

Members Handbook



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This handbook is not intended to be the definitive source of reference for everything you might need to know, or want to know, about Railfuture. It is intended as a guide to new members so they have a basic understanding of what Railfuture is all about and as a pointer to where to look for more detailed information. There is a wealth of information on the Railfuture website, but without some basic knowledge it can be hard to know where to start.

This document is owned by the Railfuture Governance Group. Please let them know if you find anything wrong, or which could be improved. Feedback, particularly from new members, is important.

Chapter 1

Welcome to Railfuture. An introduction from Christian Wolmar, our Honorary President



There is a strong message in the very name Railfuture. It shows that its members believe in the railway as playing a key role for future generations. It is a 19th century invention which has successfully overcome very many setbacks in the 20th to demonstrate that it provides a safe, efficient and reliable form of transport in the 21st. What a difference a couple of decades can make. It only seems like a few years ago when the rail network was neglected and perceived as having very limited value.

Now with new trains, huge investment, many reopenings, more frequent services and a boom in passenger numbers, rail has the strong support of all the main political parties. However, things can change and Railfuture has a key role to play. In the past, our members have saved lines from closure, ensured many lines and stations have been reopened and fought for improved services.

Railfuture campaigns for a bigger and better railway, which people will choose to use because it is better than the alternatives. We are non-political and independent, but will work with all parties to bring about a better railway.

We are all volunteers who believe that the railways deliver fantastic benefits to society in terms of the environment and the economy by providing a viable alternative to the car. It is wonderful that this is widely recognised and that is partly due to the efforts of our membership in the past. Many of our members have huge expertise and are able to use their influence and their experience to achieve change. Railfuture's strength is its members. Now it is over to you. Whether it is helping out on the station garden, writing letters to the local paper or lobbying local politicians, there is a task which you can help with. Get involved and together we can make things happen.

Christian Wolmar

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Chapter 2

A Brief History of Railfuture

The origins of Railfuture go back almost 70 years to the era of the post war branch line closures. In 1951 a group called “The Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom” was formed. (It certainly did not roll of the tongue!) It quickly shortened its name to “The Railway Invigoration Society” (R.I.S.) and its activity really took off in the early 1960’s with the advent of the “Beeching Plan”, with its proposed dramatic programme of rail closures, including major routes, not just minor branch lines. The Society campaigned with the help of local rail user groups and well known individuals like Sir John Betjeman to save a number of routes, including the North London Line, the East Suffolk Line from Ipswich to Lowestoft and the Ashford to Hastings line. But the R.I.S. was not just about fighting closures, it was in the forefront of proposing ideas to help reduce costs of operation and to generate new commercial opportunities.

In 1978 the R.I.S. merged with another pro-rail lobby group, the Railway Development Association. The merged body became known as the Railway Development Society (R.D.S.) and it operated using that legal title until 2018. In the early 1980’s the R.D.S. was in the forefront of a major campaign to help save the famous Settle and Carlisle line, and it was of course successful in that endeavour.

In 2000 the organisation changed its public name to “Railfuture”. The issue of rail line closures had largely gone away and the emphasis had moved much more to development of new opportunities, both for new stations, improved services and even some line reopenings. Perhaps the most significant re-openings being the “Borders Railway” in Scotland and the line from Oxford to Bletchley as part of “East-West Rail”. The change of the company name to Railfuture, from the R.D.S. finally took place in January 2018.

The focus of Railfuture and its predecessors has changed over time from opposing line closures, to encouraging greater use of an expanding rail network, ensuring that passengers (and freight users) are put at the heart of decisions. We remain committed to ensuring that the environmental and wider societal benefits of an affordable, accessible rail network, is in the forefront of priorities of politicians and the railway industry.

Chapter 3

Railfuture's Objectives

Our vision is for a railway which:

- Delivers a better service to rail users – more punctual, reliable, quick, frequent, integrated, comfortable, easy to use and value for money
- Delivers a bigger rail system which offers more journey opportunities, with more capacity and connectivity, to encourage modal shift, support economic growth and reduce carbon emissions
- Transfers more freight from road to rail to reduce congestion, carbon emissions and air pollution.

Railfuture's strapline puts that in a nutshell: **'Campaigning for a bigger better railway'**.

Our mission is to be the number one advocate for rail users and the rail industry.

We are, and always aspire to be an independent organisation whose views are respected by the rail industry, to which decision-makers come for advice and which rail users are proud to join. Our strategy to achieve this is:

- Earn respect for Railfuture and its members by defining a realistic position on key issues
- Build our influence by identifying, engaging and supporting key stakeholders
- Deliver a bigger better railway by identifying and actively pursuing key campaigns
- Raise our profile by promoting our position on key issues and our campaigns consistently to stakeholders, members, potential members and the public via all channels
- Attract and retain a wider range of members and encourage them to be active.

Chapter 4

Membership Benefits

It is an obvious question for any member, or potential member; what do I get in return for my subscription?

Railfuture is a non-political, independent organisation and the majority of its income comes from members' subscriptions, the sale of merchandise and the occasional legacy. Your subscription helps to run Railfuture in terms of maintaining the website, organising events and campaigning. We have no employees and none of the Branch officials and Directors receive any remuneration. In other words, your subscription goes to running the organisation and our campaigns. We also provide financial support to other rail groups and individuals who are fighting for specific pro rail causes, be that a station re-opening or a promotional activity to encourage rail use. We have very strict criteria to make sure such financial support is linked to specific deliverables.

Every member receives our quarterly magazine "Railwatch". This is a high-quality product that keeps members informed about developments both in Britain and abroad. Please read it, there is a wealth of information in it every quarter. We encourage members to receive this electronically, but a hard copy will be sent to you by post if you prefer. Members who sign up electronically can also receive a monthly "Rail User Express" newsletter which keeps you up to date with news from Rail User Groups (generally known by the acronym RUG's) and other "hot topics".

Only members qualify to take part in our Railfuture Lottery. This is an opportunity to help Railfuture raise funds and the chance to win a cash prize. There are 6 prizes every month with a top prize of £40. You can buy a ticket for just £1.

Being allocated to a Branch, you will receive a Branch newsletter and be invited to local events organised by them. The frequency of events and newsletters does vary from Branch to Branch, depending on the size, location and number of active members of the Branch committee.

Membership entitles you to attend and vote at our Annual General Meeting and to receive preferential rates for booking Railfuture events and conferences.

However, perhaps the most valuable benefit is that membership enables you to meet and interact with like-minded people who share common beliefs about trying to promote use of our rail network (See Chapter 3 for Railfuture's objectives). Of course, there is no requirement to get involved and many of our members are happy just to know they are supporting a cause they believe in. If however, you do feel able to do more, we would be delighted to hear from you (see Chapter 8 on how to get involved).

Chapter 5

Railfuture's Organisation

The Company

Railfuture is a not-for-profit Company Limited by Guarantee. This means in simple terms that the shareholders are the members of Railfuture but that their personal liability is limited to £1 per member in the event of the company becoming insolvent. This is a perfectly normal legal status for many not for profit companies, particularly in the voluntary sector. The members, who in effect hold 1 share each, have the rights that are associated with any shareholder in a limited company. The "rules" of what Railfuture can and cannot do are set out in the "Objects" of the Company and the "Articles". These are important legal documents and whilst most members are not interested in such matters, you can find out more by looking at the Objects and the Articles, which are posted on the Railfuture website. If you have any questions on these matters you should contact the Company Secretary or the Chair of the Governance Group (see below).

The Board

Like any company, Railfuture has a Board of Directors, which is responsible for the proper operation of the company within the law and in accordance with accepted good practice. The 9 Directors are elected by the members for a 3 year term, so 3 of the Directors are elected each year by secret ballot of the members. The Board is responsible for the setting the broad direction of the company and making sure that the whole organisation has a consistent and credible position on strategic and policy issues. If you are interested in the election process, please see the Articles published on the website, or contact your local Branch officials. The Board meet 4 times per year and are responsible for organising the Annual General Meeting of the company. This is held in different locations around the country to ensure that all members get the chance to attend the AGM from time to time. Recent AGM's have been held in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Peterborough and Blackpool.

The Groups

The "Groups" are the bodies that deal with the practicalities of running the company and who develop policies and procedures which are ratified by the Board. There are 7 groups which cover the following national or companywide issues:

- Passenger (with a European sub group)
- Infrastructure and Networks
- Freight
- Communications
- Membership
- Finance and IT
- Governance

The Terms of Reference of each of these Groups is available on the website. Each Group is chaired by a Board member who is responsible for ensuring that there is a flow of information both up to and down from the Board. The Groups consist of both Board and Branch members and nominees who can provide specialist advice on a particular subject relevant to the Group.

The Groups are the 'engine room' of development of policy and action in their areas of expertise and are a great opportunity for members, who have suitable skills, to get involved in the wider national issues. Each year, usually in the autumn, there is a national 'Branches and Groups Day' where ideas are exchanged and developed with all Branches represented.

The Branches

Every member is allocated to a Branch. Branches are organised on a geographical basis and normally new members are allocated to their nearest Branch. Members can, if they so wish, be attached to another Branch if it suits their personal circumstances. The strength of Railfuture lies in its Branches. It is the Branches who lead on campaigns of a non-national nature, for example the opening of a new station, reopening a closed rail route, or fighting to improve train services or station facilities. It is the Branches who liaise with the affiliated organisations like Rail User Groups (RUG's) and local Community Rail Partnerships and develop relationships with local Councils, Train Operating Companies and Network Rail. Each Branch has a committee, holds regular meetings for all members, issues a local newsletter and organises an AGM where the Branch committee are elected. Details of the Branch structure, with a map, are shown on the website. If you want to get involved in the local issues that affect rail users, please contact your local Railfuture Branch.

Chapter 6

Railfuture's Activities

The AGM

The AGM is held usually in May or June each year. At the AGM there is an opportunity to hear about the past year's activities and meet members of the Board of Directors. In addition to the formal business of the AGM there is usually a session when speakers are invited from the rail industry.

Branches

Branches are a key part of Railfuture in that they actively campaign in their area and are a link with stakeholders in the rail industry in the local area.

The Branches have Committees which meet on a regular basis to discuss campaigns and respond to consultations relevant to their area. They are represented at Stakeholder Meetings of Rail Companies and Transport Executives. Open events are also organised by Branches and recruitment stalls are arranged to attract new members. The Branches are key to our success in campaigning for a better and bigger railway as there are members who have knowledge and expertise at a local level. Most Branches produce a regular newsletter.

Details of the Branches and contact details are in all available on the Railfuture website.

Consultations

Railfuture is recognised in the rail industry as an informed body which responds to consultations. For example, written responses have been sent by Railfuture in respect of Department for Transport Consultations on new franchises, changes in legislation, proposed Government initiatives etc.

Conferences

An Annual conference is held enabling members to hear invited speakers from the rail industry and local authorities. Speakers in the past have included Managing Directors from Train Operating Companies, Senior Officers in Metropolitan Transport Authorities, University of Birmingham School of Engineering, Bentham Line Community Rail Partnership on the 'Dementia Friendly Railway'. The venue for a conference is chosen at a location close to a railway station and in a large city which is accessible by public transport. Our venues are chosen with care to ensure any person with a disability is able to access all the facilities.

Virtual Meetings

The challenges of the COVID19 epidemic have forced Railfuture to look at new ways of engaging with members and stakeholders. Board, Branch and Group meetings have been held via video conferencing and a very successful webinar titled 'Attracting Passengers back to Rail' was held in 2020. Railfuture intend to make greater use of this technology, as it does enable greater member engagement as well as being much more convenient, particularly in the Winter months. Watch the website for future events.

Chapter 7

Your Membership

Railfuture is a membership organisation with some 2000 full members and some 18000 affiliated members via Rail User Groups. The organisation has very little income apart from subscriptions, although it does raise some funds from the sale of merchandise, donations and legacies. Railfuture aims to provide all its conferences and public meetings in a way that they cover their costs, but no more. This is to keep admission and membership costs to an absolute minimum.

The current subscription rates (as at December 2020) are £20 for an individual, £22 for a joint membership and £14 for anybody under the age of 26. Railfuture offers a discounted rate to young people as we recognise the importance of attracting younger members, who are the future of the organisation. Current membership rates are always on display on the Railfuture website. Any increase of membership rates has to be approved by the Annual General Meeting.

It helps the organisation keep costs down if you opt to pay and renew your membership by standing order. Postage is also a major cost for the organisation, and whilst of course we will provide hard copy of our quarterly Railwatch magazine, newsletters and other documents, it is very helpful if you agree to have these electronically. Not only does it save money, but you also get them more quickly.

Railfuture encourages open debate between members about policy and priorities. Issues around transport can often be highly contentious. Just think of the debate around the building of HS2 as an example. However, it is important to remember that Railfuture does not implement rail policy, it works by influencing and informing stakeholders. It is therefore vital that Railfuture is seen to have credibility, to act as an informed source of unbiased non-political information and advice. To do this it must speak with one voice on key national issues. Individuals are of course perfectly entitled to express their own views on any matter, but they must be careful not to state, or imply, that are speaking on behalf of Railfuture, unless authorised to do so.

In order to provide guidance to all members, the Board has approved a Code of Conduct which sets out how members should conduct themselves, behave towards other members and to external parties. The Code of Conduct is available for anybody to look at on the Railfuture website. Most people would regard the contents as common sense, but it is worth reading so you understand what your rights are as a member, but also your responsibilities.

Many of our members are happy just to provide support via their subscriptions. However, as a campaigning organisation, Railfuture is always on the lookout for individuals who want to get more involved. If you are one of those people please look at chapter 8.

Chapter 8

How to get Involved

Railfuture is a campaigning organisation. It relies on influencing decision makers to deliver what the organisation wants to see happen (see Chapter 3). How effective Railfuture is depends to a large extent on the degree of involvement and commitment that all members put into its campaigning and lobbying. So how can you help?

Firstly, think about what skills you can bring to Railfuture. That does not mean you have to be an expert on railways. Railfuture needs people who can use IT and are familiar with social media. We need people who are good at writing letters, can design posters and publicity material, or who can simply engage with others in a positive and persuasive manner face to face.

If you want to do more, contact your local Branch. Attend local meetings and events and offer to help. There is wealth of information about what is going on the website and in our quarterly magazine, Railwatch.

The Groups, which formulate policy, and the Board which directs overall strategy, are open to all Railfuture members. Vacancies for both Groups and the Board are advertised in Railwatch. If you think you can add value to these bodies, please put yourself forward.

Railfuture organises national and regional events, either physically, or increasingly, virtually. Do come along and take part in the discussion. Several Branches organise publicity stands at events where volunteers engage with the public with a view gaining their support and help.

Campaigns often involve other pro rail organisations like Rail User Groups (RUGs), station adoption groups and Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs). Many of these groups are affiliated to Railfuture. Find out if there is such a group near you and go along to see how you can help. You will find like-minded people who want to see a bigger and better railway.

Whilst Railfuture is strictly non-political, we do engage with local Government officers and Councillors, Members of Parliament and even Government Ministers. We also try to foster good relations within the rail industry. If you have contacts of this sort, then think about how these might help to promote Railfuture's agenda. Talk to your local branch officials or one of the Railfuture Groups to see how you can help "open doors".

Remember, many rail projects take years, even decades to come to fruition. Building a consensus with stakeholders takes time. Don't get downcast if things don't happen quickly! Just have a look at the excellent publication produced by Railfuture called 'Britain's Growing Railway'" (see the website for how to get a copy). Railfuture has played a key role in many of those successes. If you want to help be part of that future, look at what has been achieved in the last 30 years or so and help shape a positive future for Britain's railways and get involved.