



December 2021

Welcome to the Rail User Express

RUX may be forwarded, or items reproduced (quoting sources). Anyone may request it as an email attachment, or opt to be notified when posted on the [Railfuture \(Rf\) website](#). There is no charge for either service. Please advise [Railfuture Membership](#) if you no longer wish to receive RUX or the link, or if you know of anyone who would like to be added. **** NB Comments on the content should be addressed to [the editor](#), not to the email address used for distribution.****

The long-overdue Integrated Rail Plan makes the best it can of strategic links, but appears to ignore local issues. For example, although it claims to “better improve connectivity between more of the West Yorkshire towns and cities” (3.82 bullet 3), there is no mention of reinstating the direct line between Sheffield and Huddersfield via Penistone, or of Skipton – Colne to create another trans-Pennine route. Will any further funding be available to progress these schemes?

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The project remains on track to reopen by December 2023, with half-hourly rail services from Edinburgh Waverley to Cameron Bridge and Leven, alternating via Fife Circle east and west routes (on electrification-ready lines). Consultation is planned on design of the stations. Leven, close to the Bus Station, is seen as an integrated transport hub with limited car parking. Cameron Bridge will be the main P&R station with up to 360 parking slots.

Unlike other Scottish rail re-openings (the Borders line, Airdrie - Bathgate), a freight terminal is envisaged to take many HGVs off inadequate local roads (Diageo generates at least 50/day). LMRC is concerned that Diageo, Malcolm and others are not responding to this historic opportunity for climate-friendly transport – the whole community will lose out if the freight option is not adequately exploited. LMRC is represented on the Task Group of Levenmouth Reconnected. Led by Fife Council with funding from the Council and Scottish Government, this aims to ‘Maximise the economic and social value of the new railway to the local area.’

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

The number of TransPennine Express (TPE) services between Edinburgh and Newcastle has increased from two to five/day with four on Sundays. The focus is on local connectivity for Northumberland, Scottish Borders, and the Lothians, including Reston and East Linton when they open. Reston is progressing well, and RAGES looks forward to its completion early next year.

Preparatory work for the construction of East Linton station is now underway. NR is awaiting a final programme, and will announce an intended completion date ASAP.

Campaign for Borders Rail

The [Union Connectivity Review](#) recognises the enthusiasm of communities in the Scottish Borders region for the economic and social benefit of improving connections between Scotland, the North of England and beyond by extending the Borders Railway through Hawick to Carlisle, as recommended by the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, a cross-border coalition of local authorities. The UCR also welcomes the £5m from each of the UK and Scottish Governments towards the development. However, CBR is disappointed that it does not directly reference its wider strategic benefits: helping to address both existing capacity constraints and the anticipated future demand for environmentally sustainable passenger and freight flows.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

SENRUG broadly welcomes the new TPE service between Newcastle and Edinburgh, which will provide much needed connectivity between Northumberland's key market towns. However, it is dismayed that Cramlington and Widdrington will no longer be served as originally advised, other than an earlier commuter service from Cramlington to Newcastle at 0711. This will relieve congestion on the current first train at 0809, something SENRUG has been demanding for several years as, prior to the Covid lockdown, every available seat had normally already been taken.

Dennis Fancett of SENRUG added "we are actually campaigning for two separate new services: an hourly service calling at the strategic Northumberland towns, similar to what TPE is now providing, but continuing beyond Newcastle to Leeds and Manchester; then an additional hourly local service calling at every station along the line: not just Widdrington but Pegswood, Acklington and Chathill as well, plus other stations we might want to re-open too, such as Belford. SENRUG made a financial contribution to a Feasibility Study some years back that confirmed there is capacity on the line for this, and it would be commercially viable.

"So we need an independent audit function to assess whether NR's claims that there is no further capacity on the line are true. And if this is indeed the case, then what NR should be doing is saying what infrastructure upgrades are needed to allow these services to run. Rail industry planners are currently over-focused on getting more and faster trains to and from London, but the tide is now turning and northern stakeholders are realising and indeed demanding that connectivity between northern communities, and a fair balance between long distance and local services, is more important."

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

8 December was one of the worst days for rain this year, but there were no flooding problems in either Summit or Winterbuttle tunnel, so hopefully the work at Gale was successful, and the Calder Valley line is now more reliable.

Goyt Valley Rail Users Association

The line from Manchester Piccadilly to Rose Hill via Hyde still has a reduced service of two trains half an hour apart followed by a 1 hour gap. This inadequate and irregular service is confusing to passengers, and having a major negative effect on ridership, but the December 2022 timetable proposals appear to make it permanent. GVRUA and Friends of Rose Hill station are campaigning to restore the full half hourly service that operated pre-COVID, and extend it to late evenings and Sundays.

Friends of the Barton Line

Performance has marginally improved since EMR took over the line, and the December changes to its operation should see a further significant improvement. The all-year-round Sunday service is expected to start in May 2022.

North Lincolnshire Council has submitted a Strategic Online Business Case (SOBC) to the DfT for a Barton - Sheffield rail service via Brigg. While the scheme is welcome, it should not jeopardise any possible introduction of a weekday Brigg line service to Cleethorpes. LNER's proposed Cleethorpes - London Kings Cross service via Lincoln has been deferred until at least May 2023.

According to the Manchester Recovery Task Force, TPE's Cleethorpes - Manchester service should run through to Liverpool Lime Street, with cross-platform connections at Manchester Piccadilly into services to the Airport.

East Suffolk Travel Association

Nearly 40 people attended ESTA's public meeting in October. Questions covered the effect on the East Suffolk Line if Sizewell C goes ahead; some awkward gaps in the timetable, especially in the afternoon on the main line from London; the case for a later evening train from Lowestoft towards Ipswich; journey times on the Lowestoft to Ipswich section of the line; the case for additional stops at Westerfield, notably on Saturdays; the fares structure, which could discourage short distance travel; and problems of litter left on trains and wider environmental issues.

Andrew Goodrum, Greater Anglia's Client & Programme Director, confirmed that Lowestoft – London through trains were "still an aspiration"; they were not in the current franchise agreement. ESTA's Chairman has been in further correspondence with Peter Aldous MP, who has twice raised this issue in the House of Commons. Transport Minister Chris Heaton-Harris responded that he would work with Mr Aldous "to see whether it was possible to look at reinstating through services over the next 6 months." The Lowestoft Journal of 5 November quoted a GA spokesperson: "We have agreed to look at whether there are any opportunities to run direct through trains between Lowestoft and London."

Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group

After many representations to GTR, the half-hourly weekday service for Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton that was suspended due to a severe workforce shortage resulting from Covid resumed on 12 December. Hopefully, the footfall will increase to make the service truly sustainable.

To address the climate crisis and increasing pressures on access in and around Cambridge, a consultation on the proposed 'Making Connections' scheme is open until 20 December.

English Regional Transport Association

ERTA commends a Bedford – Northampton - Market Harborough rail link, with a parkway station close to the A428 and A509 intersection. As well as providing more options for both passengers and freight, it would offer relief to the Midland Main Line.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

The December timetable features extra Cotswold Line calls at Honeybourne, Pershore and Worcestershire Parkway. CPLG has also secured better connections to some early morning trains. However, services between Hereford, Worcester and Birmingham continue to be plagued by a large number of cancellations, often at short notice. Four user groups in the southern part of the West Midlands Trains network have sent a joint letter to the West Midlands Rail Executive and the Mayor denouncing this wholly unacceptable situation. In contrast, CPLG welcomes GWR plans to upgrade its Worcester – Bristol services from May 2022.

CPLG is disappointed with the lack of progress on its SOBC for a faster, half hourly service between Worcester and Paddington. Despite having a benefit:cost ratio (BCR) of 4:1, it has now been with the DfT for over two years. The same situation applies to the SOBC submitted in June to reopen the line between Stratford-on-Avon and Honeybourne, and so open up passenger services from Stratford to Oxford and Paddington, and to Worcester.

GWR, Gloucestershire CC and Moreton-in-Marsh Town Council have worked together on a new transport hub at the station, and CPLG and the Vale Public Transport Group are pursuing improved bus/rail interchange and facilities at Pershore and Evesham stations. However, Gloucestershire CC, which has been cutting bus services, should take a lead from neighbouring Herefordshire.

Tonbridge Line Commuters

The transfer of Southeastern to the Operator of Last Resort (OLR) raises some significant questions. It should be an interim measure until a new operator can be found, as there is a risk that time spent under the OLR can lead to stagnation, merely completing existing projects such as previously planned rolling stock replacement, and 'keeping the lights on'; introducing significant new projects can be a risky proposition. But a significant proportion of Southeastern's Networker fleet is approaching life expiry, with no replacement lined up for that which serves the Tonbridge area. So this may not even start for several years - a concerning prospect to say the least.

Although demand has increased since Southeastern last changed its timetable in September, it has no further improvements from December; it cites the need to seek prior DfT approval. Passengers do not seem to matter much. As demand for leisure travel is generally much greater at weekends than on weekdays, TLC asked for weekend services to match the off-peak weekday service, but Southeastern will not consider this until next May at the earliest.

Reports that Eurostar will not serve Ashford International before 2023 are very short-sighted: it is the last foot-passenger station before the Channel Tunnel, and has regular direct train services to and from much of Kent and East Sussex. Users from this catchment area should not have to double-back via London. Reopening Ashford to Eurostar should take priority over reopening Ebbsfleet International, with at least four Paris and Brussels services each day in each direction. The DfT also needs to give more financial support to the service, as the most eco-friendly way of reaching the European mainland.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Some IETs have still to be repaired, so the December timetable still has some Newbury shuttles. Initially, there was a very poor 0952 service, and a gap from 1907 to 2104 in evening departures from Paddington; early versions of the timetable may still show these. However, GWR accepted a tweak suggested by Bill Wells, so now, by changing at Newbury, an 0924 from Bedwyn gets you into Paddington at 1041, and the 2004 from Paddington into Bedwyn at 2106. Pending the return of the IETs, the off-peak concession to the 0831 departure is extended, but on a weekly basis, so you may still see it as full-fare if you book in advance.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to 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 on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).



Rf's [Rail User Group Awards](#) will be held at its 2022 National AGM, close to Bristol Parkway station, on Saturday 16 July. There are six open award categories:

- # Best social media
 - # Best website
 - # Best newsletter
 - # Best new RUG – the Oliver Lovell Award
 - # Best campaign
 - # Best campaigner – the Clara Zilahi Award,
- plus the Judges' Special Award, which is totally at their discretion.

All entries received for the 2020 awards will be carried forward, unless advised otherwise, but may also be updated/supplemented. Further new entries are also welcome; the closing date for all is 16 April 2022. The Judging Panel takes a fairly relaxed view of what constitutes a RUG, so local campaigns, station adopters, community rail and heritage groups should all feel free to enter.

NEWS

The IRP adopts the smart Rf plan for HS2E to Nottingham and Sheffield, and offers faster, electric Leeds – Manchester travel, but fails Bradford; how to close the Leeds – Sheffield gap has still to be decided, and funding is not committed. Rf particularly welcomes the 180 miles of electrification, not previously announced: completion of the Midland Main Line from London to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield, and of the main trans-Pennine line between Manchester, Leeds and York, as well as upgrades to the East Coast Main Line (ECML).

So rather than lament decrements from earlier plans, Rf's initial [commentary](#) looked at how the IRP responds positively to its campaigning for a better-connected railway, with more capacity to address economic, social and environmental issues, and the development of such benefits to the rail network. A subsequent [review](#) identifies the good bits, the gaps, the hidden opportunities and the pitfalls. It concludes that the IRP aims to maximise improvement in regional connectivity within an affordable budget. However, there has clearly been a political failure by both the Government and TfN to agree on a realistic plan and budget, leading to northern MPs of all political persuasions being very unhappy.

The final UCR report rules out a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland as too costly. It recommends the creation of a strategic transport network (not just rail) called UKNET. However, a Scottish government spokesperson said: "Transport is devolved to Holyrood, and the UK government should respect that".

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

RFEA has [responded](#) to NR's second consultation on Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE). Treasury rules force NR to operate in silos, so currently EACE takes no account of plans to reopen Wisbech – March, with 2tph through to Cambridge. To be future-proof, the Ely Area will need to accommodate at least 13tph in each direction, and thus the radical solution backed by commercial and political stakeholders: doubling the single line from Soham to Ely, with [grade separation](#) to the Peterborough line. Rf does not want to be campaigning for a further upgrade in 10 years' time.

RFEA is delighted that Soham is back on the national rail network, but is astonished by how little the £18.6m price tag bought. Raising concerns about rail costs is entirely legitimate, especially where they appear to stem from inefficiency rather than quality. Funds for rail enhancements will always be finite, and projects require a BCR substantially above 1.0 to gain Treasury approval. For a 'bigger and better railway', the rail industry must lower costs and abolish the compensation culture. Great British Railways is intended to provide a 'simpler' structure; RFEA can't wait until the change is fully in place.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Every community needs good, affordable public transport, and the Government must be its biggest champion. A CRT supporter highlighted a major problem: "I would like to have holidays in Wales and Cornwall by train, but the fares can cost more than a flight to Europe! It's unfair that the lower carbon option is more expensive".

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is clarifying with the DfT how the new business planning process for train operators can constructively engage community rail. A major focus of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is the responsiveness to local needs and opportunities; supporting this with local insights and amplifying local voices is a community rail strength.

The 17th Community Rail Awards hosted by GWR and South Western Railway at Southampton's O2 Guildhall and also streamed live online had more than 300 guests in total. UK, Welsh and Scottish transport ministers addressed the event, together with industry leaders and personalities passionate about community rail, including Chris Tarrant. The Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail Award went jointly to Southeast CRP, which coordinates activity on eight lines across Kent, Sussex, Surrey, and Berkshire, and to Friends of Buxton Station. South East Lancashire CRP based in Bolton won the Involving Diverse Groups prize. Its 'Hate Crime Awareness Project' helps to raise public awareness of the impact it can have, how it can be reported, and how those affected can access support. SELCRP also came third in the Influencing Positive Change and Sustainability category.

The SELCRP Transport Operations Group is currently drafting a response to the timetable changes proposed for December 2022. It is looking at how to improve rail and bus access to the West Pennine Moors, and working with Community Rail Lancashire to develop a visitor centre at Entwistle station. Another project is to bring the Manchester - Wigan via Atherton route under its wing, possibly extending through to Rainford and Kirkby. A key focus will be links from Walkden station to the RHS Bridgewater Garden on the Worsley New Hall estate in Salford.

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

The [Guardian](#) claims that, following the backlash to the IRP, the DfT has put off announcing that rail fares would rise by 3.8% next March in line with the July Retail Prices Index, almost double the Consumer Prices Index at just 2%. Over the last decade, rail fares have risen much faster than wages, while fuel duty for motorists has been frozen at 57.9p/litre.

The Office of Rail and Road [Mid-year Report on NR](#) found that it did learn lessons from the high levels of train service performance during the pandemic, but outlines several actions NR needs to take to prevent performance declining to pre-pandemic levels as more passengers return.

The ORR annual report on rail finance for FY 2020/21 shows the impact of Covid on passenger numbers and Government spending during the first year of the pandemic. Key findings include:

- Passenger numbers reduced by 77.7%. Fares income in Great Britain dropped 82% from £10.56Bn to £1.8Bn, which accounted for 8.9% of railway income.
- Government funding of the rail industry in 2020-21 was £16.9Bn, an annual increase of £10.4Bn, largely due to the use of emergency measures for train operators.
- However, the rail industry has started to recover, with 182m rail journeys in 2021-22 Q2, more than five times the 2020 equivalent. Passenger revenue has also started to recover. In 2021-22 Q1 it was £999m, higher than the £184m in 2020-21 Q1 but still well under the £2.8Bn in 2019-20 Q1 before the pandemic.

Transport for Wales has restored direct train services from Crosskeys in the Ebbw Valley to Newport, the first for almost 60 years. Risca, Rogerstone and Pye Corner will also benefit from the hourly service - two hourly on Sunday - to Wales' third biggest city. The £1.2m upgrade, part of the £750m South Wales Metro, aims to ease traffic jams around Newport after plans for a £1.6bn M4 relief road were scrapped.

NR has launched a project to integrate its 'Luminate' traffic management system with GWR's 'Integrale' crew and rolling stock resource management system. Funded by NR and DfT's National Productivity Investment Fund, the £4m pilot will operate between Paddington and Reading, Oxford and Bristol, but benefit routes to Penzance, South Wales and the Cotswolds. The results will be shared with the rail industry. The second phase, due to start in April 2022, will add GWR's Connected Driver Advisory System (CDAS), to inform the drivers of Class 387 and 802 trains of diversions or changes to their stopping pattern.

In partnership with the National Autistic Society, NR has produced a [guide](#) to help autistic people travel confidently and independently by train. It shows the sights and sounds passengers could experience when using the railway, and covers every stage of a journey, from purchasing tickets and getting to the right platform to finding a seat on the train. It also offers advice on how to get to a station and what to bring.

[Switched On](#), a free programme for children aged 3-6, 7-11 and 12-16, explains the dangers that railways present, and encourages them to develop hazard-spotting skills so they can make good, informed choices around the rail network. [CCTV footage](#) of the pedestrian crossing at Attenborough Nature Reserve, southwest of Nottingham, shows a girl doing a handstand, as well as people lying, sitting or loitering on the crossing - any of which could have had fatal or life changing consequences.

Transport for London has commissioned a [report](#) on options to replace the Metropolitan Line Extension to Watford Junction that became unaffordable when it withdrew its funding commitment.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris has opened Werrington Tunnel north of Peterborough to take freight trains under the ECML. It should free up more paths for passenger trains, cut journey times, and improve reliability.

At the opening of the Astrazeneca facility on the Cambridge biomedical campus on 23 November, its CEO said that one of the factors in choosing that location was the Oxford – Cambridge rail link. That was 8 years ago; unfortunately AZ has progressed somewhat faster than East West Rail.

The [51st edition](#) of Barry Doe's National Rail Operators' map shows LNER extending to Middlesbrough, SWR no longer running north of Westbury, and some minor cuts to the CrossCountry network.

,,,and finally

The population of wild hazel dormice has almost halved since 2000. In a bid to save them from extinction, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is establishing new colonies in the Arnside and Silverdale AONB in Morecambe Bay. However, the Furness rail line runs through the selected site, so PTES and NR are building a crossing in the form of a 40ft tree-top structure shielded from predators on the side of an existing railway overbridge.

CONSULTATIONS

- Cambridge Council: [Making Connections](#), closes **20 December**.
- TPE/Northern: [December 2022 draft timetables](#), closes 31 December.
- Medway Council: [Future Hoo second consultation](#), closes 10 January 2022.
- South Gloucestershire Council: [Proposed station at Charfield](#), closes 10 January.
- Transport East: [Transport Strategy](#), closes 30 January.
- Transport for London: [The future of step-free access on the Tube](#), closes 10 February.

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](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#). Stand-alone lists are preferred, as newsletters may be discarded.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

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

NB. Because of Covid-19, events are being cancelled, postponed or conducted online. Webmasters, please update your websites with any changes as soon as they are made.

January

- Tuesday 4. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, Chesham, 1930 (Also 15 Feb, 5 April, 10 May, 21 June, 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- Thursday 6. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 3 February, 3 March).
- Tuesday 11. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Tuesday 11. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930.
- Saturday 15. English Regional Transport Association, Pilgrims Progress, 42 Midland Road, **Bedford**, MK40 1QB, 1500.
- Thursday 20. Friends of the Barton Line, No.1 inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (Also 16 March, 20 July (AGM) and 16 November at the White Swan, Barton, 2000, and 19 May and 15 September at No 1 Inn. **NB. Meetings at No 1 Inn are subject to confirmation.**)
- Tuesday 25. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

February

- Saturday 12. English Regional Transport Association, The High Cross, 103-105 High Street, **Leicester**, LE1 4JB, 1500.

■ Saturday 26. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, IP33 1SJ, 1400.

Further Ahead

■ March 5. East Suffolk Travel Association, Methodist Church, St John's Street, **Woodbridge**, 1400.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributor, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

Contact the editor by e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, or phone: 01462 815992.

<https://twitter.com/Railfuture> <https://www.facebook.com/Railfuture/>

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/railfuture-in-great-britain/30/22a/b59>

Railfuture Ltd is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634.

Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7N

(NB. for legal correspondence only)

All other correspondence to: 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP (NB Change of address)