

Editor's Comment



(Photos from familyfriendlytrains.com website)

The common theme running through this edition of *Rail Lincs* is the 'rail passenger experience'. Currently, we are hearing the threat of massive ticket office closures resulting in staff reductions and a decline in the quality of service for passengers. Starting of page 10, I have reprinted the recent Railfuture national press release: "*Railfuture opinion: What should replace the railway ticket office?*" In addition to the points raised, I would like to add one of my concerns that, even with

reasonable eyesight, a big problem with using a 'smart phone', outside on a station platform with no shelter, in normal daylight, is the difficulty in reading the screen. Even the digital displays on the sides of LNER Azuma trains have proved hard to read in bright sunshine. Careful positioning of Ticket Vending Machines is also necessary to aid reading the screens.

Having purchased a ticket, by whatever means, there are issues on making a train journey. In his comments as Branch Chairman, David Harby refers to familyfriendlytrains.com a group drawing attention to the obstacles parents and children face when travelling by train. In his letter on page 6, Tim Mickleburgh adds a further strand to this discussion.

Perhaps the solutions to improving the passengers' experience will be in the 'silver bullet' anticipated in the launch of Great British Railways – but that could be over two years away.

Your comments on the points raised will be most welcome for inclusion the next *Rail Lincs*.
Phil Mason

A Personal Comment from your Branch Chairman

I am writing these comments a few days after we heard that RMT members had voted for industrial action, so, I am hoping that much of what I write is not overtaken by events. I have tried to give an overview of the current situation and future prospects in a separate article in this edition but have found it difficult to find much to be positive about.

To sum up, the services provided by

East Midlands Railway (EMR), Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) are well below the standards passenger should be experiencing. Myself and other branch committee members have had numerous discussions with Northern and EMR in particular, but whilst in many cases they agree the service is unacceptable, they do not have the resources to do anything about it and it will be many months before ▶

◀ we see them return to anything near a respectable quality. The only bright spot is on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) where both LNER and Hull Trains are not subject to rolling stock shortages and are able to provide a near 100% service.

With the government having spent large amounts of money to keep the rail network working during Covid, I am sure we would all like to see a continuing recovery in passenger numbers. Northern have been very good at sharing passenger numbers, so I can report that in mid May their commuter or season ticket sales were still low at 41%, business travel (full price singles and returns) remains in the high 80 percents, but leisure has strengthened again to over 100%. Advance Purchase (AP) sales remain over two and a half times higher than pre-Covid-19. This comes with the caveat that AP tickets are in general cheaper tickets so over 100% of leisure sales does not mean revenue is over 100% and it is that revenue figure which is the most important to HM Treasury.

EMR have not been anywhere near as open with their passenger figures, but from personal observation the trains I have used have been almost as busy as before Covid. I have often seen trains with standing passengers at Lincoln in the morning peak, though most of these passengers do seem to be school, college or university students with few obvious office workers. However set against this is that there are gaps in the service so total numbers and revenue clearly have some way to go to get back to pre Covid levels.

It is generally now accepted that commuting and business travel at pre Covid levels are not going to be seen again for some years. Leisure travel is a different story with levels on some routes already well over pre Covid and at weekends reaching 125% of pre Covid. So to get overall passenger numbers

back to where they were 3 years ago it is the leisure market that must be targeted. It is here where I am not convinced the government is on the right track.

We have had the *Great British Rail Sale* which was successful in attracting passengers back to the railway, but the success was only limited in that as the tickets were only available as advance purchase they were only for travel on routes where advance purchase is available. They were also very cheap and for single journeys. Other countries, such as Germany, have been much more ambitious with their '9 for 90' offer where during June, July and August passengers could purchase a €9 monthly ticket covering regional and local trains across the entire country. This approach is doing much more to get old passengers back and attract new passengers to rail.

With the large increases in fuel prices, now should be the time when the government is encouraging modal shift and attracting car users to rail. A one off sale of cheap tickets at times of the day when many people do not want to travel is not going to generate this modal shift. Railfuture nationally have issued a media release pointing out the difference between the sale offers in Germany and here

In the longer term there are quite a few issues that will have to be addressed if we are to meet the demand for leisure travel. Should engineering work continue to mainly be done at weekends? Should carriage interiors be reconfigured to provide more luggage space instead of maximising the number of seats for commuters? What about parents and young children where a group called Family Friendly Trains have been pointing out how many obstacles parents and children face when trying to travel by train <https://familyfriendlytrains.com/>. In a recent survey from them about provision for children on trains, it is not ▶

◀ encouraging to hear that EMR, Northern and TPE did not even bother to respond to the survey!

These leisure travel issues are ones which we would hope Great British Railways (GBR) will be able to quickly respond to. However the latest prediction is we will have to wait another 2 years

before they take over. A big difference to 75 years ago when the Railway Executive was appointed in September 1947 and



BR came into being on 1 January 1948. Perhaps Mr Shapps should be concentrating on this rather than wasting time on the silly competition to decide where the GBR HQ is going to be?

Railfuture is taking a keen interest in what we should expect from GBR and your branch has recently

responded to a questionnaire from Passenger Group who are developing the detailed Railfuture policy. At the same

time we will continue to press for our services to return to the levels promised in the franchise awards.

Finally, the numbers attending our branch AGM were disappointing as was the attendance at the East Midlands branch AGM. As National Finance Officer, I am mindful that the cost of running the local branches has to be paid for from members' subscriptions, so these low numbers are worrying. I have spoken to the chairman of East Midlands branch and we have agreed that we will have a meeting of officers from each branch to see what we can do to provide a better service for local members at no extra cost.

*David Harby
Branch Chairman*



▶ (Photos from familyfriendlytrains.com website)

The current passenger experience

Even before any co-ordinated industrial action across the rail network, in Lincolnshire we have suffered industrial action of some sort for many months. No sooner than Rail Maritime & Transport Union (RMT) and East Midlands Railway (EMR) reached agreement on their long standing dispute, RMT members working at TransPennine Express (TPE) started industrial action. For potential passengers south of the Humber trying to make a journey by rail is something of a nightmare. The reluctance of staff to work rest days means that TPE are operating limited Sunday services. Limited crew training during the week is having a major impact on training for the introduction of loco hauled Cleethorpes to Manchester services and it is rare to see a weekday without last minute cancellations. On the day I was writing this, TPE had eight South TransPennine services cancelled either in total or in part.

All our operators are also seeing higher than usual levels of sickness, especially long term sickness where delays in staff getting NHS treatment and a shortage of doctors to conduct return to work medicals is having an impact. The result of this is even more short term cancellations which, as far as passengers are concerned, are the worst kind of cancellation.

EMR and Northern are for most of the time managing to operate their full timetables, but to call them full timetables is, to use a well known phrase,

economical with the truth. The Northern service between Doncaster and Scunthorpe was, according to their franchise, supposed to be hourly. The reality is a bus every 2 hours at best. The supposedly hourly Sheffield to Gainsborough Central is just one return train morning and evening, with other stops between Worksop and Sheffield being covered by the Lincoln trains. As for the Saturdays only Brigg Line service, this has not been seen since the start of Covid. With drivers now having lost route knowledge, neither Doncaster to Scunthorpe or Brigg Line services can restart until driver route knowledge is refreshed.

On EMR there are numerous gaps in their Regional timetable even on busy routes such as Lincoln to Nottingham, where even a key evening commuter service from Lincoln to Newark is a bus. The big difference to Northern is that EMR cuts are due to a rolling stock shortage and the almost complete collapse of the planned unit cascade. To EMR's credit, they have been very good at listening to stakeholders and have modified some stopping patterns, and explained why some seemingly odd decisions were taken.

With all this disruption, there is one



A Class 156 approaching Barton station
(Photo: Tim Mickleburgh)

route where there is good news and that is the Barton branch. Since EMR took over there have been a few service disruptions, mainly due to rolling stock failures, but in general it has been much more reliable than when it relied on TPE crews. EMR are also upgrading stations with a complete rebuild at Barrow Haven.

David Harby

News from North Lincolnshire

*Ann Hindley and Dr Don Peacock
report on the rail services in
north Lincolnshire.*

Rail services are being very badly hit in the north of Lincolnshire. Services on the Scunthorpe to Doncaster line, which were cut from hourly to two hourly in May 2021, were suspended in December 2021 and replaced by buses. These now leave Doncaster at a time that makes connection from the TransPennine service from Manchester impossible. This bus replacement service is in place until December 2022, when the two hourly train service will be reinstated with no likelihood at present of a return to an hourly service.

Meanwhile, the Doncaster to Hull service has also been cut, which provides some of us with a substitute. On one recent occasion, returning to Thorne North from Doncaster, I met people who had been waiting since 3 o'clock, only to be turned off the 17:26 Scarborough train (along with me) to catch (yet more) rail replacement buses. The 15:05 and the 16:05 had both been cancelled. The bus replacements, when they turned up, comprised two 14 seater minibuses for about 50 people.

This is all compounded by cuts to services between Doncaster and Sheffield and by RMT action impacting on the TransPennine services at weekends.

In addition, the weekly service between Gainsborough Central and Cleethorpes has been suspended but with no bus replacement in their case, and seemingly no information on the stations.

Reasons given for these cuts are driver training, Covid absences and industrial action by both ASLEF and RMT, all of which is understandable, but having an impact on people like those I met last

week, who had been at work since 07:00, and others with small children, buggies and luggage, trying to get on a minibus.

(AH)

Further more, Dr Don Peacock on behalf of the South Humberside Rail User Group (SHRUG) has been in contact with Peter Myers of Northern about the treatment of the Brigg Line services which was called "a disgraceful" move by Barry Doe in a recent article in *Rail magazine*. From the beginning of the May timetable, there will be neither a rail service nor a replacement bus service on the Saturdays only three trains each way between Sheffield and Cleethorpes. Mr Myers in his reply cited lack of trained staff, union action, and the back log of training caused by Covid restrictions.

His response to a further question about the lack of the substitute bus service, was the service was not put in the May timetable, so Northern did not have to provide a bus service and, anyway, it would be much too slow between Sheffield and Cleethorpes, there is a shortage of buses/bus drivers and it would be expensive to run. A check at Brigg station on 30 May revealed that there was no information at all about the missing Saturday service.

He assured me that there was no hidden agenda to rid rural Lincolnshire of its rail services, but I am not convinced.

(DP)



Editor's Mail



Parking at Cleethorpes

North East Lincolnshire Council is continuing to send out contradictory messages as to what it thinks about public transport, be it buses or trains.

As an opposition councillor, at the January meeting, I put forward a pro-rail motion calling for better rail services in the borough, both passenger and freight. This was enthusiastically taken up by the ruling group, and was passed unanimously.

But in February the latest council plan included the controversial measure to expand the Grant Street Car Park. I pointed out that this was sending the wrong signal, and would encourage more visitors to come to Cleethorpes by car. Instead I suggested people travel by rail, or made use of a park and ride scheme.

Sadly this time party politics won through, with the Car Park remaining in the plan.

Tim Mickleburgh, Grimsby.

Help with rail travel

One relatively painless way for the government to help the poorer members of our society could be to provide them with travel pass cards as presently exist for OAPs and the disabled. In addition some larger places such as London could include travel on local trains such as the metro. This might necessitate extra funding for local councils but would probably be offset by a reduction in problems elsewhere.

Tom Rookes, Lincoln

To buggy or not to buggy

It is clear that though the traffic on the roads has returned to pre-pandemic levels, that is certainly not the case so far as the railways are concerned. There remains a dramatic drop in the numbers commuting, not helped over the last two years by the Government giving the impression that travelling by train caused a Covid risk.

Anyway, those responsible for running the network are realising that the way forward is to encourage leisure journeys. And one way of doing this is to make it easier for those with children to take their buggy with them.

Now I want railways to be inclusive, but as a regular bus user by default, I can see problems based on my past experiences. You see space will have to be found for pushchairs and the like, something that can only be done by reducing seating capacity. Will rail companies want this potential loss of revenue at peak times, and will fare-paying passengers be annoyed at having to stand as a result? For they are hardly going to start charging extra for people with buggies, as that would defeat the object.

What's more, there is often a delay on buses as prams get on and off. This is despite all vehicles now being step-free entry. So, won't train journey times take longer if you need to have a ramp every time someone wishes to get on/off a carriage?

And then there is the elephant in the room, namely that babies and children often make such a loud noise which is disruptive to other passengers. Indeed, I know that if I had a private vehicle, I'd use it for my next trip after each time I had a journey disturbed by a screaming child.

Thus there are really two matters to consider for those wishing to attract parents with young children to the railways.

Tim Mickleburgh, Grimsby

Suggitt's Lane Footbridge Now Open



Photo: Tim Mickleburgh



Photo: North East Lincs Council

Around three years after the controversial closure of Suggitt's Lane level crossing in Cleethorpes, there is now direct beach access thanks to a new footbridge.

The new bridge cost £3.6 million, jointly funded by Network Rail, contributing £2 million, and the Department for Transport, which offered up the remaining £1.6 million.

It includes ramps and steps to provide a safe, accessible route over the railway line from Suggitt's Lane to the promenade.

Class 180s Debut on Skegness Services



East Midlands Railway (EMR) will use Class 180 trains for its Skegness Summer Special service this year – offering customers more luggage space as they travel to the seaside town.

Class 180 trains are typically used on EMR Intercity services to and from London St Pancras International and are designed with more luggage space than the Class 156 trains which operate the majority of the Poacher Line services.

The Summer Special services, which will begin at Derby, as opposed to Nottingham, are intended to provide additional capacity and options for customers who want to travel to the resort this summer. Services will run every Saturday from 23 July through to 10

September at the following times:
0758 Derby – Skegness
0923 Derby – Skegness
1142 Skegness – Derby
1344 Skegness – Derby

Neil Grabham, Customer Services Director for (EMR said: “Our Skegness route is very popular with our customers in the summer and every year we help thousands of families as they head to the coast to enjoy all the treats the seaside getaway can offer.

“The Class 180 Intercity style trains will offer customers more luggage room, while the increase of the summer services will also provide people more options of when to travel.”

Connect to the train

The Poacher Line Community Rail Partnership (CRP) has launched Poacher PLUS, closely working with CallConnect demand responsive bus service, to encourage a shift from car usage and get people back onto the public network of buses and trains.

From 11 April, anyone connecting to and from the Poacher Line Lincolnshire stations is able to make a CallConnect bus journey for £1 each way when a valid same-day rail ticket is produced. Bookings can be made via the booking office by calling 0345 234 3344 or via the CallConnect website: <https://lincsbus.info/callconnect>

Barrow Haven Station Rebuild



Barrow Haven station, in North Lincolnshire, is closed from Sunday 8 May for some much-needed renovations work, to be carried out until Monday 8 August. The construction project has been given a budget of £1.3 million to carry out the works as part of a project to “make train travel more attractive.” The plans are to have the existing station platforms demolished and replaced with a brand new, 60-metre-long structure that will seek to revitalise the station. The progressive work being done to the station will hopefully improve the connectivity for the local people and allow more of a modernised approach to their rail travel. East Midlands Railway (EMR) are also contributing a further £26,000 to fund additional station upgrades, including a new waiting shelter, cycle racks and station signage as well as a solar-powered help point. This renovation project will see new tactile paving being installed along the

platform, to aid visually impaired customers when they are approaching the edge of the platform. This ergonomic, positive change will help encourage those, less able to participate in rail travel, creating a more inclusive environment for those within the local community. Matt Rice, North & East Route Director for Network Rail said: “We’re giving Barrow Haven station a much-needed update, which I hope will encourage more people in the area to travel by train. It’ll bring a more modern, practical station with better amenities, and I’m excited to see the work now underway.” During the closure, EMR are providing an on-demand taxi service from either New Holland or Barton stations. A waiting area has been set up at Barrow Haven with a taxi telephone number on display. Taxis to Barrow Haven can be ordered through EMR Customer Services or the Conductor, or via station help phones. (Source: Rail Technology Magazine)

Friends of the Barton Line

• A major development on the Barton Line is the rebuilding of Barrow Haven station (see Page 9).

• Performance on the Line is still decent despite a slight dip in January. It is noted that East Midlands Railway (EMR) does seem to be working hard to provide a good service which is certainly much better than the appalling disruptions endured before last December.

• East Midlands Railway's £400,000 revamp of all stations along the Barton Line has been gathering apace. New fencing has been installed along the west side of Thornton Abbey station and at the southern end of New Clee station, new seating has been installed at most stations, with shelters at New Clee and Goxhill being patched up and much repainting taking place. Goxhill signal box has been repainted work is underway to resurface Thornton Abbey platforms.

• TransPennine Express has cancelled certain services despite running a reduced timetable. Part of the reason being abstracting crews for training on Class 68 locomotives with a view to having them haul 'Nova 3' Mark 5a trains on the Manchester-Cleethorpes route from late spring. *Andrew Berridge*



TransPennine Nova 3 Mark 5a at Cleethorpes
(Photo: Tim Mickleburgh)

Ticket to Ride – Essential for a train journey

.....getting one must be made easier



Railfuture sets out its vision for the ways rail tickets should be sold and why in-person ticket sales remain an essential choice – even if the “ticket office” is to be closed.

Last weekend Neil Middleton, a Railfuture Director, went to Birmingham International station to take the train. This station, despite its size doesn't have a conventional ticket office. Instead there are easy to use Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) and a receptionist/concierge to give advice and to sell the occasional ticket when needed. Neil commented “It all seemed to work very well – A TVM was my natural first choice – but there were staff there had I needed help and to sell the occasional ticket when it was needed.” “It was unusual for me to buy a ticket at all at the station – I normally buy online, or even better, use Pay as You Go, but it is still a very pleasant experience”.

There's talk of moving to a 100% online ticket sales process, but this will disenfranchise those that are not able – or just not comfortable, buying online. The headlines often refer to the more elderly as not being online – either at all, or when on the move. But these are not the only ones who could be disadvantaged – those without a debit / credit card will have problems, as will those who struggle to use websites & ▶

apps due to dyslexia, arthritis and other limitations to dexterity. These are critical equality issues which we don't see getting enough recognition – and they are a source of income the railway seems happy to lose, rather than encourage. David Harby, Chair of Railfuture's Lincolnshire Branch comments "I know a very active 78 year old who is out around the East Midlands nearly every day in summer watching cricket. Travelling by train with his cycle. He does not have either a mobile phone or any other IT. It is essential that people like him are not excluded from train travel."



So what is needed instead of "a ticket office"? The first thing is to stop thinking of the ticket buying process as just a cost of the railway – it's also the critical first step in getting any intending passenger to use the railway -- for instance, a way to get the 50% of us who never use the railway to start to use the train.

It is also important to remember that passengers really value a presence by staff at the railway station, so just because the ticket office is closed, that doesn't necessarily mean that staff numbers at a station should go down – that staff presence also supports other features that encourage travel, such as waiting rooms that are open and toilets that can be used and support with boarding the train – these are often closed / not available when there are no rail staff at the station. Security and passenger reassurance is also much

increased by the presence of visible staff. As campaigners for a bigger, better railway, we want ticket buying to be easy and quick for everyone – and that to apply everywhere. So, what needs to be in place first before conventional ticket offices are closed?

The first part is to make the alternatives easier:

It needs to be easier to buy tickets online – a single website (as is planned by GBR) that everybody can use, complete with good accessibility features (eg to assist the visually impaired, the neurodiverse) and an intuitive purchasing

"journey" – and it needs to sell every ticket type, not just most ticket types.

The process of simplifying fares needs to start – for instance, the myriad start times for off-peak tickets should be simplified, so intending travellers get more confident about which ticket to purchase, and advice and reassurance is needed less often.

In time, using the orange striped ticket or its successor becomes only ever optional, not essential (eg at the moment one is usually required for cross London journeys).

The option to print an online ticket on paper must always be available, to support those who do not have mobile Internet.

Contactless and Pay as You Go (PAYG) needs to be rolled out more widely (everywhere, not just London and the bigger Cities), together with promises ▶

◀ similar to that for Direct Debits so we can all feel confident about it when we might be spending £40 or £50 on our tickets for the day.

In many cases, TVMs need to be made more user friendly – who hasn't really struggled tapping away at the screen to get it to register your finger – and more of them may well be needed. And at busier stations, TVM Concierges could be provided to help (and at smaller stations, a roving Concierge could be available for a few specified hours each week).

As we outline above, not everyone can be served by online services. Solutions like the one at Birmingham International mean that the ability to buy a rail ticket from a staff member remains – but that staff member is also helping passengers in so many other ways. At a bigger station, the ticket sales task needs to move out from behind the glass and take on a wider welcoming and helping activity. At smaller stations, that staff member might help with a wider range of activities as well, accepting that ticket sales may only be available part of the time (but with clarity as to when those times are). And for many

rural stations – and when things go wrong (TVMs are broken, staff are absent etc) then the option to buy a ticket from the Conductor remains essential.

To summarise it all: Many of us already prefer to buy tickets online – or use PAYG and, with improvements more of us would be happy to use these choices – but achieving 100% of travellers being able to buy their ticket online (or use PAYG) 100% of the time is, in our view, a fantasy (to be clear, the current ratio of 1 in 8 tickets being bought in person, can, and should, be noticeably reduced).

Some commentators suggest that because the airlines only offer online purchase, rail can as well. But that is to miss a key fundamental – we usually plan to travel by plane a long time in advance, but rail travel can be spur of the moment – deciding to go, buying the ticket and being on the move. It is one thing to, once a year, help a relative buy an airline ticket 3 months in advance; another thing to be constantly available at short notice for many rail ticket purchases.

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