



May 2023

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. 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.****

So TransPennine Express has finally hit the buffers, as its contract to 28 May is not being renewed, though whether the Government-appointed Operator of Last Resort (OLR) will fare any better in overcoming the many challenges it will inherit remains to be seen.

Roger Smith

We start with news from groups around Great Britain. All contributions are gratefully received.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The lack of any solution to retain or replace at least one of the three path crossings between Coaltown of Balgonie and Thornton blocked by the new line is a major concern. Prospects are dimming for any freight provision, as major potential user Diageo prefers to congest inadequate local roads with polluting HGVs. Nor are Fife Council and Scotrail actively pursuing the much-needed train crew depot that would greatly increase the reliability and viability of the rail service, and create significant local employment.

Friends of Reddish South Station

On 11 April, new FORSS President Andrew Gwynne MP updated the AGM on the Restoring Your Railways (RYR) report and his ongoing discussions with its authors Stantec, Government ministers and TfGM. Marple - Stockport via Reddish South is not viable given the cost of a rail 'spur' from the line to Manchester Piccadilly. Similarly a service to Stalybridge would mean altering Guide Bridge station. However, an hourly Stockport - Victoria service is just possible. TfGM is keen to explore modifying Heaton Norris Junction and double-tracking Denton - Reddish South. The report has gone to DfT with additional information, so fingers crossed!

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Valid until 23 July, Northern vouchers offer one day's travel for £10, or £17.50 for a weekend. Collect coupons from any Reach newspaper.

Friends of the Barton Line

The not infrequent lack of ticket machines for the Barton Line conductors is a concern as it falsely diminishes the footfall statistics and hence the perceived worth of the service, which is still quite good although impacted by strike action.

English Regional Transport Association

In 2021 the Minsters Rail Campaign (MRC) and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) obtained RYR funding for a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to reinstate the Beverley to York line. Consultants AECOM submitted it to the DfT at the end of September. It looked at several possible alignments, but did not recommend any particular one. All would in effect be "new build", as most of the former trackbed has either disappeared or is unusable. As required by the DfT, the SOC also looked at non-rail options, eg improved bus services, but came down in favour of heavy rail. Though the highest cost option, it was the only one that met all the main transport objectives.

On 11 March, some 30 people attended an ERTA meeting in Market Harborough addressed by Cllrs Peter James of Harborough Council, and David Bill of Leicestershire CC to discuss rebuilding the railway line from Northampton. Since this closed in 1982, the route has been used for many things including development in Market Harborough, the Brampton Way (a popular footpath, cycleway and wildlife corridor), a steam preservation establishment, and now a Northern Relief Road with a flat crossing over the old trackbed north of Northampton.

The prospect of a new station for Desborough on the Midland Mainline (MML) was also raised as part of an attempt to restore a local service between Bedford and Leicester. Richard Pill said that the 2-platform station to be built at Wixams south of Bedford will have modest facilities on the slow lines, leaving the fast lines clear, and suggested that this pattern could be replicated at various places north of Bedford including Desborough and Kibworth.

Bedford Commuters Association

East Midlands Railway (EMR) is purchasing 33 x 5-Car Class 810 bi-mode trains, which should enter service in 2024. The increased number of electric trains on the MML south of Bedford and 125mph running require upgrades to the power distribution system, which is well underway, and to the overhead wiring, which SPL Powerlines will deliver.

The official opening of Flitwick Transport Interchange was postponed because buses cannot use it! Central Bedfordshire Council is seeking to resolve the issue with the bus companies. However, with Access for All funding confirmed, NR is due to start work on the lifts this Summer, with completion by next March.

TfL will close Kentish Town Underground Station for up to a year from 26 June to upgrade it and replace both the escalators. The Thameslink station will remain open, but with the main concourse closed, the only access to and from the platforms will be via the 'out of hours' entrance.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

GWR MD Mark Hopwood has responded to a letter from Laura Farris MP and Danny Kruger MP that shared BTPG concerns and suggestions. IETs were withdrawn from Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury to make savings by replacing Castle Class diesels on the Cardiff - Penzance route. Some 10-carriage IETs are being split to extend Swansea services to Carmarthen, but stabled in Bristol they are unavailable for the Thames Valley service. A Class 387 operates one Paddington - Cardiff service a day to maintain crew competency for special events at the Principality Stadium, but with no First Class or on-board catering they are unsuitable to replace IETs completely on this long-distance route. Finally, the budget set by the DfT does not provide for additional rolling stock.

GWR is testing views on Boxing Day services given that 27 December is a heavy travel day for entertainment or shopping, or as people return home after visiting friends and family. However, any such change would need DfT support, so is not guaranteed.

The GWR [Customer and Community Improvement Fund](#) is now open. Applications must be made online and received by the end of 25 May.

Tonbridge Rail Commuters

As a cost cutting measure, GTR proposed a major reduction in the Tonbridge - Redhill service that overlooked the needs of students or its potential for a Kent - Gatwick Airport link. TLC responded with a fully worked-up service pattern that still cut costs but retained the majority of services, including at school times, and proposed a direct Tonbridge - Gatwick Airport service via Redhill. GTR responded with a new timetable incorporating virtually all of the TLC suggestions, although no changes will happen before December 2023 at the earliest.

Southeastern's December 2022 timetable just about stands up, but has very little room for failure. Most metro services run from either Charing Cross or Cannon Street, rather than each line having direct trains from both terminals, so many passengers have to change at London Bridge. This is fine when things are going well, but any disruption leads to chaotic overcrowding. Southeastern prefers one terminal per line, but every consultation has rejected this. It pays to listen to passengers!

TLC would normally welcome investment, but although conducted to 'industry standards' and signed off by all the relevant bodies, plans for Hildenborough station that include a new cycle rack on a blind corner just inside the grounds are illogical and downright dangerous. Having set out its concerns, TLC made twelve recommendations, four of which were for alternative sites for the cycle rack. Watch this space.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its 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](#).

NEWS

The slides for the presentations at the Rf Annual National Conference on 30 March are now [online](#). Family Friendly Trains highlighted the paucity of family friendly facilities on Britain's railways, although the LNER Family Waiting Room Kings Cross is an exemplar. All too often facilities are distinctly unfriendly: eg there is nowhere for younger children to sleep during longer journeys. FFT would like TOCs to pledge a variety of measures: unfolded buggy spaces that can be reserved, child friendly toilets on trains, communication and engagement, assistance and staff training, and signing up to the Breastfeeding Network's (BfN) Breastfeeding Friendly scheme. A workshop then explored practical steps that can be taken now – eg gaining a better understanding of how many families already travel with under 5s.

The Mayor of London is formally [exploring the option](#) of withdrawing Day Travelcards. [Rf calls](#) for the plan to be put on hold – at least until the flaws in the contactless system have been resolved, as it isn't yet fit for purpose: it doesn't cater for groups such as families, or support Railcards. Thus a family of 4 travelling from Harpenden to London for a weekend out could see their fare rise from £26.30 to £76.40 – except that TfL's income would likely be zero, as they would choose to go elsewhere. But this isn't just an issue for the South East: the London Travelcard is a convenient and well-understood product that is widely sold. So Rf urges everyone to complain to their MP and, if in London, to TfL and their Local Assembly member.

However, TfL does seem to be able to find the money for a new [Superloop](#) express bus network that could link many railway stations in outer London.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

We can't wait for High Speed Rail, so let's campaign to make the most of the lines we have! Research group Greengauge 21 says new services over existing routes around the Leeds - Sheffield corridor would attract more passengers, and so grow its economy sustainably.

Extended platforms at Barnsley Interchange could take Intercity trains from London St Pancras to Wakefield, Castleford and York, and from East Midlands to the Calder Valley & Bradford. Sheffield – Leeds trains via Barnsley are at best semi-fast. Cross Country runs one fast train an hour via Wakefield Westgate, but where are Northern's plans for a service on the quicker route?

One of the half-hourly Leeds – Knottingley services could be extended to Goole, and the other used to reinstate a direct Leeds – Pontefract - Doncaster service via a new station at Askern (an approved RYR bid). Extending it to Lincoln in place of EMR's 5 trains/day from Doncaster would avoid the problems both of prolonged platform occupancy and conflict south of the station.

To end overcrowding on popular leisure routes, Northern needs more stock. Cascading Class 170 units from other operators is the obvious solution if any become available, but more is needed. Avanti (West Coast) will have a number of surplus Voyager units later this year, followed by some Meridians from EMR. DfT should authorise the transfer to Northern of enough of these to enable longer trains on the Hope Valley, Wolds Coast and Settle and Carlisle lines. Interior refurbishment would be needed including sufficient toilets, luggage space, and legroom, with comfortable seating aligned with the windows on these scenic routes.

RAILFUTURE HERTS & BEDS

DfT and London Northwestern Railway need to continue updating progress on restarting the train service between Bedford and Bletchley. Timescales for the delivery of replacement rolling stock and the duration of the training programme for drivers and conductors are reasonably clear, but summer holidays and ongoing Industrial action are risks. The timing of maintenance arrangements is also uncertain, as staff are still being recruited, so start dates and the amount of training needed are still unknowns. Stephen Sleight of Marston Vale CRP said, "The Marston Vale Line is a lifeline for the communities along it. Many local people rely on the Line for access to education, work and leisure." Phil Warner, Chair of the Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association added: "We really need at least peak time trains to return in time for the Autumn School Term at the start of September, otherwise its use by large numbers of school students may be a lost for ever."

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

In a meeting hosted by South West Wales Connected, CRN and Deputy Minister for Climate Change Lee Waters sought ways to make more of the thriving community rail movement in Wales, and empower communities to drive a shift to sustainable, inclusive transport.

Following media reports that ticket offices may be closed as physical tickets now account for just 12% of sales, CRN has relayed to DfT, RDG and GBRTT its members' concerns that having fewer people at stations could affect more vulnerable passengers. However, rather than removing staff, it seems that current intentions are to move them from ticket office booths to be roaming at stations. Being more flexible in supporting passengers who need help could make stations more inclusive and welcoming, with ticket office spaces repurposed for community uses. CRN will keep a watching brief to ensure that concerns and potential opportunities are both understood.

At its final meeting before it was subsumed into the newly formed North Yorkshire Council, Craven District Council honoured long-serving Chairman of the Bentham Line, Gerald Townson, with a Legacy Award. Through the Leeds-Morecambe CRP, he has helped develop several tourism initiatives to raise the profile of the line, as well as a wide range of community activities including the pioneering award-winning dementia initiative for the route, educational work with hundreds of schoolchildren, and the year-long placement of university students with Northern Trains Ltd.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF Chief Executive Anthony Smith gave evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee inquiry into proposed legislation requiring minimum service levels, including the number of trains running and staff on duty. TF also submitted written evidence that emphasised the importance of delivering this safely and reliably, and with public engagement.

Grand Union Trains briefed TF on its plans for a faster service between Stirling and London Euston with no need to change at Edinburgh or Glasgow. From 2025, subject to ORR approval, four trains a day would call at Larbert, Greenfaulds (for Cumbernauld), Whifflet (for Coatbridge and Airdrie), Motherwell and Lockerbie, and then at Carlisle, Preston, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes.

Metro tram services to Wolverhampton station are under test and planned to start in June. Along with a new cycle hub, they will finally give the city a fully connected transport interchange.

TF has been working with West Midlands Trains and the West Midlands Rail Executive to improve the customer experience through the Service Quality Regime process. NR and Transport for West Midlands are cooperating on providing a seamless experience for passengers.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Rail is a fantastic way to travel and also one of the greenest. As Summer approaches, CBT hopes a new [video](#) voiced by its Patron and Railway Children star Jenny Agutter will inspire people to take a trip by train. She said: "Train travel has always been my favourite way to get about. Even the shortest journey feels like an adventure. No pressure, just a chance to read, catch up on emails, look out at the countryside or city views, and arrive relaxed and ready for work or a holiday. And taking the train helps tackle air pollution and climate change, too."

Better Transport Week from 12 to 18 June will promote the benefits of public transport, shared mobility, walking and cycling and encourage more people to travel sustainably. It will bring together the transport industry, Government, business and NGOs, along with passengers, pedestrians, cyclists, and anyone who cares about transport. On 12 June, Rail Day, CBT will be at Kings Cross St Pancras, host a rail roundtable at the Railway Industry Association, and invite the public to celebrate train travel and rail stations, with prizes including Eurostar tickets to Paris!

The Government has approved the use of longer lorries on British roads, saving an estimated 70,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere over 11 years. However, CBT spokesman Norman Baker said the change was a "deeply retrograde step". Rather than longer lorries, the Government should be working to ensure more freight is moved by rail - an efficient, safe and clean alternative: just one freight train can remove up to 129 lorries from the roads.

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

According to the latest [ORR Quarterly Report](#), train operators closed 97,254 complaints between 1 October and 31 December 2022, a rate of 26.4 per 100,000 journeys. The 8% increase from the same quarter in the previous year reflects a 29% increase in passenger journeys, but also a [reduction](#) in punctuality and reliability. Overall however, the volumes of complaints are lower than before the pandemic.

In a confidential presentation obtained by [The Independent](#), NR says that Government funding plans for Control Period 7 (CP7 – 2024-29) will not allow it to "operate, maintain and renew" the railway at its current level of reliability. Delays caused by crumbling infrastructure such as tracks, bridges and earthworks are expected to worsen amid rising costs, and it has cut its usual £3bn "risk fund", used to cover events such as extreme weather, as there is "not sufficient headroom."

Reopening of the Ivanhoe line from Leicester to Burton on Trent is facing opposition in the form of a [petition](#) to block it – though to date it has attracted just 56 signatures!

Passengers who fail to present their ticket could be liable for a £100 penalty. EMR Customer Services Director, Neil Grabham said: "Customers not only have a duty to buy a ticket before they board one of our trains, they must also be able to present it for inspection. Some fraudulent travellers think they can avoid paying for an e-ticket by pretending they bought one and then informing EMR staff that their phone has no charge when challenged. This excuse won't work, and if the phone cannot be charged, EMR enforcement officers will issue penalty fares."

Various local leaders met with Midlands Connect to discuss its [Midlands Rail Hub](#) project. As Chancellor, Sajid Javid MP granted it £20m to fund the Outline Business Case. He commented: "In 2019, I committed the Conservative Party to supporting this scheme, and I look forward to seeing the fantastic benefits that it will bring to Bromsgrove District." Hereford MP Jesse Norman said: "I want railways and public transport to be as accessible and efficient as possible. Midlands Rail Hub will serve the people of Hereford and contribute to this goal." Staffordshire Highways and Transport Cllr David Williams said: "We look forward to the reinstatement of the additional services on the Cross City Line [from Redditch and Bromsgrove to Lichfield] as soon as possible."

Once Chair of England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum, Lib Dem Dave Hodgson was ousted as Mayor of Bedford by Tom Wootton, Conservative. With the latest alignment imminent, East-West Rail will be a priority for him, but before he was elected, Mr Wootton said that the £5bn project had been "an utter disaster from start to finish".

With two new lifts serving Platforms 3&4 and 7&8, Finsbury Park station now has step-free access throughout.

After a pilot touchscreen at London Euston began making travel announcements in British Sign Language in 2021, seven more went live in April, at Leeds, Manchester Piccadilly, Liverpool Lime Street, Birmingham New Street, Reading, Bristol Temple Meads and London Paddington, with Kings Cross and Liverpool Street to follow this month. During periods of unexpected disruption, a team of interpreters is on standby to make bespoke signed messages available within an hour.

On 2 May, Freightliner opened its first Operational Training Academy to prepare drivers for the in-cab digital signalling on the ECML that will give them continuous live information regarding speed and braking requirements, with the safeguard of automatic train protection (ATP). ERTMS should enable longer, heavier and faster freight trains on the UK network – encouraging the movement of freight by rail and lowering emissions.

...and finally

An 83-year-old station assistant at Borehamwood in Hertfordshire who has worked on the railway for 61 years has recorded his experiences. In [Then and Now](#), a new series on BBC Teach, Siggy Cragwell tells children about how transport has changed, and answers their questions.

A newly-restored railway shed designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1854 is to become a cafe and gallery space for Buckinghamshire New University. The Grade II*-listed Brunel Engine Shed in High Wycombe was derelict before the former Wycombe District Council stepped in to save it. A new slate roof was added, but Brunel's original timber queen post trusses were repaired.

CONSULTATIONS

- ORR: [Proposals to Modify NR's Timetable Change Advance Notice Period from 12 weeks to 8 weeks.](#), closes 23 May.
- TfL: [Proposed Withdrawal of Day Travelcards](#), closes 23 May.
- England's Economic Heartland: [Calls for Evidence to Inform the Development of Two Connectivity Studies](#), close 11 June.

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

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Rail Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

May

- Saturday 20. Ontrack - Tendring Transport Users AGM, Gospel Chapel, 62 Old Road, **Frinton-on-Sea**, Essex, CO13 9BY, 1030.
- Saturday 20. Rf Yorkshire AGM, Mill Hill Chapel (east side of City Square), **Leeds**, 1300
- Saturday 20. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, St Marks Church Hall, Bridge Road, **Oulton Broad South**, NR33 9JX, 1400.

June

- Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (Then the first Thursday of every month).
- 2-3 June. [European Passengers' Federation](#), **Barcelona**.
- Monday 5. Sub-national Transport Body Conference, the Vox, **Birmingham**, B40 1PU
- Saturday 10. English Regional Transport Association, The Commercial Rooms, 43-45 Corn Street, **Bristol**, BS1 1HT, 1400.
- Monday 12. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also the second Monday of every month).
- Tuesday 13. STORM AGM, **Littleborough** station, 1900 (Also the second Tuesday of each month at Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400.)
- Wednesday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 22 July in London).
- Saturday 17. Rf East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, IP2 8BX (Also 23 September, Norwich).
- Friday 23. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Timespan, **Helmsdale**, 1030.
- Tuesday 27. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every other month).

Further Ahead

- 15 July. Rf AGM, University of London, Malet Street, **London**, WC1E 7HU.
- 19 July Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800 (Also 21 September, No 1Inn, Cleethorpes, 1900).

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, BS21 7NP – **for legal correspondence only.**
All other correspondence to: 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP*