



June 2023

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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RUX congratulates Network Rail (NR) for completely rebuilding a [Nuneham viaduct](#) abutment in just ten weeks – a heroic effort. If only NR could deliver the [Ely Area Capacity Scheme](#) so promptly. With a benefit/cost ratio of 4.89:1, it really is a no-brainer.

Roger Smith

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

### Friends of the Far North Line

MSPs continue to hang the albatross of dualling the A9 and A96 round the neck of transport investment. The Far North Line and its neighbours need a lot to entice potential rail passengers out of their cars. Yet while Scottish Government policy is for a modal shift to rail, the decision makers do not seem to know what that involves. The Rail Directorate of Transport Scotland has a very clear view of the task, but is financially constrained by the MSPs who form the Government.

FoFNL has campaigned for a passing loop on the approach to Inverness since 2005. In 2019 the FNL Review Team agreed that it was a necessity. Yet four years on, NR is still working up and costing an outline design for what is now the Delmore loop. It will be submitted to Transport Scotland in the middle of the year for authority and funding for construction but, worryingly, it seems that the cost will be tied in with the extra cost of a package to enhance the passenger service, when FoFNL's campaign was for service reliability and freight capacity to drive modal shift.

### Harrogate Line Supporters Group

A [draft report](#) published as part of the forthcoming consultation into West Yorkshire's rail strategy says that the Harrogate line is close to full capacity: "Additional train capacity will be needed to provide enough space for everyone and make travelling by train a more comfortable experience". Electrification of the line should be considered, Brian Dunsby of the HLSG said the move would be beneficial: "I would expect the operator to be able to provide four-coach trains in place of the current three-coach Class 170. But it will not be in the near future."

North Yorkshire Council is minded to spend £11.2m on the [Harrogate Station Gateway Project](#) that will stifle traffic through the town centre, just to benefit a few cyclists. There is a [petition](#) to stop this development, as traffic flow could be improved in many other less costly ways.

## **Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines**

On 15 March, the Government agreed a funding settlement for Greater Manchester similar to those for Scotland and Wales, the first such flexible grant for an English region. A London-style transport system, the Bee Network, will integrate bus, tram and cycle hire services with six key rail routes: Wigan – Victoria, with a new station at Golborne, hopefully by late 2025; Stalybridge – Southport, and to Piccadilly from Glossop via Hadfield, Rose Hill, Buxton and Alderley Edge. And a £72m package of rail improvements will deliver a third platform at Salford Crescent station, easier access to platforms at Manchester Victoria, and track improvements across the north of the city.

However, [Railway Gazette](#) reports that, during a visit to Manchester on 25 May, Rail Minister Huw Merriman confirmed NR has withdrawn a planning application for additional through Platforms 15 and 16 at Manchester Piccadilly, and remodelling the track and signalling layouts at Oxford Road. He did though reject suggestions that the Transpennine Route Upgrade may be scaled back in response to funding constraints. Rumours that electrification through the core section between Stalybridge and Huddersfield was being postponed or cancelled were not correct.

## **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association**

Footfall on the Mid-Cheshire line is at about 85% of pre-Covid figures on weekdays, but 110% at weekends. If the unions will accept Sundays as part of the normal working week, Northern could deliver an hourly Sunday service similar to that on Saturday. Sadly, the rear coach of 4-coach trains continues to be locked 'out of use'. MCRUA would like to see 3-coach Class 195's on the line.

Ticket machines can issue a Promise to Pay (P2P), but this option is switched off when the ticket office is open at stations such as Altrincham and Northwich, which can result in a lengthy walk.

Work has started on rebuilding Northwich Station and redeveloping the buildings on Platform 4 at Altrincham. And Cheshire West and Chester Council has approved plans to enhance the concourse and improve customer facilities at the Grade II\* listed Chester station, for which Transport for Wales is providing £7.5m. DfT funding is being sought for more strategic improvements, including another northern platform, a new railway junction and electrification.

## **Friends of the Barton Line**

Class 170 trains have replaced the Class 156's on the Barton line.

Regarding the improvements at Barton interchange, the car park extension is nearing completion. However, it would appear that the contractor's remit did not provide for the enhancements proposed by Barton Civic Society: a bus lane adjacent to the platform, improved waiting facilities, customer information screens, cycle lockers, electric charging points, etc. Cllr Rob Waltham, leader of North Lincolnshire Council, has confirmed though that there will be public toilets.

## **Fen Line Users Association**

FLUA welcomes the half-hourly Great Northern departures from King's Lynn from 0440 until 0840, and in the evening peak; in particular, the 0812 allows an earlier off-peak arrival at King's Cross. Greater Anglia no longer serves King's Lynn, but by leaving at 0610 and making a convenient cross-platform change at Ely, you can still reach Liverpool Street by 0825.

## **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

A combination of industrial action, points failures and a fatality led to only 40% of evening trains direct to Bedwyn running. And when GWR took yet another IET for use elsewhere by reducing the 0729 departure from two five-car units to one, it was standing room only from Bedwyn. However, following BTPG protests, from 19 June this will be a nine-car train, with the 0637 from Plymouth dropping from nine cars to five. This train forms the 0926 from Pewsey and 0940 from Hungerford, so do let BTPG know if there is overcrowding on it.

## South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

A revamp of Coastway West services around the 'core' Brighton - Southampton route could see the Victoria - Gatwick - Southampton service cut short, the first time in 33 years that Southampton would have no direct rail link to the airport. The alternative route to Gatwick is by changing at Clapham Junction, but family groups boarding the direct services with substantial amounts of luggage give a clue as to why these are so popular. The problem seems to be operational: congestion on the circuitous route via St Denys and Bitterne often causes delays. So the proposed [Southampton - Woolston tunnel scheme](#) could facilitate passenger train scheduling as well as freeing up capacity through the existing tunnel for container traffic that will inevitably blossom with Freeport activity.

Reading's Green Park Station opened on 27 May with a half-hourly stopping service between Reading and Basingstoke. With two car parks, a bus interchange, taxi rank and cycle racks, it will greatly improve connectivity in the area, and access to the football stadium.

## 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

Now that the collection of views on abolishing the London Travelcard has ended, TfL and the Mayor need to reflect on what they've been told. Likewise, the DfT must respond to lobbying by MPs and others. So keep up the pressure: encourage politicians to focus on "more passengers" rather than "more money per passenger", and point them towards [Rf's ideas](#) about how the Travelcard could evolve.

## RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

Treasury rules that separate renewals from enhancements often waste public money by denying opportunity: the dead hand of accountancy stifles the guiding mind! Re-signalling the Mid-Anglia line is a case in point. The length of one block section means that trains have to be timed at least eight minutes apart. The plan was to halve this by splitting this section, so as to accommodate four freight trains an hour, and passenger services from Ipswich to Cambridge, Peterborough and, in time, Oxford via East West Rail. However, this element of the scheme has had to be dropped because it is classed as an enhancement!

The recently improved freight line out of Felixstowe could carry 48 trains/day each way, but ten of these loads go by road and clog the A14, as that number is limited to 38 by two major bottlenecks: Haughley junction, where trains cross the Great Eastern Main line, and the multi-faceted Ely Junction. And proposals to double the five miles of single track from Soham to Ely have been around since 1947, ten years before shipping containers were invented!

As more people now work from home, peak hour train services have been reduced. Greater Anglia now has a unique opportunity to use its surplus trains and drivers to trial half-hourly services where the existing infrastructure allows, eg into Colchester Town from Walton-on-the-Naze and Clacton, and on the Harwich branch.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Community Rail Week from 22-26 May sponsored by Rail Delivery Group showcased the vital role community rail plays in bringing people together. CRN members organised over 90 activities, events and promotions, and Wemyss Bay station in Scotland won a "World Cup of Stations" vote.

Scenic Rail Britain is holding a 'Days Out by Rail' tourism and leisure campaign from 3-28 July. CRN urges members to get involved with related promotions and activities, and wants content for its digital communications, based on specific themes.

At an event in Leeds during Dementia Action Week, the Leeds-Morecambe CRP shared its experiences of establishing the Bentham Line as a dementia-friendly railway by consideration of the station and train environments, raising staff and volunteer awareness, and arranging visits geared to supporting those living with dementia and their carers. One such visit recently was to Carnforth, for lunch in the station buffet made famous in the film 'Brief encounter', and a tour of the Heritage Centre, to help those living with dementia to recall memories of their youth.

Once again the Bentham Line is host to Northern's "Year In Industry" students. This year's topic, Destination Wellbeing, will explore the impact on their peers of Covid-related restrictions on movement and socialising through various themes: culture, accessing the outdoors, reflecting on heritage, active life styles and social interactions.

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

The Times believes that this autumn's King's Speech won't include GBR as it is not a Government priority. Instead, a shadow GBR will have only a fraction of the powers of the original blueprint. However, the DfT said it was committed to GBR, and that legislation would be brought forward "when parliamentary time allows".

The Office of Rail and Road has published its [Business Plan for 2023-24](#). It will work with the rail industry to drive improvements to train service performance. However, exacerbated by inflationary pressures, railway finances remain difficult, so ORR must maintain a strong focus on the efficiency of NR, and bear down on the industry's cost base. It will continue to support the Government's rail reform programme and scrutinise the Repeal of EU Law Bill. Rail is the second largest body of legislation under review, and it is essential that this be done properly to ensure the best and safest possible outcomes.

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch has issued [safety advice](#) aimed at drivers of southbound trains approaching Peterborough who are being switched from the up fast line to the slow line. It follows incidents on 17 April 2022 and 4 May 2023 when trains passed over the 30mph Spital Junction at 76mph and 65mph respectively.

NR's [Strategic Business Plan for CP7](#) (2024-29) for England and Wales aims to improve train performance, invest in what matters most to passengers and freight users, tackle climate change and make the railway even greener. Since the DfT published its High Level Output Statement (HLOS) and Statement of Funds Available (SOFA), NR has sought to deliver the best railway it can for the £44.1bn available. After adjusting for changes in electricity costs, this is just £1.8bn more than for CP6, although the Government has also committed some £96bn to the Integrated Rail Plan, with much of this being delivered during CP7.

The Telegraph reports that Northern Rail ticket offices may no longer sell Advance fares, making it harder for passengers to buy the cheapest tickets. And Rf President Christian Wolmar's podcast [Calling All Stations](#) claims that rail users may lose access to wi-fi when on-train equipment installed in 2015 is replaced, as the DfT says it is a low priority for passengers. However, wi-fi is also needed for staff purposes, so any savings would be "relatively trivial". Many business travellers only choose the train over the car because they can work on it.

Improved East Midlands Railway routes include off-peak Matlock - Nottingham through services, more from Leicester to Lincoln, and two trains per hour on Saturday on the Robin Hood Line from Nottingham to Worksop. Its Class 180 and 156 fleets are now out of service, but Meridians will continue to operate Intercity services until the new Class 810 Aurora fleet joins the EMR network.

Class 158 and Class 170 trains will operate regional services, and Class 360 trains its Connect service from Corby to London.

The latest [East West Rail route](#) from Bedford to Cambridge would see Bedford St Johns station rebuilt nearer the hospital on a new alignment, new stations at Tempsford, where the line crosses the ECML, and north of Cambourne, and entry into Cambridge via Cambridge South. A statutory consultation in the first half of 2024 will inform the application for a Development Consent Order. England's Economic Heartland hailed the announcement as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform travel across the region. However, Tom Wootton, the newly-elected Mayor of Bedford, is appalled at the plan to demolish 65 homes to make way for two more tracks north of the town: "We're going to challenge this every way we can".

Buses will replace Chiltern Line trains:

- From 7-18 August between Aylesbury Vale Parkway and Amersham (for connections to London Underground) to repair a Victorian drainage culvert in Aylesbury
- From 19 August to 30 October between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough for work to allow HS2 to pass under the Chiltern Line.

NR is stepping up the construction of Ashley Down station in north Bristol, one of seven in the MetroWest programme funded by the West of England CA, and made possible by recent improvements to the signalling around Bristol, the upgrade of Bristol East Junction, and two additional lines between Temple Meads and Filton Abbey Wood.

The 54th edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' map](#) shows Northern no longer running between Clitheroe and Hellifield until 2024, nor Chiltern serving Kidderminster, but GWR extending to Pembroke Dock. Also First Rail has lost TPE, and Serco the Caledonian Sleeper.

Planning permission for a rail freight terminal on the former Radlett Airfield was granted on appeal in 2014. The District Council then lost a High Court appeal against the Government-approved plan, but Hertfordshire CC still had to sell the land to the developers. It has now agreed to do this, although campaign group Save St Albans said it was "regrouping to pursue a judicial review".

### *...and finally*

In a bid to cut carbon emissions, France has banned internal flights where a train could make the same journey in under two-and-a-half hours, whereas on 1 April the UK halved Air Passenger Duty. In June 202, the Rail Delivery Group warned that doing so would see an estimated 222,000 rail passengers a year switch to air.

### **CONSULTATIONS**

- Network Rail: [Bridges to Replace 3 Level Crossings on the Oxford -Banbury Route](#), closes 17 July.

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.

## June

- Saturday 17. Rf East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, IP2 8BX, 1400 (Also 24 September, Norwich, and 2 December in Cambridge).
- Tuesday 20. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 1 August).
- Friday 23. Friends of the Far North Line AGM and Conference, 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).

## July

- Monday 3. Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association AGM, Golden Pheasant, Plumley Moor Road, **Plumley**, WA16 9RX, 1945pm.
- Monday 10. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also the second Monday of every month).
- Tuesday 11. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).
- Wednesday 12. Rf London & South East, Eastern division meeting, **Online**, 1900. (Also 13 September)
- Thursday 13. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (Then 7 September and the first Thursday of every month).
- Saturday 15. Rf AGM and RUG Awards, University of London, Malet Street, **London**, WC1E 7HU, 1100.
- Wednesday 19. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800 (Also 21 September, No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes, 1900, and 15 November at the White Swan).
- Saturday 22. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **London**.

## Further Ahead

- 16 August . East Norfolk Transport Users Association AGM and Open meeting, Christchurch, Deneside, Great Yarmouth, 1330/1415.
- 19 August . Rf London & South East, Kent division. 14.00.

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

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