



July 2023

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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In what seems like a quiet time for the railway, work continues on the TransPennine Upgrade, electrifying the Midland Main Line, and digital signalling of the East Coast Main Line. And at the end of the month, a new Thanet Parkway station opens. It all makes for a better railway; we can but hope that Levenmouth and the Northumberland Line will herald a bigger one!

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines

Scotrail and Transport Scotland are considering glass-sided and roofed trains as used on tourist routes in Switzerland, Canada and Mexico. Scotland's Railway MD Alex Hynes said that there was a massive opportunity when they went out to procure battery electric or hydrogen trains, hopefully in the coming months. "People are prepared to pay a premium for scenic trains with glazed body sides. We need to find a business model to tap into that market".

In its Statement of Funds Available for Control Period 7 (CP7, 2024-29), the Scottish Government commits £4.2bn to operations, maintenance and renewal of the rail infrastructure. Former Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth said: "For the first time, we have been able to specify through the High Level Output Statement (HLOS) greater integration with Scotrail, our publicly owned and primary provider of rail services. This means a greater focus on the passenger rather than the shareholders through greater integration of track and train". The HLOS also tasks NR, together with its industry stakeholders, with achieving a net growth in rail freight of 8.7% using the existing rail network without enhancement.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

LMRC remains active in ongoing consultations and steering around the Active Travel Network, River Leven Parks and Paths, Levenmouth Reconnected, Strategic Land Area, H100 and others. The railway's return, alongside the River Leven programme, is a catalyst for a range of new investment in our long-neglected conurbation following the extended hollowing out when mining and ancillary industries including railway closed down 5-6 decades ago. However, significant concerns remain regarding the extent to which external agencies are capturing benefit, and how these improvements can be sustained after the short-term boom has passed.

Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Since its inaugural meeting 10 April 2001, SELRAP has campaigned for over 22 years to reopen the former rail line linking Colne in Lancashire with Skipton, North Yorkshire.

The spirit level on the front cover of the latest [At A Glance](#) is a reminder of the Prime Minister's levelling-up commitment "to mend the indefensible gap in opportunity and productivity and connectivity between the regions of the UK", and also that the 'Northern Link' is the lowest graded trans-Pennine route - an important consideration for freight hauliers – and would allow freight to avoid heavily congested central Manchester. Also, in the 2022 Queen's Speech delivered by Prince, now King Charles: "A bill will be brought forward to drive local growth, empowering local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensuring everyone can share in the United Kingdom's success."

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

The Government has stressed that the transfer of TransPennine Express (TPE) to the public sector, under the wing of the 'Operator of Last Resort' (OLR) was a temporary measure before the company was returned to the private sector, but the last thing either TPE or Northern needs, though a long period of uncertainty and 'interim' management won't be helpful either. The most straightforward approach would be to keep the two operators under state ownership. However, there is a growing appetite amongst Northern politicians to control their rail network, and taking responsibility for the two Northern operators would be quite an attractive proposition.

The most obvious vehicle would be Transport for the North (TfN), a sub-national transport body run by a consortium of local authorities but without the powers enjoyed by Transport for London. That should change, with more resources and expertise given to TfN. The DfT has the power to transfer responsibility for both contracts to a body such as TfN if it chose to do so. In that event, TfN could, if it wanted to be more radical, set up the two operations as social enterprises in which any surplus is ploughed back into the business. A significant amount of worker and passenger involvement could form part of the structure.

North Cheshire Rail User Group

In response to NCRUG requests, from December, Lime Street to Chester services will be extended to Llandudno; Manchester Airport to Llandudno services will be extended to Bangor, calling at Llandudno Junction but not at Llandudno, and there is the prospect of improved frequencies at Frodsham and Helsby. The group has also asked for more early morning services from Chester to the airports at Manchester and Liverpool. The market has considerable potential, but the latter needs a good bus service from Liverpool South Parkway.

East Norfolk Transport Users Association

At its Rail Passengers' Forum in April, Greater Anglia said that it was looking to re-time some trains from May 2024, as its new fleet of trains will then have been running for 12 months, so they can assess its full capabilities. And it has been confirmed that East Midlands Railway will continue to run the Norwich - Nottingham – Liverpool service in its present form until at least December 2024, as the DfT has "taken off the table" plans to split it at Nottingham.

Their respective CRPs have again produced paper train timetables for services on the Wherry Lines (Norwich – Gt Yarmouth and Lowestoft), the Bittern Line (Norwich - Sheringham) and East Suffolk Lines (Ipswich to Lowestoft and Felixstowe).

East Suffolk Travel Association

An ESTA discussion paper "[A Railway For All Purposes](#)" acknowledges the improvement to the Ipswich to Lowestoft service over the past ten years, and sets out what it wants to see in the next ten. The paper identifies 57 action points, 26 of which are short-term.

ESTA has updated three of its glossy illustrated leaflets: Discover Lowestoft & Oulton Broad; Saxmundham To The Coast, and Discover The Deben & Alde Valleys. Available at many local outlets, they encourage local people and visitors to explore the area by train and bus.

Tunbridge Wells & District Rail Travellers' Association

At the Tunbridge Wells Public Transport Forum in June, NR reported on an exercise to determine the level of demand for Gatwick Airport services from the Medway area. Various options were considered but Tonbridge – Gatwick was preferred. Expect final proposals later this summer.

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](#).



Rf President Christian Wolmar will present the 2023 RUG Awards - that are also open to local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships - after the national AGM in London on 15 July. Eight groups across five Rf branch areas submitted 13 nominations. Five of these groups are believed to be participating in the Awards for the first time.

The judging panel of Rf vice-presidents has assessed Awards and Commendations for the five categories in which nominations were received: best website (the Adrian Shooter award), newsletter (the Paul Abell award), campaigner (the Clara Zilahi award), campaign and social media. Winners of Gold awards and the Judges' Special Award will make presentations after receiving their certificates. The Rf Member of the Year award (formerly Campaigner of the Year), a separate award reserved for individual Rf members, will also be presented at the AGM.

RAILFUTURE SCOTLAND

A housing developer has withdrawn proposals that could jeopardise the reopening of Portobello station, which Edinburgh City Council has said could happen in the near future. It is reassuring to see a council pay attention to land for future rail development.

With Reston station open and East Linton under construction, Rail Action Group East of Scotland is now campaigning to reopen Haddington. With a population approaching 15,000, it is the size of Galashiels that, like Bathgate, Alloa and Edinburgh Park, confounded experts by being used by many more people than forecast.

Transport Scotland and regional transport partnership SWestrans are appraising the proposal for new stations at Beattock, East Riggs and Thornhill, with a view to making the business case. Further east, the Campaign for Borders Rail could commission its own research to support the case for extending Edinburgh - Tweedbank to Hawick and Carlisle. And a new group, the Tweed Valley Railway Campaign, wants a line from Tweedbank to Berwick, via St Boswells and Kelso.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

The Hope Valley Capacity Improvement Scheme is well under way. Its main element involves redoubling the track between Dore Station Junction and Dore West Junction, which was singled in 1985 to allow the second platform at Dore and Topley station to be closed, but created a bottleneck that impacts both the Hope Valley and Midland Main Lines. The work also includes:

- Lengthening the south curve at Dore to allow freight trains to stand without fouling the Hope Valley or main line
- Providing an eastbound freight passing loop between Bamford and Hathersage
- Lengthening the Dore & Topley platform to accommodate 6-car trains – a 50% uplift to the current 4-car capacity
- Provision of a second platform at Dore, complete with accessible footbridge with lifts.

The works should be completed in time for the May 2024 timetable change, but in the absence of any commitment to provide the uplift in fast passenger services for which the HVCIS was intended, local rail user groups are seeking improvements to the hourly stopping service, an easy and cost-effective benefit to local communities that should also attract sustainable tourism.

RAILFUTURE WALES

The Welsh Government has asked the North Wales Transport Commission to consider alternatives to a third road bridge over the Menai Straits to Anglesey. Rf will put the case for a rail bridge.

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS

RfWM responded to several consultations in 2022 including a revised West Midlands Rail Executive Rail Strategy, Midlands Connect's proposals for the Marches line, the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy, Warwickshire Transport Plan, City of Stoke Transport Plan, and plans for a Rugby Parkway Station. However, it has yet to see any result.

It will support local campaign groups, but concentrate its own campaigning activity on strategic issues, liaising with agencies such as the Rail Executive. However, where no local group is involved, it will do its best to campaign for local issues such as the lack of services at Polesworth, and the reopening of stations between Stoke-on-Trent and Stone (Barlaston, Wedgwood or Trentham).

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTH EAST

TfL and the Alliance of West London boroughs are working with NR to develop the case for an Orbital rail service on existing freight lines from Hounslow towards Hendon and West Hampstead, to form part of the London Overground network. Work to date shows that a new rail service is the best option to meet the objectives. A feasibility study this year will identify an optimum route and service frequency, and provide a robust cost/benefit analysis. If funding can be identified and subject to approval, services could start in the early 2030s.

RAILFUTURE WESSEX.

Consultants continue to develop the business case for a new station between Fareham and Botley to serve the major housing and commercial development at Welborne. A single-platform station would cost around £18m, although there is reason to believe that the forecast quarter of a million passengers a year is on the low side.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

West Devon Borough Council has £13m of levelling-up funding to develop plans for a new parkway station and transport hub on the A30 east of Okehampton. Exeter's new station at Marsh Barton opened in May with an hourly service, plus a few extra trains in the weekday peaks.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is exploring wider funding sources within and outside the rail industry to support members looking to diversify their funding base by developing social enterprise opportunities. Many have already embedded social enterprise within their work, developing a range of revenue-generating activities, whilst others have forged links with existing social enterprises or small businesses.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

[London TravelWatch](#) believes 1.5 million Londoners are being excluded by a digital-first approach to transport. One in six say they are unable to buy a ticket, and one in five say they have paid more for travel because they can't use or don't have access to a smartphone or internet connection.

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

In its Periodic Review, a [draft determination](#) of NR's plans for spending £40.0bn on the rail network in England and Wales in CP7, and £4.2bn in Scotland, ORR says that, while the plans largely deliver against the UK and Scottish Governments' priorities, it needs a greater focus on train performance for the benefit of passengers and freight customers, and on renewing core assets like track, structures and earthworks - especially with the challenges presented by climate change. ORR requires more detail in certain areas, and will also take account of stakeholders' responses to a consultation before issuing its final determination in October.

The railway between Kennishead and Kilmarnock is closed until 3 August to install overhead power lines and for platform works at Kennishead, Priesthill & Darnley, Barrhead and at Nitshill, where the footbridge is also being replaced with a new ramp to Platform 2 to provide step-free access. Track, signalling and embankment upgrades will also be delivered near Lugton, in East Ayrshire,

With a £50 million levelling-up award and planning approval, the possible impact of the Eden North Project on rail services to and from Morecambe, Heysham Port and Bare Lane need to be assessed. Consideration could even be given to reopening [Morecambe Promenade station](#), which was built to cope with the much larger crowds of old, and would be more convenient.

On 13 June, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) approved proposals for a new 1,198 space multi-storey car park with better facilities at Northampton Station. It is now working closely with NR and its development partner, BlocWork, to bring the car park forward.

[London Northwestern Railway](#) expects to receive the Class 150 trains for the Marston Vale Line between Bletchley and Bedford from Northern in July. To prepare for their entry into service in the autumn, it is developing the necessary driver and conductor training courses.

Thanet Parkway station between Ramsgate and Minster will open to passengers on 31 July. The fully accessible station has two 250 metre platforms that can accommodate 12-car trains, offering high speed services to St Pancras International via Ashford International in as little as 70 minutes, as well as Mainline connections to London terminals and across Kent and the Medway Towns.

On 25 May, the overnight train between Berlin and Brussels resumed after 14 years. It runs west on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, and east on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. By 8 June over 10,000 tickets had been sold. And a new Hoek van Holland Haven station, served by RET light rail, spares ferry passengers a bus replacement or a 500m walk to a temporary platform.

NR is planning to regenerate over 30 acres of land at [Bow Goods Yard](#), East London, strategically located next to the A12, and a legacy of London's 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The integrated logistics hub and sustainable transport network would significantly reduce HGV journeys, delivering a lower carbon footprint, and easing congestion.

Rail freight is better for the environment than road and air transport. The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport has shown how just 50 miles of electrification would boost it significantly:

- London Gateway to Thames Haven Junction (2 miles)
- Acton West (GW) to Willesden (WCML) (3 miles)
- Felixstowe to Ipswich (14 miles).
- Nuneaton to Birmingham Lawley Street (19 miles)
- Leeds Stourton to Hare Park Junction (12 miles)

...and finally

After a campaign to save the mechanical bull that had starred in the opening ceremony of last year's Commonwealth Games, NR offered it pride of place inside Birmingham New Street station, but it needed a name. West Midlands Mayor Andy Street and NR Chairman Lord Peter Hendy shortlisted the initial suggestions to just four: Ozzy, Brummie, Bostin or Boulton. 70% of the 28,306 votes cast by the public went to Ozzy, to honour the surprise performance of Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne in the Games' closing ceremony.

On 23 June, a long-lost plaque was restored to Liverpool Lime Street station to honour Frank Hornby, inventor of three of the 20th century's most successful toy brands: Meccano, Dinky cars and the eponymous Model Railway. To mark the site where he was born on 15 May 1863, which was cleared when the station was expanded, a plaque was installed on the concourse in 1994. But during renovations in 1999, it was taken down and then lost. The Railway Heritage Trust sought a photo of the plaque from the Hornby Railway Collectors' Association in order to make a reproduction, but a reader of its newsletter came forward with the real thing!

CONSULTATIONS

- NR: [Bridges to Replace 3 Level Crossings on the Oxford - Banbury Route](#), closes 17 July.
- Transport for the North: [Strategic Transport Plan](#), closes 17 August
- ORR: [Periodic Review 2023: Draft Determination](#), closes 31 August
- West Yorkshire CA: [Rail Strategy](#), closes 3 September.
- GTR: [West Coastway, proposed timetable change](#), closes 27 September.

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.

July

- 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, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, **London**, WC1E 7HU, 1100.
- Saturday 15. English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) AGM, The Swan, 1 Dunstable Road, **Flitwick**, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP, 1400.
- 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**, 1100 (Also 12 September on Zoom, 1930).
- Saturday 22. English Regional Transport Association, Montgomery Tower, Lower Claremont Bank, **Shrewsbury**, SY1 1RT, 1400 (also 19 August in Brighton, and 30 September in Northampton).

August

- Tuesday 1. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.
- Wednesday 16. East Norfolk Transport Users Association AGM and Open meeting, Christchurch, Deneside, **Great Yarmouth**, 1330/1415.
- Saturday 19. Rf London & South East, Kent division. 14.00.
- 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

- 24 September. Rf East Anglia, **Norwich**, (Also 2 December in Cambridge).
- 15 October. East Suffolk Travel Association, **Saxmundham**.

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

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