



# Yorkshire Rail Campaigner

Number 61

Summer 2023

All opinions in this newsletter are views of the writer not necessarily of Railfuture or its Yorkshire branch. Photos by editor (JSW) unless otherwise attributed.

## Progress at Dore – even if it did take 10 years to plan

Great to see work at last under way not just here at Dore and Totley station but all along the line to Hope. New – or at least renewed – capacity should benefit freight and passenger. It's taken a decade to get through the hoops of planning, waiting for government approval and then getting contracts under way. Too long!

TransPennine Express has been nationalised. Government can be held responsible if things don't improve. A new union agreement should prove helpful. All agree there is no quick solution and TPE's passengers still suffer a daily lottery of cancellations.

We are delighted to welcome our branch president Alan Whitehouse as guest columnist on page 2. Turn to page 9 for Nina's usual column as branch chair. We have items on issues across Yorkshire including the thorny issue of station car-parking. And we have a spot on community rail following our Leeds AGM where Jools Townsend of Community Rail Network spoke inspiringly. *Should not all railways be community railways?* – JSW on the Summer Solstice 21 June 2023

# **railfuture**

## Yorkshire branch

### President:

Alan Whitehouse:

### Vice-Presidents:

Mike Crowhurst,  
Alan Williams



# “The best and most civilised way of getting around”

**Alan Whitehouse**, our Yorkshire branch president, shares thoughts on his career – and ambitions for rail

I have been Railfuture Yorkshire's Honorary President for well over a decade now and your editor has decided it is time that you, the wider membership, should hear a little more from me. So here goes!

The best place to start is to give you a little bit of background about myself. It is after all, a long time now since I left the world of work, and it is highly likely that some of today's members will either never have heard of me or have only a vague idea of who I am.

As the former US Vice-President Al Gore was fond of saying, I almost used to be someone.

My background is in journalism. In fact, my entire career of 40 years was in journalism, spent mostly at the Yorkshire Post where I became the paper's first transport correspondent and later chief reporter. I began writing about transport affairs because I quickly found out that if you brought stories to the newsdesk, they gave the tedious jobs to someone else!

My biggest transport story at the Yorkshire Post has to be the Settle-Carlisle line closure saga. I was among the first people to write about the (alleged) state of the Ribbleshead Viaduct which formed one of the main planks of British Rail's closure case. It turned out to be bunkum of course. I remember a press conference where we were solemnly assured that, come what may, the viaduct would be unsafe to use within five years. Well, forty years on it is still there and still carrying heavy trains.

## Landmark

The whole affair was long, and fraught with uncertainty. Towards the end, it really did look as though the line would close. Thankfully it did not, and I was able to attend a celebration day 25 years later where my name badge identified me as a 'saviour' of the route. The first and probably only time that description will be applied to me!

The S&C campaign was a true landmark in that the fear was that if it closed it would trigger a 'domino effect' with more closures being brought forward. Bear in mind this was the time of the infamous Serpell report with its even more infamous Option A of just three main railway lines.

I made the switch to broadcast journalism a couple of years later in 1991, joining the BBC as their first Northern Transport Correspondent, working right across the North of England. It was a great job, but a full-on and demanding one. The



It was great to have Alan Whitehouse, branch president, as guest chair at our recent branch AGM in Leeds. Here, he is a little further away! Who knows where? (We could offer a prize - Ed.)

biggest story of my broadcasting days was, of course, rail privatisation.

Privatisation was, for journalists, the gift that kept on giving, with an endless stream of stories about rising subsidies, failed franchises, ever-high ticket prices and growing overcrowding. For rail users it has all been rather less enjoyable.

In my 20 years at the BBC I worked mostly for regional TV and local radio, but at some point or other I worked for all the 'flagship' news programmes from the Today programme through to Newsnight, taking in the One, Six and Ten O'Clock news bulletins and the radio equivalents. I also made six File on Four documentaries for Radio 4.

After 20 years I had the chance to retire early and grabbed it with both hands. I spent 12 years as a footplate volunteer on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway qualifying firstly as a diesel driver then a steam loco driver.

A couple of years ago I returned to live in South Yorkshire. I chose to live in a village with a railway station – Silkstone Common – because I have always been a great believer in railways as the best and most civilised way of getting around. I find it a pleasure to be able to walk the three hundred yards or so to the station, board a train and be in the centre of Sheffield 35 minutes later. It is also an intriguing thought that I can, by changing trains twice – and both times under the same roof – make the journey from Silkstone Common to Paris, Brussels and now Amsterdam with a tiny carbon footprint.

***I agreed to become your Honorary President because my beliefs are your beliefs: that what we need is the biggest, best and most reliable railway system possible. We are, I fear, a long way from that ideal.***



**Batty Moss or Ribbleshead viaduct. 12 miles or so up the “long drag” from Settle Junction. 60 miles on to Carlisle.** Opened 1875, after 5 years of lethal toil (100 navvies died). Designer was JS Crossley, Midland Railway chief engineer. Line closure was proposed – and expected – in the 1980s but in the end refused. The viaduct, once said to have no than more five years of usable life remaining, almost 40 years later is an artery for green tourism and freight. And Grade II\* listed. (Caption – JSW)

**Picture credit** Creative Commons <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en> Michael Bryan “Here Comes the Sun...”  
[Ribbleshead Viaduct - Wikipedia](#)

# TPE crisis: correct decision made. Do we now have a plan?

by **David Hagerty**

Chair, Slaithwaite & Marsden Action on Rail Transport

Deputy Chair, Stalybridge to Huddersfield Rail Users' Group (SHRUG)

## **SHRUG is in no doubt that termination of the First TPE contract was the correct decision.**

The TransPennine Express train company was transferred to government-owned TransPennine Trains Ltd at the end of May. 18 days later Chris Jackson, newly transferred from Northern as interim managing director, wrote to stakeholders.

Jackson pointed out: "Only 50% of TPE drivers are currently equipped to drive the trains and routes in their roster. The lack of qualified driver availability is the main contributory factor in ongoing service cancellations."

So the headline was a deal with ASLEF "to suspend its current action short of a strike, and to reinstate the previously agreed rest day working agreement", helping "to reduce the current backlog of driver training and in turn contribute to the delivery of improved of improved reliability of TPE services." Note that this had not been resolved under First's tenure.

Passengers in our communities between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, and everywhere else on the TPE network, have endured 18 months of severe disruption, with cancellations averaging 1 in 5 to 1 in 7 throughout the period from December 2021.

We have asked repeatedly when, and whether, the service might improve. Severe disruption and multiple cancellations moved from being a possibility to being a probability.

Incrementally, we have seen the service reduced, starting in February 2022 with an unannounced 56% reduction to the Sunday service, in what we presume was an attempt – unsuccessful – to restore reliability.

Some Sunday services were restored on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023<sup>1</sup>. One piece of good news is that before the change of ownership TPE had been able to resolve their local dispute with the RMT that affected Sunday trains. "I am pleased to advise," wrote Jackson, "that on Sunday 11 June we reintroduced 51 additional services on Sundays for an initial trial period of eight weeks."

### **P-code curse**

Taking up the history of this saga, the exclusion of trains cancelled the night before from the official performance statistics ("P-coded" cancellations) enabled TPE to report cancellations in single figure percentages, when the true level of cancellations was many times higher. As a rail user group, we were surprised to see official cancellation figures around 5%, when our experience was typically that 15-20% of the Huddersfield-Manchester stopping service did not run. We wondered why we were being singled out for a much higher percentage of cancellations than the rest of TPE's network. The answer, as it turned out, was that we weren't. The official figures failed to show the full impact from a passenger perspective, and were more or less equally bad across the whole of the company's operation.

The impact has seemed worse in locations where the service was already relatively infrequent or where TPE was the sole operator.

Once the ORR started publishing figures including P-coded cancellations, this situation received the level of media coverage which it deserved, with both TPE and the Department for Transport acknowledging the need to act.

It has been reported that in January 2023, TPE drew up a "recovery plan" which they have since started to implement. TPE had claimed that their recovery plan was achieving improvements. But since it was extremely difficult to find detail of that recovery plan, passenger and rail users' groups have been unable to see what progress if any is being made. Apart from during the period of route closure at Stalybridge in March, when fewer trains were scheduled to run, there was minimal improvement in the cancellation levels which have consistently been in the range 1 in 5 to 1 in 7.

The questions of what this recovery plan would achieve and when passengers would see a difference have

<sup>1</sup> Albeit affected by engineering work – JSW



remained unanswered. If passengers cannot find out what the plan involves, what the service will look like once that plan is implemented, and when we might see a difference, then the plan cannot be given much credibility.

## Lost confidence

Regrettably we lost confidence in TPE's ability to restore an adequate train service in our communities. TPE claimed to be employing record numbers of drivers, and were operating just 58%<sup>2</sup> of their pre-covid train mileage, easily the lowest of all the train operating companies. Yet cancellations consistently exceeded 20% and on some days in the spring of 2023 were more than 40%.

Something didn't add up.

It appears that at the core of TPE's failure to provide an adequate service is a shortage of drivers with the requisite route and traction knowledge.

This has arisen, over a long period, from:

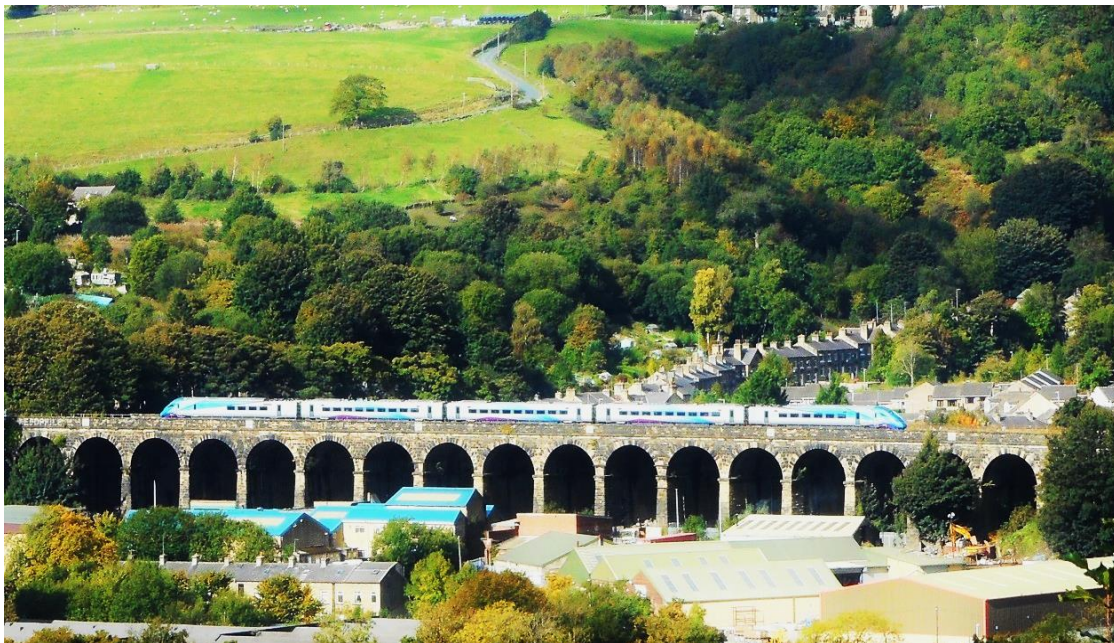
- The decision to order several different traction types at the time the franchise was awarded.
- An apparent policy of reducing drivers' route knowledge so that a service such as Newcastle to Liverpool, which previously could be operated by a single traincrew<sup>3</sup>, now typically requires two changes of traincrew en-route in each direction, potentially six traincrew and hence 6 times more vulnerable to cancellation.
- Timetable changes which, whilst in themselves sensible long-term decisions, created additional driver training requirements, e.g. the remapping of Hull and Scarborough services.
- Additional training requirements arising from diversionary routes for Transpennine Route Upgrade works.
- Covid and its impact on the ability to conduct driver training.
- An over reliance on voluntary rest-day working.
- Industrial relations issues.<sup>4</sup>

Some of these were external factors outside First TPE's control; others are self-inflicted. This situation has developed over a long period. There is no obvious quick fix, but there are actions which would make a noticeable difference.

## New plan

It is understood that within the railway industry there was some surprise that First TPE's contract was not to be renewed, and an expectation that a contract extension would be awarded. However, amongst those who use TPE's services on a regular basis, or those who now commute by car because TPE have been so unreliable, there has been not the slightest doubt that First TPE did not merit a contract extension. There has been cross-party support across the North for termination of First TPE's contract.

Questions need to be asked about the Department for Transport's role in this debacle. It is hard to escape the thought that if it was happening in the South East, it would have been addressed long before now and not allowed to fester for 18 months. The DfT are responsible for ensuring that TPE meet their obligations towards their [actual and wishful] passengers and the communities which they serve; they comprehensively failed to do so. The DfT have been either complacent or complicit, or possibly both. It is unclear to what extent micro-management by the DfT contributed to making the situation worse than it would otherwise have been. →



TPE class 802 bi-mode on diesel in the Colne Valley crossing Crimble Viaduct, Slaithwaite. Arguably one of their best trains! We need to see more of them and fewer of the "185s" that are ideal neither for local stoppers nor long-distance expresses. (Photo: SMART)

<sup>2</sup> ORR Passenger Rail Usage July to September 2022, table 4.1, published 15 December 2022

<sup>3</sup> To be fair we do not know how often this happened in practice, but it clearly is an issue – Ed.

<sup>4</sup> The last two may be linked, of course.

→ The transfer of the services to the operator of last resort provides an opportunity for a reset, both of relationships (TPE-unions, TPE-passengers, etc) and policies. At the time of writing it is unclear how much has changed and how much will change in the near future.

The ASLEF agreement is a promising start.

Chris Jackson added: "We are also working through many other aspects of an operational review, in which this agreement plays an important role, to inform a new stabilisation plan, the details of which will be shared with stakeholders by September. We are leaving no stone unturned or lever untouched as part of that review, and while there might be hard decisions to be taken, I assure you that if it can have a direct and sustained impact on reducing cancellations, we will not hesitate in taking that action."

So:

- Does the new "stabilisation plan" supersede First TPE's seemingly secret "recovery plan", which allegedly was working as they had hoped, but was so robust that no-one except themselves and the DfT could be allowed to know what was in it?
- I'm always wary when people talk about "hard choices" or "tough choices". Those choices tend to be hardest on the people who have no say in the matter, and not particularly hard on those making the choices.

Whether by the publication of the old recovery plan or new stabilisation plan or by other communication with passengers and other stakeholders, ***there needs to be evidence of a clear strategy to restore a punctual and reliable service for communities like ours.***

## Branch diary:

### Consultations coming up – your views needed!

#### Transport for the North (TfN) strategic plan

- **12 weeks ending deadline for submissions 17 August**
- **Drop-in sessions** Wednesday 5 July - The Queens Hotel, Leeds (11am-3pm), Friday 14 July - The Royal Station Hotel, Newcastle (11am-3pm). Plus Monday 31 July - Virtual Workshop, details on TfN website (11am-3pm).
- To register for sessions, read documents and respond see [transportforthenorth.com/STP](https://transportforthenorth.com/STP)

#### West Yorkshire Combined Authority rail strategy

- **Ends 4 September.**
- Full details at: [Our Rail Strategy | Your Voice \(westyorks-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/our-rail-strategy-your-voice)
- Some webinars etc have already taken place. More may happen!
- **Railfuture Yorkshire will be responding.** To influence our response please study the online material and send your views to Stephen Waring (email on back page of this newsletter) **before beginning of August.**

This is an opportunity to comment on the draft strategy and influence the final version. Ambitions include (!) developing services for example around Pontefract ("five towns") and the Calderdale/Huddersfield-Wakefield-York corridor; and improved service frequencies. New routes such as Bradford-Barnsley-Sheffield via Halifax (or later Spen Valley); Menston-Otley, Penistone-Deepear, and regular passenger service on the existing heritage Worth Valley railway also get a mention (see p60 of main report). Freight is also covered (p67-72).

Decarbonisation priorities beyond Transpennine upgrade and Leeds-Bradford, are full electrification of Harrogate and Calder Valley routes (Tier 1) with Pontefract and Hallam lines following (Tier 2). That would be 80% of route-km across the county. Tier 3 would be all remaining routes.

***It's a massive ambition. Let's support it and press for even more – JSW***

Railfuture Yorkshire branch meeting  
**Early autumn meeting**

**Date to be announced – in South Yorkshire. We are hoping for a prominent speaker.**

Late autumn meeting – probably in  
Halifax, **Saturday 27 November**

Joint meeting with Rf North West branch.

Speaker **Dr Paul Salveson.**

Paul is sometimes billed founder of community rail, but is also a leading light of the Rail Reform Group. We are negotiating subject area for this meeting, and have suggested that a workshop activity could be good.



# Community boom – we want more not less

by **Stephen Waring.**

Inspirational and aspirational, Jools Townsend, Community Rail Network (CRN) chief executive spoke at Yorkshire Railfuture's AGM.

Here's a summary with some thoughts of our own.

A growing grassroots movement. 76 community rail partnerships, 1200 station friends groups. A two-way process, helping people get the most from their railways, helping rail to be more community focused, fostering local links – a sense of ownership. It's about Covid recovery and tackling climate change. There's an evidenced – and quantifiable – impact on lives. Over 10000 volunteers, 470000 hours, worth £40 million.

Jools Townsend's presentation quoted a 17 year-old volunteer in Kent: "I didn't use the trains before, I felt a bit nervous, But with this project I found there are people to help you at stations – nothing to be scared about." Not that we

need to go to Kent; Yorkshire and Humberside is home to 6 CRPs and 130 station groups. Involving young people gets the next generation gaining confidence and getting on the trains. Jools set out six inspiring objectives:

- **Helping rail create social value and support regeneration** – community rail as a "rich resource" for organisations like Railfuture.
- **Engaging young people and families** – fostering desire to use rail. Children's mobility horizons have shrunk. Tackling car dependency. Helping young people see the railways as "theirs". Accessing opportunities.
- **Travel confidence, inclusion and accessibility** – tackling loneliness and exclusion, innovations to support people with disabilities and vulnerabilities, thinking beyond present station and passenger boundaries...
- **Integrated sustainable transport** – modal integration not working! CR can pull partners together. Three in 10 adults do not have access to a car.
- **Modal shift and promoting leisure travel** – modes and sectors working together. We face huge change as a society and need major reduction in car use by 2030 (and flying!). Let community voices and stories inspire people; it's not about being criticizing.
- **Localism – responsiveness to local needs and opportunities** – getting active all along our lines.

Community rail has an aspirational quality. Transport emissions are still not falling. Electric cars are far from a silver bullet. It's not just about pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions but other issues of public health – exercise, combatting obesity and human effects of congestion. Public space dedicated to cars approaches 50% in urban areas.

What works in achieving modal shift? We can't just persuade people to change. Transport mode is not usually a free, conscious choice and the car is deeply embedded in society, lifestyles and identities. We need to recruit people socially and break down barriers, raising awareness of benefits and achieving together. Creating a sense of momentum and ownership. Rail is a huge part of the solution, making trains part of the everyday agenda, in a world where, **"for a lot of people, still, trains are another world completely away from their everyday experience. It's a car-dominated world, but it can't go on like that... It really isn't sustainable."**<sup>5</sup>

Community rail faces its own challenges. We hear of a 25% cut in government funding supplied via train companies.<sup>6</sup> This seems counter to the need to open up rail to more of the community, not less. We all pay for our transport systems in part through taxation. Trains should not be just for commuting or occasional weekend trips but should be the natural mode of transport for more and more of the population. Leisure will be a big market and that ties in with station "friends" groups, line partnerships, and groups of keen and active young people learning how to use trains and spreading the word. This is about getting the best value from government support.

**Should every railway be a community railway? Discuss!**



**Todmorden. Community rail booms – established station groups, and new initiatives with college students. Artwork like this can be seen on the across the North. And a new community rail partnership is making an impact through Calderdale and Rochdale. (Pic JSW)**

<sup>5</sup> John Le Grove, treasurer, Friends of Glossop Station.

<sup>6</sup> See for example [Concerns for the future of community rail funding | RailBusinessDaily](#)

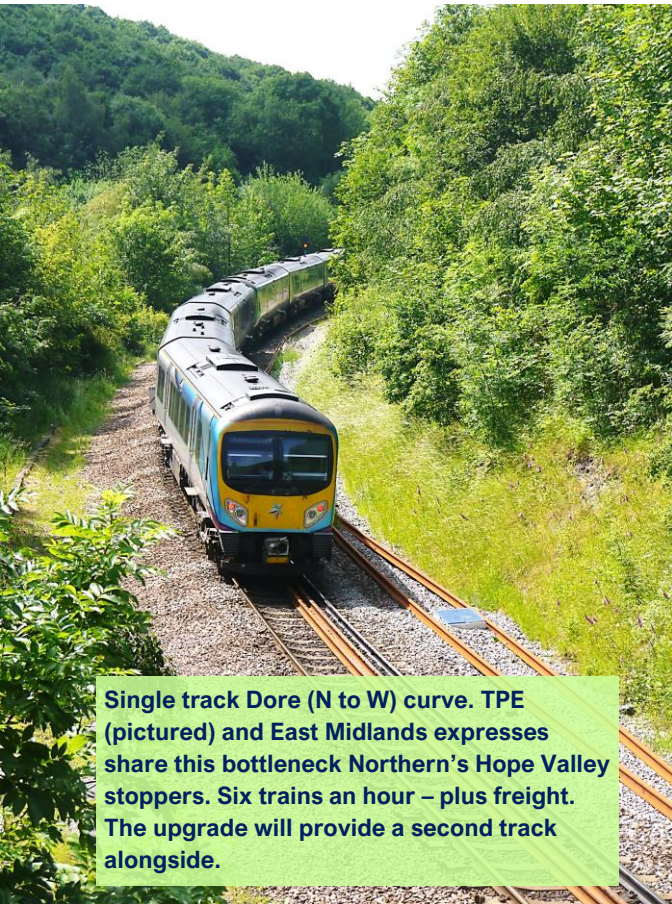


# Hope Valley upgrade

by **Andrew Dyson**, Vice-Chair, Railfuture Yorkshire

## Works on the Hope Valley Capacity Improvement Scheme are now well under way.

Main element involves reinstatement of the double track section between Dore Station Junction and Dore West Junction.



Single track Dore (N to W) curve. TPE (pictured) and East Midlands expresses share this bottleneck Northern's Hope Valley stoppers. Six trains an hour – plus freight. The upgrade will provide a second track alongside.

This short stretch of line was converted to single track in 1985 to allow closure of the second platform at Dore and Totley station and eliminate maintenance costs arising from the platform and footbridge there. Result was a notorious bottleneck which today impacts both the Hope Valley and Midland main line.

The work also includes

- lengthening of the south curve at Dore to allow freight trains to stand without fouling the Hope Valley or main line;
- provision of an eastbound freight passing loop between Bamford and Hathersage (work under way);
- lengthening of the existing platform at Dore & Totley to accommodate 6-car trains – 50% improvement current 4-car capacity;
- second platform at Dore to be re-constructed, complete with accessible footbridge with lifts.

It is a full decade since the first public consultations about the scheme (2013). Proposals then were to provide four fast and one stopping service per hour, plus freight. The specification was subsequently cut back to three fast and one stopping service per hour, plus three freight trains in every two-hour period. A public enquiry took place in 2016 and was finally approved by then Secretary of State, Chris Grayling, in March 2018. It is anticipated the works will be completed in time for the May 2024 timetable change.

It is unclear however when the intended uplift in service provision will be delivered.

## Progress to date: could we seek local service improvements?

Track works to incorporate the revised layouts at Dore Station Junction and the new Dore West Junction have been completed. Drainage work has been undertaken in preparation for the additional formation, and the existing track through Dore Station has been replaced. Earthworks near to West View Lane to accommodate the extended Dore South Curve are ongoing; soil nailing to secure the retained embankment and clearance of the excess has proved problematic, but it is anticipated this will be completed during the drier summer months. Laying of the second track to connect the remodelled junctions is progressing steadily – we might be tempted to say slowly!

At Bamford, the new footbridge that will enable closure of a foot crossing on a public footpath has been delivered to site. Signalling work is also ongoing along the route. Work at Dore and Totley is expected to become even more visible very shortly, as construction of the new station platform and associated footbridge begins to take shape.

In the absence of any commitment to provide the uplift in fast passenger services for which the HVCIS was intended, **local rail user groups along the Hope Valley Line are seeking improvements to the hourly stopping service.**

This is potentially an easier and more cost-effective way to make good use of the upgraded infrastructure once the work is complete. **Why not use the improvements to benefit local communities and attract sustainable tourism to this spectacular belt of country?**





## Let's start with ticket offices...

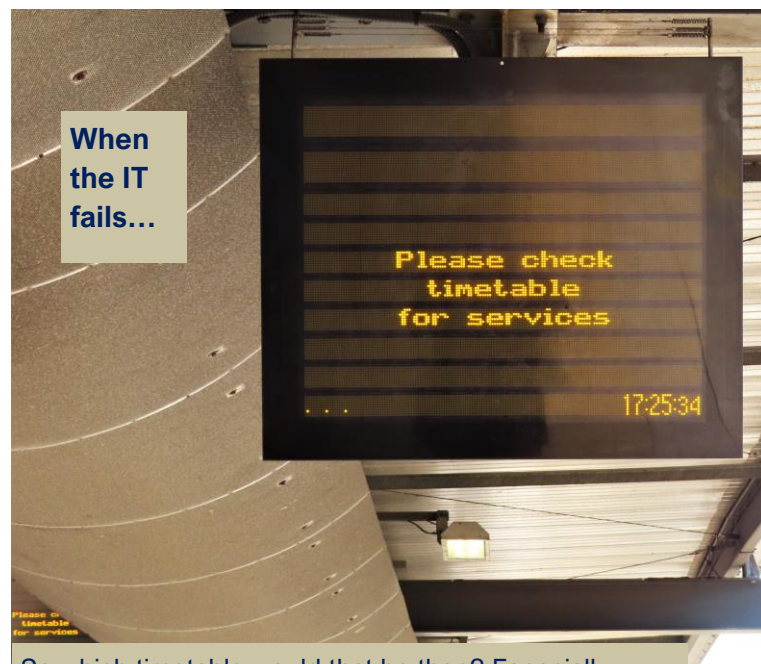
### How can we secure the future of passenger facilities that many people want and need?

The Editor has asked me to write a piece on the importance of ticket offices. Stephen and I agree that offices with staff behind the counter are very important for millions of passengers. We differ on one aspect. Stephen believes we should embrace the Merseyrail model of ticket offices also being small retail outlets<sup>7</sup>. I disagree. It is important that ticket offices staff can give passengers speedy and full attention. This will not happen when people in the queue are buying snacks or groceries. I want to see retention of proper ticket offices.

They must offer passengers the full range of tickets available on the network. There should be no discrimination in the purchase of advanced purchase tickets against those who, for whatever reasons, are unable or unwilling to purchase them on-line. Northern's recent decision not to sell "advance purchase on the day" tickets at ticket offices is unacceptable and discriminatory, especially against older people who on average are less computer savvy than younger folk. Northern should reverse this policy forthwith, although I fear it may be the start of a Treasury or DfT led slippery slope whereby ticket offices cannot sell any advance purchase tickets. That, of course would not only inconvenience passengers, and cause some not to travel by train, but by reducing ticket offices sales, would strengthen DfT's wish to get rid of them.

Thanks to HM Treasury, the news about our railways continually gets gloomier, despite the strong passenger numbers. Leisure traffic is well above pre-Covid levels, and commuter traffic has very definitely returned in the north of England. Our railways are enormously important, not just for their obvious function of getting people to work, enabling business trips, enabling family visits and other leisure journeys, and the efficient movement of freight, but also because the railways facilitate sustainable economic growth and are vital to reducing carbon emissions by reducing car and lorry journeys. Those of you who heard the excellent Radio 4 programme "What are our Railways for?" will have heard me say how important the railways are for the planet's healthy future by enabling modal shift (from road and air). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001mc65>

***Yet HM Treasury seems determined to lower the cost of the railways to the public purse, by demanding various cuts in the services available to passengers, and cutting back on investment at a time when we should be proceeding with a massive programme of railway***



So which timetable would that be then? Especially when there's no sign of the traditional poster as the railway company thinks it's saving the planet by using less paper and ink. So perhaps you could use your mobile, assuming it's not relying on the same source as the non-operational screen. Ask staff on the platform? Quick. Join the queue. The joy of technology. Thanks to Andrew Whitworth for the picture. – JSW

<sup>7</sup> **What the editor (really) thinks.** Yes, there may be a place for multi-purpose shops for passengers. I would not suggest this should be universal! It may work at some stations, not at others. I do think it needs to be considered as a possibility if we want to keep booking offices at stations with staff behind the counter. (I worry about whether some of our friends in train company management have even thought about it.) If you travel on many trains you will see a majority of passengers have mobile tickets on their phones. Obviously this correlates with a big reduction in ticket office use. If, as many of us hope, fares are eventually simplified this will cause a further reduction. So a strategy could be not just to retain the present range of retailing activities but actually increase them – which could mean providing local bus times, visitor information or – yes! – more general retailing. Get your ticket, a bite to eat, and something to read in one transaction. Loaf of bread or frozen meal on the way home? Yes, there will be more queueing. Sign of good business? Worthy of consideration? But, no, it won't work everywhere. ***And of course staff and their representatives must be taken with us which means not damaging pay and conditions.*** – JSW

**electrification and other measures to get people and freight out of their cars and aircraft and onto the railway.** We need government to understand just how important our railways are now, and even more so in the future.

## ... and who should run our stations?

Railfuture national chair Chris Page recently asked branches for their views on the future of stations, pending a meeting with the Rail Minister. One of our branch vice presidents, Alan Williams, put forward the very interesting idea that all stations should be managed by one body. At present, a lead train operating company staffs a station. There is an obvious question about the extent to which other TOC services are properly marketed, and about possible failures to coordinate inter-train connectivity, especially when there is minor late running.



Middlesbrough station booking hall – rather grand. Gaudy magenta tape identifies TransPennine Express. Picture, Wikipedia, by Robert Eva (2017)  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>

Alan cites the example of Middlesbrough, which is managed by TPE although they have only two train departures, to Saltburn and Manchester Airport, each hour compared to Northern's six. Yet the station staff are TPE. Could this be to the detriment of full information about Northern services? Northern's 6 hourly departures serve Saltburn (2/hr), Darlington/Bishop Auckland (2/hr), Newcastle via Sunderland (1/hr) and about 1/hr to Nunthorpe of which 5 a day continue to Whitby. LNER has a morning train to London returning at tea time but has so far delayed its commitment to start a direct service to London every other hour.

I agree with Alan about the need for unified station management, as already happens at the 18 major stations managed by Network Rail. However, I feel this is only necessary for stations served by more than one TOC (including open access operators).

***We need a joined up railway, and fully joined up stations would be a good start!***

## Grand Central

Living in Hebden Bridge, I have long been a fan of Grand Central, being one of the early users of their pioneering West Riding service from Bradford to London via Halifax, Brighouse and Pontefract. In the years leading up to the pandemic, GC built up well patronised services. As an open access operator, GC received no targeted help from government during the pandemic. A poor decision by government. Fortunately GC is flourishing in terms of train loadings. The need to recoup pandemic period losses has resulted in changes to the food service, but First Class is still worthwhile if you do not want to travel in crowded Standard.

GC has been suffering badly from cancellations recently, with one train set out of service awaiting accident repairs and the Class 180 Adelante trains being somewhat unreliable. It is time for GC to get some new trains. I would favour some of the remaining HSTs, at least in the short-term. More likely will be ex Avanti Class 221 Voyages when they come off-lease, or maybe the similar but better equipped former East Midlands Railway class 222 Meridians when their bi-mode replacements arrive. Longer term, GC needs new bi-mode trains to enable them to use electric power when on the east coast main line.

Whichever units GC get to replace the 180s, they need to ensure that the seating and legroom in both classes is equal to the standard of those 180s. This is particularly important in First Class, otherwise much of this business is likely to be lost to LNER where the two are in direct or semi-direct competition. On the West Riding service, the slow running between Bradford and Doncaster is acceptable whilst passenger comfort is of a high standard and fares are competitive.

## West Yorkshire needs trams!

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) will shortly be announcing their latest plans for the West Yorkshire Mass Transit network. At Railfuture we have submitted our views to both consultations. We are clear that this network needs to be rail based (trams, tram-trains and light rail). The importance of a good tram system has been emphasised recently in Greater Manchester, where since the tram was extended to the less prosperous boroughs of Rochdale and



Oldham, their local economies have been growing faster (albeit it from a much smaller base) than the City of Manchester – and we know how Manchester is prospering!

This was emphasised recently by Northern Powerhouse chair Lord (Jim) O'Neill on the Radio 4 Today programme (3.6.23). O'Neill stressed the need for Northern versions of the very successful Elizabeth line and Oyster card to better link up the cross-Pennine agglomeration from Liverpool to Sheffield, Leeds, York and Hull. That means Northern Powerhouse Rail in full! Returning to tram systems, it is worth constantly repeating that West Yorkshire is the most populated area in Europe without a tram system, and the sooner the Government provides the funding to get the system developed, the better for both people and the planet.

## Orient express

Travelling on the modern version of the famous Orient Express is out of my price range, but I am sad to learn that the English leg is to become yet another casualty of the folly of Brexit. UK passengers for the train currently travel by VSOE Pullman train to Folkestone, transfer to a coach to travel under the channel, and then board the main OE train at Calais. In future, they will need to travel to Paris to board, as the border delays that have so grossly inconvenienced coach and car passengers at busy times this year mean that the English leg is no longer viable. The majority of the population now recognise that Brexit was an awful own goal, so it is time for reversing the process to begin. We need easy access for people and goods between our offshore island and the European continental mainland, and we need to end the economic and cultural disadvantage which is impacting on most of our lives.

## Strikes go on

I wrote this on a day when train services were severely disrupted by another ASLEF strike. Some may disagree with me, but I have no sympathy for ASLEF's dispute. Train drivers earn around £60k a year – almost double the national average wage, more than many of the commuters they carry to work, and more than what is paid in most European countries (<https://www.euronews.com/travel/2022/12/23/train-strikes-these-are-the-countries-that-pay-train-drivers-the-most-and-the-least-in-eur>). Under privatisation competition between companies pushed up wages more than in most occupations. ASLEF has turned down 4% this year and 4% next – a total of around £5000. Their leader claims that the dispute is not political yet continually quotes the profit made by train operating companies, although the typical 2% return is surely by no means excessive. Nor does he mention that six TOCs are owned by the Government! To meet the ASLEF pay claim, HM Treasury will insist that it has to be recouped in higher fares. Yet higher fares deter travel, are an extra cost on those who have no choice, and contribute the current alarmingly high inflation.

This strike is causing massive inconvenience to ordinary people, has an adverse economic and environmental impact, strengthens HM Treasury's apparent dislike of the railways, and threatens both service levels and future expansion. Time, train drivers, to accept that we have a seven day a week railway. The normal working pattern should be spread over those seven days. We need a reliable and expanding railway to reduce road traffic and carbon emissions. It is time to end this damaging strike.

**Unlike ASLEF, I do think that the RMT has a justifiable case.** Many of their members are on average or below average wages, and they are fighting against unacceptable government demands for the closure of ticket offices. It is time for the DfT to drop that demand, and to enable the train operators to offer RMT members a sufficient pay rise to get them back to work.

### Another view?

UK's inflation rate fell to 8.7% in April, down from 10.1% in March and first dip below 10% since Aug'22. May's level was no less than April's. Food was costing 19.1% more than a year ago according to the Office of National Statistics (BBC News 24 May [UK inflation live: UK inflation down to 8.7% but food bills still rising quickly - BBC News](#)). The percentages are annual increases over one year. Interest rates are expected to rise further. So it is understandable that workers with unsocial and variable hours often clocking on or off in the small hours, might not be happy with 4% over one year (that's 8.2% over 2 years) less than half of annual inflation. No wonder ASLEF members recently voted at percentages well into the 90s for further action – on high turnouts too. That's another six months of strikes.

In the devolved countries things seem a little different. In Wales ASLEF has recommended acceptance of a TfW 4-year deal, 8.9% from April, 7.9% next year, 4.1% at the end of next year and an inflation linked rise in 2025. Changes in conditions are involved including working Sundays as if a normal day. *At time of writing the Welsh ballot result is awaited.* (21 June.)

In Scotland ASLEF recommended acceptance of a 1-year 5% deal. This was rejected by 51.6% in a ballot.

Recent inflation has been attributed to fuel costs, the Ukraine war and continuing after-effects of Covid. – JSW

## Talking points across the region

### Scarborough and York

by **Graham Collett** Vice Chair, Railfuture Yorkshire

NORTH Yorkshire Council's levelling up bid to redevelop parts of **Scarborough and Seamer** railway stations was unsuccessful. Plans were to spend £8.4m at Scarborough Railway Station to provide a transport hub, regenerate the surrounding area, and improve station to town centre 'gateway'. At Seamer £25.2m would have linked the station with housing to the west. A new footbridge would cross the rail line and A64, with lift access and a new station car park.

However, the public realm phase of the 'gateway' redevelopment is now set to go ahead this summer with a £6.6m Towns Fund contribution.

In **York** the May election saw a new, Labour-led council elected. Councillor Peter Kilbane, now deputy leader overseas economy & transport. We look forward to working with him and his team. We hope the new administration make progress on a new local transport plan for the city, feeding into the LTP for the new Metropolitan Combined Authority (MCA) of York and North Yorkshire, due by May 2024.

A project to prepare a high quality, regular interval bus network for the new MCA area - taking account of rail connections - is currently seeking funding.

At **Haxby**, consultations in 2020 and 2022 raised concerns. York council announced that a planning application for the new station would be submitted in Spring 2023. Concerns centred on the chosen site in Towthorpe Road. Haxby Town Council considered the issue in March this year. At the meeting, York

Labour leader Cllr Claire Douglas (now leader of the council) argued that the station needs to form part of an integrated transport system with sustainable, easy access for pedestrians, wheelers, cyclists and drivers. "We agree with Haxby Town Council that Towthorpe Road is not the ideal place for the station," she said, "And if elected in May, we will press the Government to allow time to locate the station at a more logical site." Watch this space!

**LNER** has extended its ticketing trial. Return fares are replaced by single-leg pricing to provide customers with more flexibility. The single tickets are priced at around half the cost of a return, removing situations where single fares cost almost as much as a return. Anytime Singles, Off-Peak/Super Off-Peak Singles and Advance Singles are available. The scheme was extended from 14 May across LNER's network – but is still a trial. Whilst Railfuture was concerned that this change to ticketing would push up the cost of day return journeys (and deter potential travellers), we have been assured that this will not be the case as the cost of two singles should not be more than for the former day return ticket.

### Parking palaver by **Andrew Whitworth**

CONVENIENT station car parking is essential for users who are less mobile or live far from a station. It is also important for locals with heavy luggage or when the weather's just awful. It needs to be simple to use. And spaces need to be available at all times.

Northern's station car parking is generally free in metropolitan counties but often chargeable elsewhere. Payment methods have changed. Like many other businesses, Northern moved away from cash during Covid, switching from parking ticket machines (cash only) to the RingGo app (which charges a fee). You need a mobile phone - in theory an old Nokia will do, as you can transact by voice call, though I can't imagine that would be enjoyable. In my local station, Harrogate, you can buy a ticket at the booking office (not mentioned on the car park notices) – but then you have to cross gate lines five times to return to your car and display it (your rail ticket only works for the first pass). RingGo is probably easier. Customers at Pannal, for example, don't have a choice.



I don't begrudge paying the £4 daily charge. The upside is that spaces are always available - unlike the situation in many free station car parks. Three observations, however.

- this is another example of the drift to disadvantage people who don't own or feel befuddled by mobiles.
- even though traffic is now approaching 2019 levels, car park usage is much reduced. Is it increased active travel to the trains? Or is rail missing out on custom by complicating payments? **Why can't you just buy a car park ticket from the TVM?** Do car park season tickets need a carnet option for hybrid working?
- 2019 practice made non-rail users pay £8 per day, with rail users either obtaining a £4 refund from the ticket office, or getting a £4 RingGo discount using a code given by gate line staff. For some reason this has been discontinued. It's a bargain to park in our town centre for £4. If unscrupulous locals realise there are no checks on the "rail users only" rule it may, in time, become more difficult to find a space – with potential loss of revenue and inconvenience to genuine rail passengers.

## Minsters rail – not giving up on Beverley-York

by David Pennie

The Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) submitted to the DfT in August 2022 after a successful Restoring your Railway bid makes a positive case for the line on economic, environmental and connectivity grounds. Unusually among RYR projects this is a largely new railway proposal, with little use of the original formation, giving very high construction costs, varying considerably between eight possible routes. There is considerable allowance for risk. And limited funding meant the SOBC had to base demand and revenue forecasts on 2005 data. This added up to an unfavourable BCR of from 0.1 to 0.5. The SOBC is still in the DfT's adjudication pipeline.

The Minsters Rail Campaign had become concerned that these factors might stall the next stage of business case progress. Consultants AECOM (who prepared the SOBC) have produced a proposal for a study that will refine the work, with new demand and revenue forecasts, in order to present the best and most cost effective case to the government. This would be much cheaper and quicker than the typical next stage of an Outline Business Case.

Graham Stuart MP (Beverley and Holderness) who commissioned a survey in which 98% of respondents supported the line is actively supporting the AECOM proposal, and recently convened a meeting at Westminster attended also by Julian Sturdy MP (York Outer), Minsters Rail Campaign officers and representatives of AECOM. Among actions mapped out, Graham Stuart will investigate funding from sources including the DfT and local authorities along the route. Hopefully a further step along the way towards Beverley-York reinstatement.

## Pontefract update

by David Hogg Coordinator, Pontefract Civic Society Rail Group

With Leeds-Askern-Lincoln, Sheffield-Baghill-York and Leeds-Goole as top strategic three priorities there's still room to care about Pontefract's "forgotten" station building

Since my article on the future of the main building of Baghill station, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency have not renewed their lease, and the building has been empty for a considerable time. The DVSA were very happy with location and the building itself, but it seems leasing company ARCH holdings had difficulty carrying out repairs.

The current state is indeed bad. Holes in the roof. Fall pipes and guttering missing. Recently a break-in through the old ticket office window caused much damage.

We have recently had a meeting with an ARCH representative who stated that their quote to stabilise the building was unacceptably high as they can only use contractors approved by Network Rail. We were not aware that Network Rail still actually own these assets, but they have a 125-year leasehold on all the properties.

A local business representative suggested the building would make ideal office space for small firms on short term contracts. A local council officer, who specialises in revitalising old buildings, agreed. We hope to be involved in a further site meeting. **And we hope a suitable use can be found for this once thriving building, located on a rail link itself ripe for an upgrade, before it is too late.**

**Finished with this newsletter? Please pass it on to a friend or colleague who might be interested in campaigning for better transport or even joining Railfuture. Or you could leave with other second-hand books and magazines where these are placed e.g. in station waiting rooms; please ask for permission if appropriate.**

## User groups affiliated to Railfuture within Yorkshire area

Askern Station, Friends of	Contact Graham Moss on <a href="mailto:graz.moss@sky.com">graz.moss@sky.com</a> or 07510 555722
Bradford Rail Users' Group	<a href="http://www.bradfordrail.com">www.bradfordrail.com</a>
Esk Valley Railway	<a href="http://www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk/evrhc.html">http://www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk/evrhc.html</a>
Halifax and District Rail Action Group and Electric Railway Charter	<a href="http://www.hadrag.com">www.hadrag.com</a> and <a href="http://www.electriccharter.wordpress.com">www.electriccharter.wordpress.com</a> email <a href="mailto:js.waring@hotmail.co.uk">js.waring@hotmail.co.uk</a>
Harrogate Line Rail Users' Group	Care of <a href="mailto:billtymms@btinternet.com">billtymms@btinternet.com</a>
Harrogate Line Supporters' Group	<a href="http://www.harrogateline.org">www.harrogateline.org</a>
Hope Valley Rail Users' Group	<a href="http://www.hopevalleyrailway.org.uk">www.hopevalleyrailway.org.uk</a>
Huddersfield, Penistone and Sheffield Rail Users' Association	Email: <a href="mailto:hpsrua@btinternet.com">hpsrua@btinternet.com</a>
Hull and East Riding Rail Users' Association	<a href="mailto:davidpennierail21@gmail.com">davidpennierail21@gmail.com</a>
Hunmanby Railway Station, Friends of	<a href="https://e-voice.org.uk/friendsofhunmanbyrailwaystation/">https://e-voice.org.uk/friendsofhunmanbyrailwaystation/</a>
Lancaster and Skipton Rail Users' Group	
Minsters Rail Campaign (Beverley-York)	<a href="http://www.minstersrail.com/">http://www.minstersrail.com/</a>
Pontefract Civic Society Rail Group	<a href="https://en-gb.facebook.com/PontefractRail/">https://en-gb.facebook.com/PontefractRail/</a>
Selby and District Rail Users' Group	<a href="http://www.selbytowncouncil.gov.uk/useful-links/selby-district-rail-users-group/">http://www.selbytowncouncil.gov.uk/useful-links/selby-district-rail-users-group/</a>
Settle-Carlisle Line, Friends of the	<a href="http://www.foscl.org.uk">www.foscl.org.uk</a>
Skipton-East Lancashire Railway Action Partnership	<a href="http://www.selrap.org.uk">www.selrap.org.uk</a>
Stalybridge to Huddersfield	Email: <a href="mailto:markashmore@yahoo.com">markashmore@yahoo.com</a>
Upper Calder Valley Renaissance Sustainable Transport Group	Email: <a href="mailto:Nina.Smith@railfuture.org.uk">Nina.Smith@railfuture.org.uk</a>
Upper Wensleydale Railway	<a href="https://upperwensleydalerailway.org.uk/">https://upperwensleydalerailway.org.uk/</a>
Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership (Yorkshire Coast Wolds Coast Line)	<a href="http://www.yccrp.co.uk">www.yccrp.co.uk</a>

## Yorkshire branch (RfY) committee and the small print

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