

The quarterly branch newsletter of *railfuture* in London and the South East

Britain's leading independent campaign for a bigger better railway – for passengers and freight

Tears for two tiers?

If our objective is to convince others of the merits of our cause through exerting our influence upon them, then those others include local transport authorities. Within our regional branch area that's the Greater London Authority's executive agency Transport for London plus the unitary and county councils.

Outside London, all will change in the coming months and over the next few years as the new government's plans for both local government re-organisation (the end of the two-tier structure of counties and districts) and central government devolution take shape.

This matters to us as rail campaigners, why? Effective campaigning sees our messages absorbed by policy-makers and decision-takers in all places and at all levels. In future our local transport authorities will all be unitary authorities, with minimum populations of c.500k required, and our new devolved authorities will be a combination of unitary authorities to make up Strategic Authorities with minimum populations of c.1,500k. For the time being at least, our two subnational transport bodies – Transport for the South East (which includes parts of our Thames Valley and Wessex branches) and Transport East (which includes Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock) – will remain.

Our regional branch area currently includes seven unitary authorities (Bedford 185,225, Brighton and Hove 277,103, Central Bedfordshire 294,252, Luton 225,262, Medway 279,773, Southend-on-Sea 180,686, Thurrock 176,000) – none meeting the newly-required population threshold – and six counties (East Sussex 546,861, Essex 1,506,726, Hertfordshire 1,200,899, Kent 1,578,552, Surrey 1,205,994, and West Sussex 885,048); population figures are 2021 Census data.

In a fast-changing scene, of the six areas brought into government's Devolution Priority Programme, two are in our regional branch area – 'Greater Essex' (Essex, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock) and 'Sussex & Brighton' (East and West Sussex, Brighton & Hove), and one is adjacent, in the TfSE area – 'Hampshire & the Solent' (Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Southampton).

It may be the case that only after the new pattern of unitary local government authorities has been settled, with elections due in May 2026, that the complete structure of new Strategic Authorities with powers devolved from Whitehall can finally be put in place.

While it might be argued that one two-tier system is being replaced with a different two-tier system, what matters for Railfuture campaigners is knowing where, and who, the future points of influence will be.

North-South Main Line interchange

A flurry of questions to and answers from the Mayor of London in the London Assembly in late-2024 has reinvigorated interest in this next expansion of the London Overground network, the West London Orbital, with its interchange at Old Oak Common with HS2.



Assembly Members Bassam Mahfouz (Ealing & Hillingdon, so South Acton and Acton Central stations) and Gareth Roberts (Hounslow, Kingston-upon-Thames and Richmond-upon-Thames, so Lionel Road, Brentford, Syon Lane, Isleworth, and Hounslow stations), both newly-elected in May 2024, are the ones who were doing the asking in late-2024.

The most recent exchanges involved three questions from Bassam Mahfouz dated 19 December with written answers given on 23 December (ref. 2024/4172-4174). This was the Mayor's response to the request for an update: "The feasibility design stage for the West London Orbital project is nearing completion, resulting in a shortlist of options for each element of the scheme such as stations, junctions and rail sidings. Milestones achieved include completion of engineering, timetable and traction power studies which confirm that the scheme is deliverable. A study assessing the benefits for each borough has also been completed which demonstrates a strong strategic case for the project. Transport for London (TfL) is working closely with Network Rail to review the designs developed and shape the next stage of scheme development. Subject to agreement of funding, TfL and the west London boroughs intend to commence this next stage in 2025. which will include identification of a single preferred option for each location and undertaking public consultation." Be ready to weigh in with our support!

Connectivity for Heathrow airport - 2

In light of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech in north Oxfordshire on 29th January when she said "So I can confirm today that this Government supports a third runway at Heathrow and is inviting proposals to be brought forward by the summer" we should remind ourselves of Railfuture's position, as an exclusively pro-rail campaigning organisation, devoutly agnostic about the arguments for and against expansion of infrastructure for other travel modes such as air.



We take an interest in airport surface access issues, particularly by rail, in no small measure because improving the share of trips to and from airports by staff and airport workers for all job types by sustainable modes – especially by rail, of course – is of no less importance than for air passengers. That interest also has to include workers at the various employment sites which cluster around especially international airports as significant economic as well as transport hubs.

The <u>Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group</u> are, with our support, championing the western rail link.



The MP for Slough, where many airport workers live, a former Mayor of Gravesham, Kent County Councillor and Opposition rail transport spokesman, Tan Dhesi is a strong advocate for the western rail link to Heathrow.



In the wake of last July's general election, and since our previous newsletter, he has formally re-established the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Western Rail Link to Heathrow.

Connectivity for Gatwick airport - 2

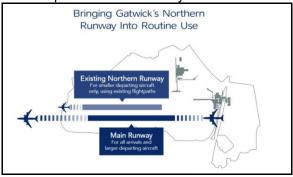
This branch's previous newsletter outlined the range of commitments secured by Network Rail from Gatwick Airport Ltd (GAL) that will help to plan for and manage any impacts on the railway network which arise in the future from the company's Northern Runway Project, should it gain its Development Consent Order (DCO).

As an indicator of the depths to which such matters are pursued, the Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee in January included this exchange (with thanks to our Surrey Division Convener for the information):

Q from a local Councillor – "As Network Rail withdrew their objection to the DCO over their earlier concerns about lack of capacity on the Brighton Main Line as and when 54% passengers are using public transport to and from the Airport what agreements and remedial actions has GAL reached with Network Rail to overcome their earlier capacity concerns?"

A from GAL: "GAL held constructive engagement with Network Rail throughout the DCO Examination process and provided additional technical material and clarification related to the assessment of rail demand and impacts contained in the DCO Transport Assessment [REP3-058] and relevant appendices [APP-260 and APP-262]. The clarifications were provided in response to remarks made by Network Rail during the Examination and as part of ongoing engagement. As a consequence of the continued dialogue GAL concluded a Statement of Common Ground with Network Rail which was submitted at Deadline 9 of the Examination [REP9-092] as well as a Joint Statement on behalf of both parties submitted concurrently [REP9-125]. The Surface Access Commitments put forward by GAL were also amended during Examination to explicitly provide support and funding for rail-related mitigation, notably in Commitments 14A and 14B [REP9-043]. Progress with these matters allowed Network Rail to withdraw its objection to the Application before the end of the Examination Period."

The bracketed references above are to documents in the Planning Inspectorate's website – click on 'Find a National Infrastructure Project' then 'English Projects' then 'Complete list of all projects' and scroll down to 'Gatwick Airport Northern Runway.'



After the decision stage, when the Secretary of State is due to have reviewed the report and taken the final decision by 27th February 2025, either she will have extended the time for a decision or the six-week period in which people can challenge the decision in the High Court, through a judicial review, will be in progress.

Britain's Growing Railway – a bigger better railway in London & South East

Recent anniversaries of our 1st-quarter local successes, comprising three new 'domestic' stations, one new 'domestic' service, three extended 'domestic' services, and one new international part of an existing station.

January

~ on the 5th, in 1981, restoration of passenger services from Barking into Gospel Oak instead of Kentish Town, after a 55-year break.



~ on the 8th, in 1996, Ashford International connected with the European high-speed network when Eurostar began serving the station. Pandemic withdrawal of services from Kent's two stations continues – but for how long, with two rival competitors to the incumbent?



February

~ on the 7th, in 1966, Garston, Herts. Probably the first new, rather than reopened or relocated, post-Beeching rail station, with c.75k entries and exits in 2019/20, recovering slowly post-pandemic to 45k in 2023/24.

~ on the 28th, in 2011, the Dalston Junction-Highbury & Islington (below) extension of London Overground



services from Crystal Palace and West Croydon, four months short of 25 years since the last train through Dalston Junction station on Friday 27th June 1986.

March

~ in 1991 (date/s uncertain) north and south chords off West Anglia Main Line and the new three-platform Stansted Airport station (airport open officially on 15th).



1991 photo credit: Lee Spenceley

Estimated 2023/24 station usage was up to 9,280,540, only 500k short of the previous best year in 2018/19.

~ on 27th, in 2008, Heathrow Airport T5 extension from Heathrow Central / T1-3, and new Terminal 5 station, served now by Elizabeth line and Heathrow Express.



ORR estimated usage in 2023/24 was 4,106,268, near 60% up on the previous year (the usage of Terminals 2 and 3 grew by the same proportion).

What would our success look like?

- ~ Hoo Peninsula Railway with St. Werburgh station;
- ~ West London Orbital with Old Oak Common Lane London Overground / HS2 interchange station;
- ~ East West Rail services reach Bedford from Oxford;
- ~ Gatwick airport-Redhill-Tonbridge hourly service;
- ~ Heathrow airport southern and western rail accesses.

Your examples to londonandsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk

Further to the front page coverage of helpful London Assembly exchanges in December, a decision by Hounslow Council in mid-February has added impetus to TfL's development of the West London Orbital.



The Council's Cabinet allocated an additional £714k from its CIL to the project team developing plans for the WLO, to fund planning and development underway to prepare for a formal funding bid with TfL for the line's construction. The Mayor of London has said a decision on whether to request a Transport & Works Act Order for the scheme could be made in the late 2020s – allowing the line to open in the 2030s.

Stay up-to-date and lend your support via our website pages under 'Campaigns' > 'A bigger railway' – it includes links to 'Missing links' and 'New stations.'

See also 'Current London and South East campaigns'

Our vision for rail: A railway system that provides services which travellers and freight forwarders want to use, and which offers more journey opportunities to more people and more freight.

Rail Transport for the South East

Refreshing the TfSE Transport Strategy – continued. A third in-person meeting of TfSE's Transport Forum was held in London, three of Railfuture's regional branches – London & South East, Thames Valley (Berkshire) and Wessex (Hampshire & IoW) – being represented through your regional branch Vice-Chair.



The specific task was to draft a composite response by the Transport Forum to the consultation on the new Transport Strategy which closed on 7th March. Next steps are to finalise the Strategy and then from July to October go through individual local transport authority sign-off followed by presentation to central government.

TfSE rail – west of East Sussex: Brighton - East Sussex - Kent BTN-FMR-LWS-UCK-COH-ERI-TBW

Refreshing our integrated planning of development and transport message – continued. The final version of the revised National Planning Policy Framework was published by the MHCLG in mid-December, with a technical amendment in early-February. With it are the government's confirmed expectations for planned housing growth. Lewes District, outside the South Downs National Park Authority's area, now needs to plan for 853 rather than 777 new homes per annum, compared with Average Annual Net additions over 2021/22 -2023/24 of only 490 ie a 75% increase on recent delivery. In the MHCLG's Housing Delivery Test Lewes District needed to produce an Action Plan "to identify the reasons for under-delivery (at 89% of target) and actions to increase delivery in the future"

Lewes District Council's latest Local Plan 2040 consultation – "Defining our policies and early site allocations proposals" – closed in February.

From 2012 to 2025, click right for campaign summary.

TfSE rail – east of East Sussex: East Sussex - Kent EBN-BEX-SLQ-HGS-RYE-AFK-STP

Network Rail's new Strategic Study for East Sussex Coastway and MarshLink, in which Railfuture has been included as an invited contributing stakeholder, was due to progress to a draft summary report in February.



Read more about Railfuture's MarshLink campaign

TfSE rail – N. Downs Line west: West Sussex - Surrey - Hampshire - Berkshire GTW-RDH-REI-DPD-GLD-WKM-RDG

Network Rail's Strategic Advice for the North Downs Line, for which Railfuture was invited to contribute, was published jointly with GWR in December. Badged as a Traction Decarbonisation Strategy, the full 11-page document is in the Network Rail website under 'Running the railway / Long-term planning / Regional planning documents / Southern.'



NR's original front cover image

The study has been driven by the need to plan for replacement, by 2035, of the c.35-years-old Class 165 and Class 166 diesel-only trains currently operating the services between Gatwick Airport and Reading. With only 17 of the 46-mile route electrified, the two unelectrified gaps making up the other 29 miles — between Wokingham and North Camp / Ash (12 miles) and Guildford and Reigate (17 miles) — mean that a battery-electric rolling stock solution is most favoured. The all-too-familiar bugbears of value-for-money and affordability seem to rule out the electrification infills.

This is also in the face of the Office of Rail and Road's continued seeming intransigence on options to mitigate the risks of new third-rail power, and also perpetuating the inherent flaw in the specification of the Intercity Express Train fleet with its overweight electric / underpowered diesel combination lugging around tons of dormant diesel engines and their fuel beneath the overhead electric power source. In doing so it transfers the capital and operational costs away from the infrastructure asset owner onto the train operators. Whether the balance of those calculations will change under a re-structured national railway which brings such factors together onto a single scorecard, the integration of track and train, remains to be seen.

While the aspiration to resurrect the previously-planned third hourly service along the North Downs Line continues to be re-stated by many stakeholders, including train operator GWR itself, it is neither incorporated in nor excluded by this Strategic Advice. While some hope it would be a direct Gatwick Airport – Oxford link (one of three service extensions evaluated, Brighton and Portsmouth the other two) the study favours a Guildford – Reading option for development.

A combination of this Strategic Advice and rolling stock replacement plus the recent 10-year "Shared Vision to Grow the North Downs Line" between GWR and GAL, especially if supplemented by an expanded Gatwick Airport, might be the catalyst for overdue change.

TfSE rail – north Kent: Medway – Gravesham / Tonbridge & Malling HMK-GRV-DFD-ABW-GNW-LBG HMK-HGM-SOO-RTR-CTM-GLM-RAI HMK-HGM-SOO-SDA-MDB-PDW-TON

The final draft of Medway Council's 15-year Local Plan had been expected to be published for public consultation in the first quarter of this year, but that's looking unlikely now. Instead, but not as an alternative, there's been a recent consultation on Community Facilities for the Hoo Peninsula.



This follows a Hoo Peninsula Community Panel of 50 residents which ran from February 2024, asking this:



"Help shape the future of community facilities on the Hoo Peninsula"



This will be the sixth Medway consultation involving Hoo Peninsula since our campaign began in 2020, one being the draft Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Plan in February 2024.

As the first of the three of five Railfuture London & South East regional branch campaign roadshows when our Hoo Peninsula Railway campaign engages up close and personal with the general public, the regional branch and Kent Division campaigns stall returned, with Thames Gateway Tramlink, to the annual Erith Modell Railway Society exhibition, this year in a new venue near Abbey Wood station.

See our January 2020 website article "<u>Hoo-rail victory</u>" with subsequent updates of our evolving campaign.

Local government reorganisation and the Devolution revolution

Expanding on the front page's lead feature, the pace of change is most recently reflected in the mid-February launch of MHCLG consultations for Devolution Priority Programme authorities (three of the first six nationally being in the TfSE area) in which "Government seeks views of people in six areas on proposals to establish mayoral combined (county) authorities". Terminolgy can be confusing and it appears that the proposals for a 'Mayoral Combined County Authority' for each of Greater Essex, Sussex and Brighton, and Hampshire and the Solent would bring together more than the minimum critical mass of population (1.5 million) required to constitute a new Strategic Authority.

Map look familiar? From railse no.146 December 2019!



5 Counties and 11 Unitaries in Transport for the South East

Consultations on Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-on-Sea City Council), Sussex and Brighton (East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton & Hove City Council), and Hampshire and the Solent (Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, and Southampton City Council) run to 13 April. As the consultations make clear, "The process known as "local government reorganisation" is a separate process to the one in this consultation."

On transport and local infrastructure the consultations say: "The Combined County Authority would become the Local Transport Authority for its area, which means it is responsible for public transport services, like buses, instead of local authorities."

On rail specifically they state, in summary, four points:

- ~ The Mayor would have a statutory role (meaning a role set out in law) in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network.
- If they meet transparent criteria, the Mayor would also be given the option for greater control over local rail stations.
- ~ The Mayoral Combined County Authority would play an important role in engagement with the Department for Transport on its national rail planning processes.
- ~ The government would work in close collaboration with the Mayoral Combined County Authority to deliver shared ambitions on ticketing."

In parallel, MHCLG seeks interim plans by 21 March for local government reorganisation in all two-tier areas, with full proposals for Surrey by May, September in proposed Mayoral CCA areas (their local elections this May postponed to May 2026) and by November elsewhere, including Kent and Medway.

Campaigning through roadshows

London & South East regional branch has a sequence of five campaign roadshows for public engagement:

January – in Erith MRS exhibition (near Abbey Wood) promoting our own Hoo Peninsula Railway campaign and partner Thames Gateway Tramlink's KenEx Tram.



- # March in London at our region's rail exhibition at Alexandra Palace, promoting our own Hoo Peninsula Railway and Uckfield-Lewes campaigns, plus again supporting Thames Gateway Tramlink's KenEx Tram.
- # May in Faversham during the Festival of Transport, promoting our Kent campaigns and joint work with Kent Community Rail Partnership / Southeastern.

June/July – in Uckfield, promoting our own distinctive approach to making the case for a new rail link to serve housing growth between Lewes and Uckfield.



August/September – in Lewes Town Hall at the local Societies Fair, promoting our own distinctive approach to making the case for a new rail link to serve long-term housing growth between Lewes and Uckfield.

Campaigning through consultations

Our campaigning continues through responding to consultations and calls for evidence and making other submissions eq to local planning / transport authorities.

Since the previous newsletter we have responded, either on our own behalf or in collaboration with other regional branches, to:

Network Rail Property on the revised Liverpool Street station redevelopment.



- # Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government New Towns Taskforce's Call for Evidence to explore opportunities for large developments (such as at Hoo?)
- # East West Rail Co. on what we understand will be the last non-statutory consultation before the statutory consultation required prior to submission of their application for a Development Consent Order for the new Bedford-Cambridge regional rail link.
- # Office of Rail & Road's Call for Evidence for its review of train operators' revenue protection practices.
- # House of Commons Transport Committee's Call for Evidence for its Inquiry "Rail investment pipelines: ending boom and bust."
- # Lewes District Council's 1st of a 2-phase consultation for the next stage of its new Local Plan 2040 "*Defining our policies and early site allocations proposals*".



Transport for the South East's new Transport Strategy



Medway Council on the Hoo Peninsula Community Infrastructure Framework.

Have your say

<u>Your opportunity</u> to influence our responses to Calls for Evidence and Consultations, and policy development, is to email londonandsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk

Current consultations of general interest to our London and South East regional branch area are in the "What's on" section of the website, within 'Rail dates', and linked here; of specific regional branch interest are in the branch website and linked <a href=here.

Our responses to all consultations and calls for evidence and submissions to planning bodies etc are in the "Campaigns" section of the main website, within 'Consultation responses', and linked here. For our regional branch see 'Submissions' here.

Our vision for Railfuture: An independent organisation whose views are respected by the rail industry, to which decision makers come for advice, and which rail users are proud to join and recommend.

Forthcoming calendar / diary dates

Wednesday 12 March Eastern Division evening online meeting. Invite non-members!





Saturday 15 – Sunday 16 March Railfuture London & SE regional branch campaigns stall at annual London Festival of Railway Modelling, Alexandra Palace.

Thursday 20 March Sussex & Coastway Division evening online meeting. Invite non-members!

Thursday 20 March London Metro Division in-person evening meeting, central London. <u>Invite non-members!</u>

Wednesday 9 April Herts & Beds Division evening online meeting. Invite non-members!



Saturday 12 April Railfuture L&SE regional branch annual meeting, with morning speaker and afternoon members-only AGM, at Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, 49 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AU.

Monday 28 April Copy date for your campaign news / reports for the London & South East regional branch Local Action column in July's *railwatch* no.184, and for June's *railse* no.168.

Send to londonandsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk

Thursday 1 May Sussex & Coastway Division evening in-person meeting. Invite non-members!



Thursday 1 May Copy date for your campaign news, letters, articles, photos to appear in July's *railwatch* no.184. Send to editor@railwatch.org.uk

Saturday 3 - Monday 5 May Bank Holiday weekend.

Wednesday 14 May Eastern Division evening online meeting. Invite non-members!

Thursday 15 May London Metro Division in-person evening meeting, central London. <u>Invite non-members!</u>



Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 May Railfuture London & SE regional branch / Kent Division campaigns stall at annual Faversham Festival of Transport.

Saturday 17 May Herts & Beds Division in-person meeting, St. Albans. <u>Invite non-members!</u>



Saturday 24 May – Sunday 1 June Schools' half-term holiday: remember, >95% of the national rail network remains open for customers!



Sunday 1 June – Railfuture London & SE regional branch / Sussex & Coastway Division '*Bridge the gap*' campaign stall at Uckfield & District Lions Club Family Fun Day and car boot sale, Luxford Field, Uckfield.

Saturday 21 June Railfuture East Anglia regional branch open afternoon meeting, Ipswich.

By the time this newsletter appears, the places for you to look for further informed, independent analysis and comment will be your quarterly magazine Railwatch for April, our "News and views" articles, press releases, and our Twitter and LinkedIn output.

Your branch divisions' meetings – all members, and non-members, welcome

Eastern [s. Essex and n. & e. London] — meets alternate months on second Wednesdays, online at 19.00 — next on **12 March**, then 14 May. Division Convener: howard.thomas@railfuture.org.uk. See Eastern Division.

Herts & Beds – meets monthly – next online at 19.30 on **9 April**, then 17 May St. Albans in-person. Division Convener is Neil Middleton (opposite). See <u>Herts & Beds Division</u>.

Kent – meets quarterly on third Saturdays, at 14.00 – next due on **17 May** in Faversham. Division Convener: chris.fribbins@railfuture.org.uk See Kent Division.

London Metro – covers all TfL rail modes and DfT TOCs within London. Meets alternate months on third Thursdays in-person at 19.00 – next on **20 March**, then 15 May and 17 July.

Division Chair: richard.bowry@railfuture.org.uk See London Metro Division.

Surrey – Division Convener is Stephen Rolph: stephen.rolph@railfuture.org.uk. See Surrey Division.

Sussex & Coastway – meets about monthly on Thursdays, at 18.00. Next, online, on **20 March**, then in-person on 1 May. Division Convener is John Black: jcbblack@yahoo.co.uk,

Division Secretary: robertcheesman@btinternet.com See Sussex & Coastway Division.

Your branch committee's meetings

Officers and other committee members continue to meet, **online**, every 4 weeks on Wednesday evenings.

railse online

Available in the 'Branch news' area of our branch's main web page: https://www.railfuture.org.uk/London-and-South-East-branch-news. Any links in blue are clickable hyperlinks.

Railfuture campaigns (noun, and verb!)

Our five national **railfuture** policy priorities:

- # Attracting passengers back to rail improving the travelling environment
- # Climate change and modal shift how the railway can help reduce the carbon footprint of transport # A Bigger Railway driving economic / housing growth through new / re-opened rail lines / stations # Fares and ticketing making the system easier and fairer
- # Industry structure and Great British Railways taking the opportunity to move to devolution and alignment of responsibilities for track and train.

Railfuture 'news and views', and Railfuture 'in the news'

- ~ Stay abreast of Railfuture's and others' reports and thoughts published in our website <u>articles</u>.
- ~ Stay abreast of Railfuture members making, not just watching, things happen in our website <u>media extracts</u>. ~ Railfuture is also on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Neighbouring and other branches

All 14 branch websites, including their **events** and **newsletters**, are **online** in 'Railfuture near you'.

London and SE Branch officers

Branch Chairman, and Secretary: both vacant.

Vice-Chairman: Roger Blake, 70 Dynevor Road, Stoke Newington, London, N16 0DX. roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

Treasurer: vacant

Membership Secretary: Neil Middleton. neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

inter-railse

Our two-page monthly e-newsletter, by email (as a <u>pdf</u> <u>or link</u>) is sent to all branch members on email.

This branch newsletter is free, published quarterly and usually distributed with each edition of the national *railwatch*The copy deadline for *railse* issue no.168, due to be published in June 2025, will be Saturday 26 April 2025.
Items for this newsletter and our branch Local Action column in *railwatch* to londonandsoutheast@railfuture.org.uk



Railfuture's mission: to be the number one advocate for Britain's railway and rail users

Websites: Welcome to Railfuture London and South East regional branch
Railwatch Rail Action Rail User Express

Follow us on twitter @Railfuture and @RailfutureLSE and @Railwatch