


Yorkshire Rail Campaigner

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Huddersfield. Never seen it like this before. September closure for route upgrade works (TRU). Diverted TransPennine Expresses all call at Brighouse station, and some at Hebden Bridge (see **Nina Smith's** picture below) and even Sowerby Bridge. At end of month Huddersfield will reopen with just three platforms (TPE and Penistone line trains) – three new to be built by Dec'2026. There will be a footbridge. The heritage buffet – currently stored – will be reinstalled. Excavation on right is to lengthen the bay platform for Penistone and Sheffield trains. Look at all the machinery – huge crane in background is being used in viaduct replacement work north of station. There will be regular full weekend blockades over the coming months, and bus substitution every day Hud-Brighouse. *Main picture here by Editor (JSW).* Plenty to make you think in next 15 pages!

As always, all opinions in bylined or initialled articles are those of the writer, not Railfuture or its Yorkshire branch.

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Railfuture Yorkshire branch

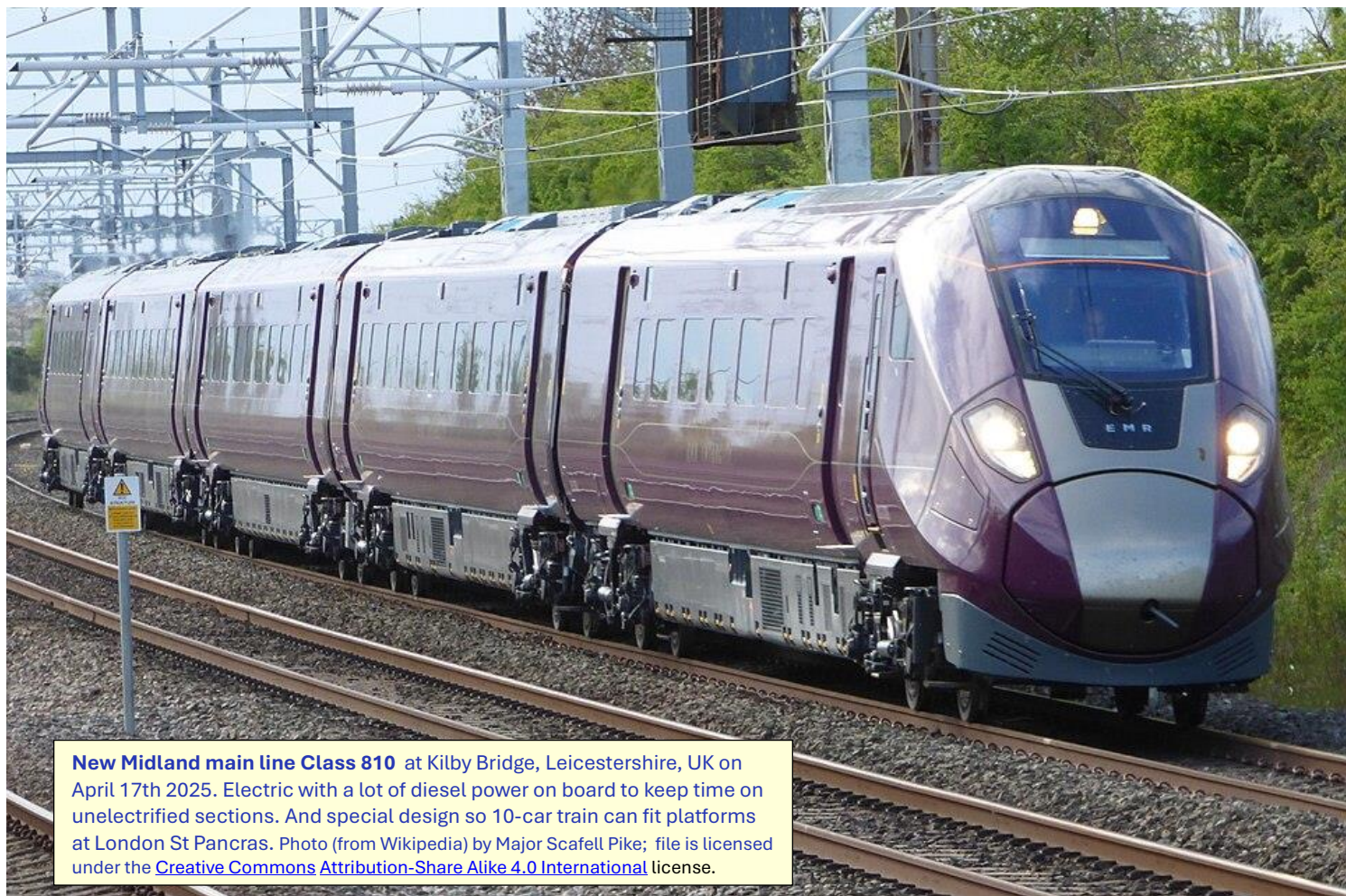
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railfuture

Pause for complaint!

by Alan Whitehouse, Railfuture Yorkshire branch president



New Midland main line Class 810 at Kilby Bridge, Leicestershire, UK on April 17th 2025. Electric with a lot of diesel power on board to keep time on unelectrified sections. And special design so 10-car train can fit platforms at London St Pancras. Photo (from Wikipedia) by Major Scafell Pike; file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#) license.

If you have spent any time at all in the railway campaigning business, you will have come across a good few apparently illogical, badly thought through and downright wrong-headed decisions. But the announcement that the remainder of the Midland Main Line electrification to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield has been “paused” has to be one of the best (or worst) yet.

“Paused” is a weasel word. Would “abandoned” be more honest? It is a short-sighted and foolish decision that will have many long-term implications and consequences. These can be divided into two groups: the effects on the Midland Main Line itself, and secondly the wider implications for other electrification projects. Let’s have a look first at what this means for the MML.

Railways exist to serve customers. On the passenger railway, that usually means an attractive combination of speed and convenience. With two trains per hour to both Nottingham and Sheffield, the convenience is certainly there. But it still takes two hours to reach Sheffield from London. That is the same as London to Leeds even though Leeds is around 40 miles further north. At least some of that gap would have been closed by the enhanced speed and acceleration that electric traction allows. This will now not happen, and it is difficult to see how journey times on the MML can be cut as the new Class 810 bi-mode trains have had to have specially uprated diesel engines fitted simply to allow them to maintain the same timings as the current Class 222 fleet.

Had the MML electrification gone ahead it is perfectly possible that part of the Class 810 fleet would have had the diesel engines, fuel tanks and so on removed, reducing maintenance costs and reducing weight, making the all-electric version more efficient and cheaper to run. Retaining a portion of the fleet as bi-mode would have maintained a degree of flexibility for emergencies and for serving places off the electrified network.

Electric traction would have brought important benefits to Sheffield station itself. We will now for the foreseeable future have two trains per hour, each with four uprated diesel engines, belching out all the usual emissions into an area almost completely surrounded by higher ground. An environmental own goal which can do nothing but undermine the railways’ green credentials.

Potential benefits for freight traffic have also been lost. →

→ So much for the immediate effects on the MML. What about the longer term and wider implications? The twin starting points here are the Mayor of South Yorkshire's recent statement that he would like to see 'an all-electric Sheffield' and the thought that, having reached Sheffield it is almost inconceivable that the wires would simply end there.

When the supply chain of electrification components is up and running, and the electrification gangs have been working together for some time, electrification becomes cheaper. This is why all railway electrification works best as a continuous rolling programme.

Long before work was complete in Sheffield, it seems highly likely that one, or possibly two routes northwards be in the process of electrification. The most obvious being the Dearne Valley route to Moorthorpe where the curve onto the Doncaster-Leeds line would instantly create a continuous electrified railway from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Derby, opening up the possibility of the next generation of cross-country trains using electric power for a significant portion of their journey. It would also allow one of the Leeds-Sheffield local services to use electric traction too.

And, just as South Yorkshire would be looking to capitalise on MML electrification, so would the East Midlands and it seems equally likely that money would be found from somewhere to continue the overhead wiring to Birmingham. All this would be happening at exactly the moment when replacing the Voyager fleet of trains was becoming urgent.

South Yorkshire's transport authority has also said it would like to see the other route to Leeds – via Barnsley – electrified, allowing potentially both local services and the inter-regional trains to Nottingham and Lincoln to be wholly or partially electric powered. Let's not forget that many local services in South Yorkshire are using diesel multiple units that are 40-plus years old still with no confirmed plans for replacement.

Future freight electrification is also likely to be impacted. Having another trunk route electrified would open more possibilities for short infill schemes to allow cleaner, more efficient electric freight locomotives to oust ageing diesels.

In summary, the MML electrification could have been a key piece of the jigsaw of a rolling programme of electrification that would have made providing new trains easier and helped the authorities deal with environmental issues such as air quality.

Rushed decision

There is little doubt that this has been a rushed and ill-thought decision. The engineers Furrer and Frey have said all the preliminary work to get electric trains to Sheffield has been completed and the scheme is ready to go. This has a sound of money wasted.

This is not the only decision of its kind of course. The same announcement also "paused" essential cliff stabilization work near Dawlish on the West of England Main Line. This leaves the coastal stretch of railway vulnerable to storm damage, potentially closing the line to Newton Abbott and all points beyond. A petition to get that decision reversed has already been launched and has garnered over 400,000 signatures as I write this in mid-August.

Maybe campaigners in Railfuture's Yorkshire and East Midlands areas need to launch something similar for the Midland Main Line.

Railfuture members and branches must keep up the campaign!

Politics, economics and energy

Rail minister Peter Hendy, and Alex Hynes DfT Director General of Rail Services took the flak from MPs at the transport select committee in July (as reported in *RAIL*, July 23rd). Members were concerned about the decision to pause projects such as Midland line electrification.

Talking about the necessity of tough decisions, Hendy added "I don't want to pretend we don't have aspirations to do more." Priorities were blamed, and the decision had been made to buy bi-mode (electro-diesel) trains which would provide better service and more capacity.

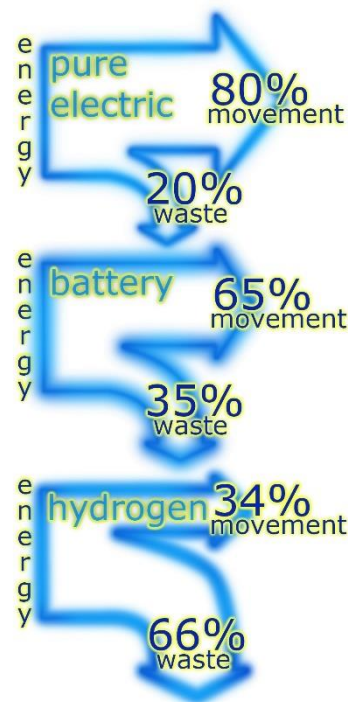
Hynes said the northern sections offered less value for money... difficult decisions had to be made... and "By ordering bi-mode trains you inadvertently weaken the case for electrification." ***You could see what he meant.***

Electro-diesel bi-modes are heavier (as are battery trains) than pure electrics reducing energy efficiency, even when operating under the wires. More mass means more energy needed for acceleration. In electric mode that extra mass is still there. And in diesel mode the heavy transformers that turn 25000V into motor voltage are still there. Midland Mainline's new class 810 bi-modes have been specially redesigned to fit the short "main line" platforms at London St Pancras; they are also – slightly – more powerful, and slightly less heavy, apparently to equal "Meridian" performance on diesel sections. Of course these trains could be used on other routes (we can think of one or two in Northern territory!), and they could in due course be converted to battery operation. But what would we then do with the rather new diesel engines?

It's all a bit of a mess.

We'll finish this with the Electric Railway Charter's "Sankey diagram" comparing – approximately – pure electric, battery and hydrogen traction efficiencies.

Diesel is not much better than hydrogen – JSW



Turn over for Chair's column →

Points of view from

Nina Smith, Chair, Railfuture Yorkshire Branch

Policy is misguided

Last issue, I gave the government, and not least Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the Exchequer, two cheers, for confirming funding for the first stage of the West Yorkshire mass transit (tram) system. For doing so, I received a thank-you email from a local Labour councillor (*It would be good if all recipients of YRC could forward it to their local ward councillors and MP.*)

This time, its only one cheer – shared by funding of Haxby station, Leeds station improvements, and overdue projects in other regions. However, in a move that reminds me of Sunak's cancellation of HS2 to the north-west, Reeves has paused (possibly cancelled), completion of Midland main line electrification. This is important not only for itself but also to maintain the effective teams that have delivered the most recent section (Kettering to Wigston) on time and to budget.

We have also still to see funding allocated for much needed infrastructure improvements including:

- reopening Skipton to Colne
- a rolling programme of electrification
- infill electrification on freight routes
- new rolling stock for operators like Northern and East Midlands Railway who are severely short of enough stock to meet passenger demand;
- enhancements at Ely that would enable more container trains from Felixstowe to the Midlands and the North.

I could go on. Some say there is no extra money, but **the Government needs different priorities in how it spends its transport budget in this era of climate chaos**. Nearly £10 billion has been allocated to the Lower Thames road tunnel that will encourage more car and lorry journeys – “reverse modal shift”.

And then of course there is the go-ahead for a fifth runway at Heathrow, whilst an HS2 station for Birmingham Airport is being built. Both the tunnel and the airports will have a negative effect on efforts to reach net-zero.



Does the chancellor understand just what an enormous threat global warming poses? Not just to wildlife on land and in the seas, nor to the continuing existence of low-lying island states, but also the very real threats to the economy because of the vast sums that will be needed for resilience, including diverting roads and railway lines that are threatened by landslides and rising sea levels. The mega projects are also mainly in the overheated South East, another reason why the funding should have gone to railway infrastructure in the regions. The Chancellor has also allocated between £207m and £340m to rebuild and improve the junction of the M62/M60 with the M60/M66 near

Prestwich and Heaton Park. **That would pay for reopening Skipton to Colne**, including upgrading and upgrading the existing line from Colne to Gannow Junction. **Priorities!**

Not enough rolling stock

Examples to illustrate some of Northern's needs:

- Reduction in off-peak services between Bradford Forster Square, Ilkley and Keighley/Skipton
- "parliamentary" (i.e. "minimal") services from Sheffield to the Gainsborough Central, Kirton Lindsey and Brigg line (going on to Cleethorpes).
- Sheffield-Pontefract-York and Goole-Leeds limited services (both arguably "parliamentary" also)
- Leeds-Pontefract-Doncaster – the Askern line – still waiting for any service at all apart from occasional Grand Central expresses
- Plus, of course, the need for more coaches on thousands of trains across our region. **We even see overcrowding on Sundays.**

East Midlands Railway are unable to run a much needed hourly service between Doncaster and Lincoln, which was a franchise commitment a few years ago.

There are simply not enough trains with not enough carriages across the national network to meet growing passenger demand. So cascaded train sets are in great demand.

Transport for Wales has disposed of its excellent class 175 units, replacing them with inferior CAF 197s (similar to Northern's 195s). GWR has snapped up the 175s for its regional and local services in the West of England. Problem is, some of these are to replace the shortened HSTs, still the favourite train for many passengers. The HSTs will either be scrapped or exported. Wouldn't it have been better if GWR had retained the HSTs, and the 175s had come to Northern to supplement its inadequate level of rolling stock. It could have used the 175s to provide higher quality trains on routes such as the Settle and Carlisle, and York-Blackpool. Doubtless, this was another cost cutting decision by people in the Treasury and DfT who probably rarely travel outside London!

– NS, with additional points by JSW

Promoting move to rail: *Must we have track access charges when need is to promote modal shift to rail?*

It is not just in the UK that governments are blind to the need to achieve mode shift from road and air. In Sweden, long standing rail flows of may be moved to lorries because of increases in track access charges. Will the same occur here under GBR? **Should we have track access charges at all when there is an overwhelming climate imperative is to maximum use of the rail network?**

Post GBR, most passenger trains will be run by GBR and so may not pay explicit charges (we must wait and see), but freight trains (presumably) will, and so too will open access operators. I know there are members of Railfuture who are opposed to open access on ideological grounds, but I say to them, do you want LNER, with its ticketing "simplification" (Orwellian Newspeak!) to have a monopoly of long distance travel on the East Coast Main Line, when many of us prefer to use Grand Central and Hull Trains that allow open off-peak ticketing and serve stations that LNER and its predecessors have ignored?

Rumours suggest that LNER-type changes may be introduced onto the other core main lines as their TOCs are taken into public ownership. This must not be allowed to happen. Unlike some other countries, the UK has a long tradition of a walk-on railway, and that must remain. **A walk on railway requires the availability of flexible ticketing at an affordable price, available from booking offices, TVMs and online.** It also means that no train should be reservation only – people must be allowed to stand if they need to make their journey when they wish to.

High fares deter. Two more stories. **In Scotland peak fares, from 1 September, have been abolished** ("Because this is your railway," says Scotrail see [Peak fares gone. For good. | ScotRail](#)). **In England**, a woman who lives in Leeds and works just a five-minute walk from Manchester Victoria station usually drives to work: "because of the prices, it just makes more sense to drive" (BBC 2.9.25). She admits the train is more convenient and she would use it if it were cheaper.

Environmental issues may not be a factor in this

passenger's decision, but it demonstrates clearly that **if this country is serious about trying to stop a climate catastrophe, we need cheaper fares (and more carriages) to achieve significant modal shift.** LNER and other English train operators please note!

Ticket offices, fares and back to Reeves!

Anecdotally, increased use of the railway by leisure travellers has meant more business for ticket offices. So why is it that at some major stations, full size ticket offices are being replaced by small ones with too few staff? Examples include York and the kiosk at Newcastle (see link <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj0y9my12j8o>). Are LNER and its bosses in DfT trying to make using ticket offices as unpleasant as possible, so they can try again to remove them? Campaigners need to be vigilant on this.

Train fares could rise next year by as much as 5.5%, thanks to the latest inflation figures from the Retail Price Index. This is totally unacceptable. The Chancellor has so far continued the Tories' freeze on fuel duty, making car travel ever cheaper compared to trains. Larry Elliott in *The Guardian* (14.8.25) estimates that since the freeze was

introduced in 2010, it has cost the Exchequer £130billion.¹ This at a time when many road surfaces are appalling, and train operating companies have inadequate rolling stock to run service levels that passengers need and expect.

I have three transport related asks for Reeves's Autumn statement .

- Increase fuel duty by at least 5% and bring in an annual tax for electric vehicles based on weight, with the rate for large SUVs high enough to cover the damage these heavy machines do to road surfaces and bridges
- remove all subsidies on flying (except to islands off our coast); and use the income to freeze or reduce public transport fares
- increase the infrastructure budget to make the Midlands and North's railways fit for the 21st century.

The new Northumberland line demonstrates that if you provide trains, provide a decent service² and have reasonable fares, people will travel by rail. This has been **proven yet again on the Northumberland line**, which has exceeded its 500,000 passenger target ahead of schedule and with three stations yet to open. In West Yorkshire, as part of the temporary changes brought about by the TransPennine upgrade closures, commuters from Batley and Morley are experiencing **a direct service to Bradford** are calling for the service to be made permanent. This would also give Brighouse a half hourly service to Leeds.

Putting passengers first

Northern has a priority looking after its customers, but sometimes it goes badly wrong. In a recent example, a Carlisle to Leeds service had to be terminated at Skipton. The conductor made arrangements for the passengers to transfer to a waiting local electric service. But just as the passengers were reaching the adjacent platform, the electric train guard shut the doors, and off went the train.

People were seriously inconvenienced, especially those with onward journeys from Leeds. How many passengers were put off train travel for good? Why did the guard let that train go? Who was responsible? We need to know. Northern has just announced that it is restructuring and that there are to be six service delivery directors across the network. A priority for these will be to ensure that incidents like this become things of the past.

Seating on stations. Many people like to sit down when waiting for a train – especially if it is delayed, or they have a lengthy interchange wait. Some stations are well provided – Hebden Bridge is an excellent example. Brighouse has always had inadequate passenger facilities, but with it being used as the replacement for Huddersfield whilst that station is under a TRU closure, it becomes extremely busy. TRU have funded enhancements and these include what appear to be **new standard Northern waiting shelters**. The ones at Brighouse do not have proper seating, only dreadful perches. I'm told this is so there is enough room for passengers in wheelchairs to be able to manoeuvre.

Who made this unacceptable decision? Who was consulted? Railfuture and user groups weren't. This is not acceptable. The shelters need wheelchair space near the entrance, but **proper seats are needed** (yes, needed) in the rest of the shelter. **Most passengers are not disabled, and most disabled people do not use wheelchairs.** They are older people who have difficulty walking or standing, blind people, autistic people, people with dementia, people who are tired after a long day. **Northern must reverse its no seats in the new shelters policy, otherwise train travel becomes increasingly unattractive and difficult for many people.**

Final points for now:

Queensbury tunnel took trains on a long closed Great Northern line northward from Halifax to Keighley. Queensbury was the highest village between the two towns, and had a triangular station with a branch down to Bradford. The tunnels are thought to be in basically good repair but require an estimated £27 million to rectify issues and to provide a cycleway through them. Common sense you might think given the government has a budget for Active Travel. But no, £27m is too much for a government that can pledge over 300 times that amount to build a tunnel for cars, vans and lorries under the River Thames. Instead, the Government proposes to pay Highways England to fill-in the tunnel, at considerable cost. Heidi Alexander risks proving to be the latest in a long line of disappointing transport secretaries. Let's hope she changes her mind and proves me wrong!

In the North West, a couple of issues affect train services across in Yorkshire. Travel Watch North West have produced a report on **Manchester Victoria station**, making a number of suggestions for improving Northern's premier station. <https://travelwatch-northwest.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Manchester-Victoria-report-June-2025.pdf> I have commented on the report, suggesting further improvements, mainly in the areas of platform seating, and information about bus and tram services.

I recently went to the **Clitheroe** Food Festival. The four carriage class 156 train from Manchester was well patronised, but all passengers travelling and boarding beyond Blackburn had to travel in the front two carriages because of short platforms at the stations including Clitheroe. Some stations had the remains of previously longer platforms clearly visible. **Why do these stations have platforms too short for trains, when there is space to rectify? This needs tackling.** →

¹ https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/14/fuel-duty-rachel-reeves-uk-chancellor-motorists?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

² Northumberland line Newcastle to Ashington is half-hourly.

→ Finally, I am sad that the **Royal Train** is to be withdrawn. King Charles has not used it much, which is surprising given his long standing green credentials. Journeys by the royal train symbolise the centrality of the railway in British life.³ I do hope that all the carriages will find their way into museums, onto heritage lines, or as part of luxury touring trains. **Nina Smith 27 Aug updated 7 Sep'2025**

Prising out bricks in Dore and the Hope Valley by **Chris Morgan**, chair of Hope Valley Railway User Group

There are 3 services an hour between Sheffield and Manchester, two fairly fast and one stopping. That's 3 operators, different rolling stock, different routes beyond the two cities. It's over a year since £140-200m was spent creating a 3rd fast path along the Hope Valley, however no extra trains can be added due to capacity restrictions into Piccadilly from Chinley and from Dore into Sheffield.

Fear not, plans are afoot to add a 4th service but it may not be fast.

When? Ah, that's the tricky part. Studies of options allow it between Chinley and Dore. However the restrictions from there into Manchester and Sheffield require major changes falling beyond the scope of such calculations. Might a second skip-stopping slow service between the cities help? There's no money for any capital investment or to add more subsidised services. Currently it's impossible to make a strong enough business case for anything, or so they say.

They? Those who are ultimately responsible for heavily subsidised rail services to whom we aren't a top priority. Who has the clout to cajole Transport for the North and the hard pressed Treasury to pass a little more our way? Fast passenger services run through South Yorkshire (SYMCA), East Midlands (EMCCA) combined authority as well as Greater Manchester combined authorities. They start in Liverpool City Region, and run through Peterborough and Cambridgeshire to finish in Lincolnshire or Norfolk. Many fingers in our railway pie.

We have to prove more services can bring more revenue to cover costs. The 2024/5 passenger numbers will show a rise in leisure use but regular commuter revenue remains subdued. Financially it doesn't fit.

Bright patches

Saturdays and Sundays are the best days to attract visitors to the Peak District – but Northern can't crew their timetabled hourly Sunday stopping service. Since January their “temporary” 1 in 3 cancellations has become the norm and is confirmed as permanent from December – or is it? Supposedly negotiations to resolve the Sunday working anomalies between east and west side crews continue. Resolution will require more money. But will there be enough?

Fortunately HVRUG maintains good relations with all three TOCs. There'll be small bright patches on Sundays for Dore & Totley and for Edale. TPE and East Midlands will be providing two additional and earlier fast trains to Manchester. East Midlands current first train of the day from Nottingham will stop at both Dore and Edale, very useful for Nottingham walkers who currently have to change in Sheffield. Dore gets a new mid-day EMR fast service from Manchester to Nottingham and Norwich. TPE is to provide afternoon and evening stop. (See for example [Realtime Trains | Departures from Dore & Totley all day on 11/01/2026](#))

By prising out a loose brick here or by finding an unlocked door there progress can come in small increments. Talking to anyone and everyone helps to identify the doors and bricks and eventually may bring results.



EMR at D&T!
(Picture by Chris Morgan)

³ Famously of course, the late Queen Elizabeth II used to travel on public trains from London to Kings Lynn to reach Sandringham [Queen takes train to Norfolk for Sandringham Christmas break](#) (BBC clip with thanks).

Rail 200: September climax

by **Andrew Whitworth**, reporting from just north of our branch border!



Locomotion No 1 displayed in Hopetown Museum in June, now back at Locomotion in Shildon after a brief visit to The Greatest Gathering. (All pics in this piece by Andrew M Whitworth.)

Rail 200 has been organising events across the country throughout 2025 to celebrate 200 years of train travel, and things are building up to a climax. September 27th marks the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The inaugural train in 1825 started at Witton Park Colliery with its load of coal pulled over two rope-hauled inclines. At Shildon, the as yet unnamed *Locomotion No 1* was attached, along with a single coach *Experiment* for VIPs and some coal trucks for standing passengers. 300 tickets were sold, but 553 passengers boarded – the train being delayed an hour by the chaos. Fare evasion, overcrowding and punctuality problems were also born on this day! A symbolic highlight of the journey to Stockton was when the train raced and beat a stagecoach on the turnpike alongside at Preston Park – attaining the trip's maximum speed of 15 mph.

“The Journey that Changed the World” is the inscription on the £2 coin minted this year to commemorate the opening. The event which became etched on the timeline of world history, something of which people from the North East of England, in particular, are extremely proud.

It's well known that this wasn't the first passenger train, or the first steam train, or the first public railway⁴. But the team behind

the S&DR had joined several dots to bring these innovations together, and captured the world's imagination in a way that these other enterprises had so far failed to do.

The dots led quickly to the revolutionary Liverpool and Manchester Railway which opened in 1830⁵, and the Stephensons were already working on that project before the S&DR was even completed.

National events celebrating the bicentenary can be found at <https://railway200.co.uk/>, and there are several in Yorkshire – including the NRM, of course. The amazing Middleton Railway in Leeds dates from 1758 and provided a couple of the dots that the S&DR joined – they've been celebrating Rail 200 through the year. The Inspiration train is touring the country and has some local visits scheduled, this contains an exhibition which includes railway history but also seeks to attract young people to careers on the modern railway with details of current projects and opportunities.

Naturally there are numerous events being run in the vicinity of the S&DR route itself, which are detailed on the S&DR 200 Festival website: <https://www.sdr200.co.uk/>. There's been expansion and refurbishment of Locomotion at Shildon, and also of the Hopetown Museum at North Road station in Darlington (close to the famous Skerne →



Robert Stephenson's statue oversees girders of the Gaunless Bridge, painted in original colours and moved from the National Railway Museum. Behind is Shildon's enlarged exhibition hall. (AMW)

⁴ Excellent summary of key railway milestones before the S&DR at: <https://www.therailwayhub.co.uk/71213/railway-firsts-before-1825/>

⁵ Stand by for further celebrations! – Ed.

→ Bridge). Both sites have various activities and displays throughout the year and are well worth visiting for their large and important collections.

Other locations in the area will boast art installations, plays, concerts and exhibitions.

The (original) LNER gained great publicity by arranging a centenary celebration in 1925, including a cavalcade at which Locomotion No1 was the centrepiece. In 1975 BR arranged a similar display at Shildon which included the prototype HST. For 2025 there was The Greatest Gathering at Derby in August, but there will be a journey along sections of the line by a replica of Locomotion No 1 and Experiment over three days, starting at Shildon on 26 September, with bookable viewing. I've got my ticket!

A Trail of Discovery walk following the 42 km original route is under development and should open soon, with information boards. For a taste of this, a fascinating public footpath follows the route from Shildon station for 3 km to the surviving engine buildings at the summit of the Brusselton rope hauled incline, and just beyond where a spectacular length of stone sleepers still lie in position.

There is much to celebrate in the S&DR bicentenary, and also lots to learn from the remarkable and varied survivals of infrastructure, equipment and social record available to enjoy at this year's festival.



Track towards rail's future and an enduringly modern transport system. Impressive line of stone sleepers remains on the Stockton and Darlington's early route beyond the Brusselton summit, west of Shildon, on the incline down to the Gaunless valley. (Photo AMW)

When will Harrogate's independent line out of York get go ahead?

Rumpus over investment.

by Andrew Whitworth

At the beginning of September the “third line” – what we might baptise the “Harrogate Independent Line” – was discussed at Transport for the North's Rail North Committee – along with several other projects, including some that had been expecting the green light. One of those was capacity increases between Northallerton & Newcastle. Another was upgrading Sheffield station for inter alia for longer trains. An interesting and quite angry discussion to be followed up by letters to DfT and Treasury.

Following the June spending review, the DfT announced the cancellation of the York “third line” capacity project on 8 July. This project had been underway with completion scheduled for May 2026, but ongoing work was abruptly paused in October last year just before major engineering works, originally scheduled for Christmas, were pulled.

Planned resignalling of the Harrogate to York had been cancelled in 2016, and planned redoubling from Knaresborough to Cattal was curtailed in 2020.

Both these decisions contributed to existing poor reliability on the route. But things have recently deteriorated further as a result of changed policies in platform allocation at York, which see Harrogate trains diverted last minute to arrive at platform 8, even if there's a conflict with a departing train already at that platform. Delays have ballooned, and passengers are confounded because the altered platform isn't updated in online travel information.

The project was designed to improve operation of the York northern approaches with the provision of a third line from Skelton Jn, where the Harrogate line joins the East Coast Main Line. **There would have been big gains from this scheme in itself in terms of reduced disruption.**

In last Winter's issue we showed a historic token-exchange at Hammerton. That no longer happens there but there are still “boxes” and →

Historic view of “Pacer” on Harrogate platform at York. Nice Class 170 trains have taken over, and token working has ended, but long single track sections and lack of a third track out of York still damage timekeeping. *Note office oriel window with view over station!* (All pics in this piece by Andrew Whitworth.)





Another irresistible York platform 8 shot. Imagine train is collecting current from the overhead wires!

A review of the scheme has been linked to Northern Powerhouse Rail plans – so it may now be delayed for many years. This is another example of erratic rail investment policies, wasting money and resources and causing frustration to rail users and surely also to the rail industry – hence the furore over much bigger farce of the Midland Line electrification.

The Sheffield capacity scheme delay is another, coming on top of the MML electrification being cancelled. ***TfN say all delays will be at least 4 years unless they're successful in reversing things!***

→ staff still manually open and close crossings. The changes that took place in 2020 were a step forwards – enough to increase the service – though minimal compared to the original plan of mass control from York and continuous double track for most of the line.

The even more necessary third track out of York would also benefit passengers on the main line as Harrogate trains would conflict less – less need for them to cross over to use the two ECML main lines.

DfT claimed in the cancellation announcement that passenger benefits would only be realised in combination with other work. To be polite, this is at best questionable! It may not have provided enough capacity for extra main line services, but the improved reliability is very important. Platform capacity at York is extremely tight and delays quickly snowball. The scheme was originally to have included extra platforms but that had already been excised.

Profiting handsomely?

When enviously viewing rail investment in the South East, northerners have often been told that it's funded by property development. Network Rail must be profiting handsomely through the massive York Central land sale, but it seems it isn't allowed to reinvest this windfall locally.

TfN are annoyed about this project's cancellation as their reluctant acceptance of the LNER December 2025 timetable rehash was contingent on investment to eventually allow the reinstatement of the second Manchester-Newcastle TPE service. Not only were they expecting this York project to go ahead, but they also believed approval was forthcoming in the Spending Review for further capacity works between Northallerton and Newcastle which, in combination, would have allowed this extra hourly train.



Safe grazing as Harrogate's most modern local train type (Class 170) passes over Crimble Viaduct.

Good ideas on hold. TfN Rail North Committee, 1 Sep'2025 meeting...

...is worth looking up at link [Rail North Committee - Monday 1 September 2025](#). It's a webcast, but all the committee papers are there to read at leisure. Items relevant to this article include the impressively titled Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) Update, including:

- Midland Main Line electrification pause
- Sheffield "no regrets" capacity improvements (also on hold)
- East Coast main line. Pausing of Northallerton-Newcastle and York to Skelton Jn third line – the latter our Harrogate line enhancement
- Northallerton-Eaglescliffe freight gauge clearance – guess what? Paused
- Cheshire Lines route modernisation – OBC (= Outline Business Case) going ahead but no commitment yet to proceed further

On Northern Powerhouse Rail, announcements are now expected very soon. This might involve commitments to high speed rail – Bradford comes to mind. But the urgent need is to get those good ideas like the ones listed above beyond the drawing board **now**. We cannot wait decades for the high-speed promise – JSW

Was it all a slip of the pen?

Our mantra is *jobs, education, growth* for line's reopening, writes SELRAP campaigner **Nick Tennant**

Local campaign group the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership (SELRAP) remains very optimistic that the 12-mile Skipton to Colne line can be re-instated within a decade.

As Andrew Whitworth highlighted in his comprehensive account of the route's demise (*Yorkshire Rail Campaigner*, Summer 2025), none other than Lord Beeching recommended it be retained and developed. Barbara Castle, Transport Secretary in the 1960's, was a supporter too. The line closed, barely challenged, in 1970 – possibly even (it has been suggested) the result of a civil servant's slip of the pen.

Buoyed by the recent re-introduction of similar schemes in Northumberland, Dartmoor and the Scottish Borders, SELRAP, founded in 2004, is as determined as ever to rectify this mistake. With around 500 members, we have the support of local MPs and councillors, past and present, from across the political spectrum, as well as business leaders from across the North.

The campaign's mantra promoting the scheme to today's decision makers is **Jobs, Education, Growth**.

The business case for re-opening the line is now more compelling than ever, supporters argue, providing excellent value for money and low risk. Transforming journey times across the North, it would quickly unlock huge, untapped potential for sustainable growth, including tourism.

The associated economic, social and environmental benefits would have a game-changing impact, not least in communities on the route in East Lancashire, which are among the most deprived in the country. In forgotten towns such as Accrington, Burnley, Nelson and Earby, job opportunities, salaries and house prices lag by some margin better-connected areas only a matter of miles away, such as Skipton. The re-opened line would help redress this imbalance.

The project would particularly benefit young people and those without a car, giving them access to hard-to-reach "powerhouse" cities on their doorstep, for work and leisure.

Making it reality

To make it a reality, the re-opening of the line will, of course, require Government support.

SELRAP recognises that delivering economic growth, whilst balancing the nation's books is no easy task.

Earlier this year, the rail minister, Lord Henty told SELRAP that, whilst he recognised re-opening the line has "a strong strategic case", "no further development funding [is] being allocated to this project at present."

This is despite the Government earmarking over £15 billion of central funds for public transport improvements in urban areas with elected mayors, such as Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. Government focus on the big cities is short-sighted. **More isolated communities deserve their slice of the cake too.**

The population of East Lancashire, 250 000, matches that of cities such as Milton Keynes. Despite this, the region stands to receive not a penny of the Government's planned rail spending in the North.

With the route intact and no tunnelling required, the line could re-open by the early 2030s. But it will only



Crowds from West Yorkshire descend on Skipton. Passengers at the station numbered more than a million April 2023 to Mar 2024. *We'd bet a few were heading for Colne and East Lancs!* (Pic: SELRAP)

happen if the decision-makers know local people are supportive.

The urgent requirement now is for everyone who wants the line re-opened **to make their views heard in the corridors of power**, from town halls to Whitehall.

The "accidental" closure of 55 years ago can still be reversed. More at www.selrap.org.uk

Leeds and North Yorkshire P17 extension, plan for new footbridge; Haxby station and Selby gateway now good to go, we hope!

From notes by **Graham Collett**,
vice chair Railfuture Yorkshire



View from Leeds platform 16 showing narrow gap leading to P17 which is where semi-fast Northern trains to Sheffield depart, plus locals towards the West Yorkshire's eastern end. Often there are two 2-car trains in P17 at the same time with issues if one of them arrives late. (Yes, it does happen.) The extension will allow 6 cars (= 2 x 3-car), providing some easing of overcrowding on these popular routes. We understand part of the plan will provide an additional track to Leeds West Junction where the Normanton line diverges. If we understand correctly this will remove conflict with TransPennine trains like the one in this picture. **Lift will be relocated.** Soon, we hope, Northern is to introduce an hourly fast service Leeds-Sheffield via Wakefield Westgate. We assume that will use a different Leeds platform – less out of the way than number 17. We hope those trains may also be more than 2 coaches!
Thanks to West Yorkshire Combined Authority website for image. – JSW

Railfuture Yorkshire requested a meeting in pursuit of a better understanding of the changes involved in improving accessibility to Leeds platforms 16 and 17 and related improvements. James Moy who met us as project sponsor for Network Rail had also been involved in new platform 0 at Bradford Forster Square Station, where work was now pretty much complete. James explained that the platform 17 project formed part of the Leeds Area Improvement Scheme, which included an additional (G) line at the west end of the station. As the sponsor, he manages the project with the clients (WYCA and DfT) and works with TRU and NPR colleagues.

Leeds Package 1 is the name applied to the project, which is now handed over by the Leeds Capacity Improvement Scheme.

The aim is to increase capacity by extending platform 17 to take 6 car trains – or two 3-car class 195s, at peak times. These will be redeployed from the north west. Nottingham and Lincoln – both via Sheffield – have bounced back strongly since Covid. There is suppressed demand as 2-car trains are simply not long enough.

The work involves widening the platform to 3.4m for most of its length, with a short section of 2.8m, the width requested by operators. Even on the narrower section, all train doors should be fully accessible (a

derogation from ORR will be needed).

There is no need for a Transport and Works Act order, but the project cost has increased from £21.5m to maybe £50. The increase is due to the need to strengthen the viaduct which supports the platform. It is hoped to save on this cost as it would damage the business case. DfT have requested that a “minimum viable product” approach be taken and have asked for detailed designs (expected now!). Additional funding of £240m in 2026-27 for Leeds station works was awarded in the Spending Review, but clarification on this was still being sought.

Platform 17 will be taken out of use for 12 weeks to enable the viaduct work and the installation of a concrete base on which to build the new platform. Platform 17 extension work will be carried out first and the current lift shaft will be removed, before work on improving access to both platforms commences. A decision on the platform 17 project is expected by the end of 2025 or Q1 of 2026, with work complete by December 2026 and in service by Easter 2027 or May 2027 timetable. Platform 16 work is moving to the Leeds Station Improvement Programme, which includes a new central overbridge (completion 2028). Access to platform 16 will be sited to link to the new overbridge. →

→ **Leeds Existing Station Programme (LESP)** includes interesting plans for the South Concourse (the hall just outside ticket gates). The 1960s admin block is to be demolished early 2026 (NR has bought the building). Boots's store will be relocated, opening up the roof area with more light and allowing the ticket barriers area to be widened. Concourse area space will increase by 25%. New subway access is planned with new entrance on Neville Street and through the Dark Arches to future tram stop.

More on all of this to follow.

Accessible stations

Improvements – planned and promised! – at Leeds station formed part of the spending review announcements. Better access should be a big feature of the platform 17 work. We are keeping in touch with Network Rail and are expecting an update in the autumn. So watch for out in next YRC.

Railfuture continues to be consulted on proposals for improving accessibility at stations across Yorkshire – including those involving resiting as a result of the TransPennine route upgrade (TRU).

Recent issues have included communication problems for disabled passengers travelling from Hebden Bridge and the **delayed installation of the much needed passenger lifts at Todmorden**. Todmorden rail users have over the last year or so have seen start, stop, and not yet start again – an issue with contractors again.

Consultation meetings are shortly to commence on plans for improving accessibility at Hatfield & Stainforth station.

Haxby

Yorkshire Branch is pleased to welcome the go ahead for the reopening of this station (on the York-Scarborough line), following over 15 years of lobbying. It was one of the few new stations to be given the go-ahead in the June spending review.

20,000 residents will be within 3 kilometres of the new station site, with bus links and cycle paths to be provided.

York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

Y&NY combined authority's strategic transport plan is currently in development. A consultant has been commissioned to work with the authority's transport team on the plan.

Stakeholder engagement (including Railfuture Yorkshire) will be taking place on the draft, followed by public consultation in the new year. It is hoped to release some of the £15.4M allocated to 2025-26 local transport funding for projects continuing into the new financial year, including the Selby gateway scheme, which involves important station improvements and a new "eastern" entrance. (It is perhaps more helpful to describe this as on the south side of Leeds-Hull route – see picture).

A business case for increasing the York to Scarborough service to half-hourly (as sought by Mayor Skaith) is being prepared, although TPE say that this will not be possible until 2028.



Selby. Artists impression with thanks to North Yorkshire Council via BBC news. In rail terms view is east (ish!), towards Hull. Note proposed new development to south-east of station. Town centre is to the north (i.e. left!). See also link to [BBC news item](#).

Hull and East Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

Luke Campbell (Reform UK) was elected mayor in May and chairs the new H&EY combined authority. One of the authority's principles includes enhanced connectivity to create an integrated low carbon transport network. The devolution deal is a multi-year settlement. Transport gets around £100m over four years and includes the authority being brought into Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The Mayor has agreed local performance indicators and monitoring arrangements for the authority's Northern Rail routes. His ambition is for quicker journeys and extending electrification of rail lines to Hull and East Yorkshire – something we have long pressed for.

More on all of this to follow in future editions of this newsletter.

SY and EM progress Ticket acceptance, info screens and South Yorkshire hopes

From notes by
Andrew Dyson,
vice chair Railfuture Yorkshire



Northern Trains, TransPennine Express and East Midlands Railway now have a tripartite agreement for mutual ticket-acceptance if one of their trains is cancelled. Holders of valid tickets can now travel on any EMR, Northern or TPE service within two hours of their cancelled train. Both pre-planned cancellations (p-coded) and cancellations on the day are covered, for two hours before or after the cancelled train.

This follows on from a DfT directive (Dec'2024) requiring Northern, TPE, LNER and South Eastern (the four DfT-operated networks at the time) to accept each other's tickets in the event of disruption. A previous agreement between Northern, TPE and EMR had applied on Sundays only, but now all days of the week are covered. Any reasonable route is valid as long as it is displayed as an option in journey planners.

The arrangement will be of particular benefit to passengers on the Liverpool-Sheffield-Nottingham corridor where three are operators "compete".

The agreement relates specifically to cancellations and does not cover delays, unless a specific dispensation is granted. Nevertheless, this is still a very welcome initiative that will provide greater certainty to passengers at times of disruption.

Also very welcome, East Midlands Railway has begun to reprogramme its customer information screens, increasing both quantity and quality of detail. Train formations are now displayed as diagrams, showing where to find wheelchair spaces, bicycle spaces and first class. Carriage letters will tell people where to find seat reservations. This should also reduce delays at the platform-train interface.

So far, only EMR and Cross Country formations had been added to the system, but we gather discussions were going on with TPE about adding identical information for their formations in the coming weeks.

Detailed train formation information is useful for everyone, but **invaluable for disabled passengers, the elderly or infirm, or anyone travelling with luggage**. Such information already can be seen at many stations, but provision tends to be erratic, presentation inconsistent. Railfuture's national passenger group is working on ways to improve the passenger experience. It is hoped EMR's positive approach will be mirrored elsewhere.

Yorkshire Railfuture meets South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

SYMCA officers told Railfuture South Yorkshire representatives that their Rail Plan awaits signing off. This may take some time as there are many other reports awaiting approval. We must therefore wait for exact detail contents.

Network Rail has produced (or updated) its Sheffield Single Rail Strategy. All solutions are very expensive. Sheffield Midland station capacity is highly constrained by two bridges at the south end and multiple bridges and tunnels to the north. Reducing headways from 3 to 2½ minutes (north end) is apparently being examined. At the meeting we discussed possible re-opening of Sheffield Victoria station, with potential

- to increase capacity for rail services across the Sheffield area,
- but also to damage connectivity between services...
- ...but also potentially bring substantial regeneration opportunities to the area surrounding Victoria station.

Pausing of MML electrification – Doncaster station issues – new Leeds-Nottingham service

Mayor Coppard has written to the Secretary of State to express his concerns about Midland line electrification. Reply was awaited. Officially designated as paused, the scheme is effectively cancelled as the electrification teams working on the project will be disbanded.

It was suggested any project revival should include electrification through to South Kirkby Junction and Doncaster, to connect into the existing electrified network.

Platform 0 at Doncaster – safety concerns were raised. Lack of a monitor at the bottom of the stairs leading from Platform 3, with security issues at night and service change announcements were raised. SYMCA are unable to install a monitor as this is within the remit of LNER, but SYMCA would raise all the issues with LNER at a scheduled meeting in October.

It was suggested Railfuture could also raise the issues directly with LNER. →

→ New Northern Nottingham-Leeds via Wakefield Westgate starts in the early weeks of the December timetable. SYMCA have not yet been advised about what rolling stock will be used and the diagrams. SYMCA want to see how the service beds in before looking at any possible enhancements.

Penistone line, Hope Valley, Cross Country, Sheffield/Doncaster/Scunthorpe/Lincoln, and LNER fares

Progress with Penistone Line investment. £48M funding awarded via West Yorkshire for infrastructure improvements is still in place. £1.4M of that funding has been released to enable up-to-date surveys of the line and determine the work to be funded.

The funding will enable work towards a two-trains-per-hour service, but will not in itself deliver that level of service.

On page 7 Chris Morgan describes latest Hope Valley progress services, with a few extra EMR and TPE stops at Dore & Totley and Edale on Sundays from December 2025. No resolution in sight to the industrial relations issues that have meant 1 in 3 Northern Sunday services cancelled. Station timetables will display the actual Sunday timetable including scheduled cancellations from December, rather than the notional full timetable.

Progress with XC Reading-Newcastle reinstatement: further uplift on this corridor is expected in May 2026, but this is still not expected to be a reinstatement of the full hourly timetable.

On **Doncaster-Scunthorpe** there is general agreement that the present two-hourly weekday service and no service on Sundays is inadequate. SYMCA is working on two submissions to Rail North/TfN (separate for weekdays and Sundays) to reinstate hourly trains Mondays to Saturdays, and introduce a Sunday service.

SYMCA is also working on three further submissions to Rail North/TfN

- to **improve the limited Sheffield-York via Pontefract** service,
- to **reinstate the hourly Sheffield-Gainsborough Central** service
- and to **restore the second hourly stopping service between Sheffield and Doncaster**.

Surely all of the above are much needed!

Doncaster-Lincoln: SYMCA is still pressing for this service to be increased to hourly from the present five trains per day. The hourly service was a franchise commitment when the EMR franchise was last awarded, but EMR has since withdrawn support. The Doncaster-Lincoln line also has potential for new stations at Bessacarr and to serve Doncaster Sheffield Airport, which – with government support – is expected to reopen,

LNER's simpler fares: not in place (yet!) at stations in the SYMCA area but the Railfuture members expressed their concern that LNER have withdrawn the off-peak regulated fare tickets as part of the trial, resulting in fare increases of typically 100% in some cases. There was concern that if the trial were to be applied nationally, such fares increases would affect passengers in the SYMCA area.

- **Alex Forrest and Ian Fothergill of SYMCA were thanked for giving Railfuture South Yorkshire members the opportunity for discussion.**

South Yorkshire: more to follow!

Andrew and Railfuture SY colleagues have suggested improvements to rail services in and around the SYMCA area. Key points would be reconfiguration of **Nottingham-Leeds** and **Norwich-Nottingham + Nottingham-Liverpool** services so the new **Sheffield-Leeds via Wakefield Westgate** runs through to Nottingham. **Cleethorpes-Liverpool and Lincoln-Leeds** would become Lincoln-Liverpool. Other changes are also mentioned and **advantages listed. Expect more on this in next issue.** – JSW



Diversions and buses: endpiece by Stephen Waring, editor

Here's another Hebden Bridge shot by **Nina**, Newcastle-Liverpool TransPennine express coming into view (not stopping). In Mon-Sat daytime pattern diverted Redcar-Manchesters call at Sowerby Bg and Hebden, and a Scarborough-Man Vic runs non-stop Brighouse-Castleton. Brighouse gets a good deal with all diverted TPEs stopping. 2 stoppers run every hour Leeds-Brighouse and on to Halifax or Bradford. The station car park has become a bus terminus for Huddersfield. Not entirely clear where you go if you normally park at the station car park (free); Daisy Street public parking (10min walk) is £6.30. Brighouse station has had a toilet installed, taped off the first week, and then seemingly protected by a RADAR-key lock. There was a big crowd on the platform when I visited so I didn't get chance to ask any of the staff present what you're meant to do.

Replacements buses, 4/hour Brighouse-Huddersfield, seem to work. At quiet times it's nearly as quick as the normal hourly train. But **Colne Valley** contacts say bus drivers still often use wrong stops at Slaithwaite and Marsden despite there having been weekend replacement buses for months. It seems passengers have seen their bus not arrive, then an empty direct bus go racing past. It recently took a passenger three hours to get from Marsden to Leeds. Rail replacement buses seem to be run by variety of companies. There is of course no provision for non-folding bikes, and it is very awkward for disabled people ([Rail Replacement Services | National Rail](#)). No pain no gain maybe, but **are we treating people fairly?**

Corrections corner. Did you spot Editor's footnote error in YRC69, p7? The Settle Jn to Carnforth "Bentham line" is **double track** all the way, though with no intermediate signals. We knew that really!

Diary

Sat 4 Oct, Nottingham. Doors open 12.00 for prompt **12.30** start (update your diary!) Joint conference with Midlands and Lincs branches. Key speaker **Carew Satchwell, Head of Rail Strategy, East Midlands Combined County Authority** in rooms 6 & 7, 2nd Floor, **Nottingham Central Library**, 1 Carrington Street, Nottingham, NG1 7FH. Also sessions with Railfuture's regional team and finishing with **Christian Wolmar**. Short break at 13.30 for – library has café. Will finish by 16.00 (building closes that time so no danger of over-running). Members should have had email (or, we assume, notification by post).

Sat 22 Nov, Leeds Joint meeting with NW branch, at Mill Hill Chapel, City Sq, Leeds. Starting at 13.00 (to be confirmed). Full details to follow.

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Please send us your contributions for Winter 2025 issue:

by Sunday 23 November 2025 (earlier in hope of getting out before Christmas)

Digital submissions preferred. 750 words will fill page; longer or shorter pieces welcome. **Illustrations** (not just pictures of trains!) also very much encouraged if we can reproduce them freely (so give source). Any **paper articles** should be **no more than one side of A4**. It's not too early to think about what you want to write!

User groups affiliated to Railfuture in Yorkshire

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

Yorkshire branch (Rfy) committee and the small print

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