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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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This issue recounts a horrifying incident when a brick thrown from a bridge struck a train at high speed. If you witness any such idiotic behaviour, please do call 999. Parents should remind their children that this is a serious criminal offence that could have fatal consequences.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line

The single-track lines in the Highlands suffer from a lack of passing loops. On the FNL, the Forsinard loop is more than 20mls north of Helmsdale and south of Georgemas Junction. If the 0618 from Wick, due into Inverness at 1037, is 20mins late at Muir of Ord, it is held there for another 40mins to allow two northbound trains to pass. The Delmore loop, two miles out of Inverness on the section also used by the Kyle Line, has long been planned but is still unfunded.

The other issue is journey times. The 0700 from Inverness takes 4h 31m to reach Wick on what was once a sub-4hr journey. The Train Protection & Warning System loop entry speed of just 15mph has to be maintained over its whole length. A more comprehensive system such as that on the Cambrian Coast Line would permit a higher line speed on long loops.

The FNL has great potential for both passengers and freight, with massive developments in Easter Ross for the Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and Nigg Bay, but the need for financial investment seems to have escaped the Scottish Government.

Tram Train Edinburgh

A campaign has been launched to reopen Edinburgh's South Suburban rail line with tram-trains that could link into the proposed north-south tramline from Granton to the Royal Infirmary (see Consultations). A study by civil engineering postgraduates at Heriot-Watt University proposed four services an hour in each direction, and eleven stations along the route, including five new ones.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

Use of the Northumberland Line is five times greater than forecast, and it is struggling to cope. SENRUG is now campaigning for a better Newcastle - Berwick-upon-Tweed service. Currently, the one morning and one evening train serving Pegswood, Widdrington and Acklington terminate at Chathill, and places such as Belford, and possibly Beal at the start of the Holy Island causeway, also need a station.

It is technically feasible, but finding the right process to engage with NR and the train operator is proving difficult. The line along the North Sea coast provides glorious views and serves several long-distance walking routes. Northumberland CC plans to re-visit the earlier feasibility study. SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett commented: "If at some future point an Edinburgh - Berwick local service is established, they could be merged, as it would save turning trains round at Berwick."

Lakes Line Rail User Group

Over the 7-week summer holiday period, delays to the 349 Avanti northbound afternoon/evening trains monitored totalled 148hrs, an average of 25mins per train, more than enough to miss the connection to Windermere.

Better news: on 11 days over 8 weekends in July and August, volunteers engaged with 7,350 passengers on 35 Lakes Line trains. Adding in the 1,250 over the Easter weekend, 1,350 at the Spring Bank Holiday and the 4,600 recorded at the end of June gives a total of 14,550 passengers.

Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Chris Norton of the Scottish Borders Campaign Group told a SELRAP meeting that, in the 10 years since it reopened, the line to Tweedbank has completely regenerated the area. Year one saw 1.8m passengers, exceeding all expectations. The Scottish Borders Council is now the lead authority and funder with Borderlands on extending the line to Hawick and Carlisle. £10m has been awarded for a feasibility study.

That makes SELRAP more determined than ever to see Skipton - Colne reopened. In his maiden speech to Parliament, Pendle and Clitheroe MP [Jonathan Hinder](#) called for its restoration, as it would transform the area. The group has enlisted the support of councillors on Lancashire CC, and is due to meet MPs along the Transpennine route at Portcullis House on 3 November, with further meetings planned.

Esk Valley Railway Development Company

The recast of the ECML timetable from December adversely affects the Esk Valley services. Mondays - Saturday, there are currently five return services between Whitby and Middlesbrough, with two each way extended to Hexham via Newcastle. But three of the through services are being withdrawn. At Middlesbrough, you will have as little as 6mins to catch the train to Whitby - a very tight connection, particularly if a change of platform is required. Miss it and you will have to wait just short of four hours for the next!

However, the early morning service from Whitby to Middlesbrough via the James Cook Hospital for which EVRDC has long pressed is being restored in December and extended to Newcastle arriving at 1020. With the remaining through service leaving Newcastle at 1640, Whitby residents will now have a working, shopping or leisure day on the Durham Coast or Newcastle without the need to change.

East Norfolk Transport Users Association

At the AGM in August, after a minute's silence to respect the passing in July of its late Chairman, Tony Grice, Honorary President Michael Taylor spoke on the need for more services via Reedham, the lack of any Great Yarmouth trains to destinations beyond Norwich, and a hope that taking the TOCs back under Government control could mean simpler fares.

Greater Anglia Partnerships Manager Scott Dolling told a well-attended open meeting that the new information board at Norwich station showing both bus and train information would facilitate seamless journeys for passengers; Great Yarmouth would shortly get one too. And it was good that the bus service linking its rail station to the seafront ran again this summer. Sponsored by the Wherry Lines CRP, it was taken over by Ambassador Travel.

The state ownership of rail franchises offers new opportunities to restore excursion trains for reasonably priced days out. Destinations could include the Spalding flower festival, Woodbridge and Bury St Edmunds, the coastal resorts of Clacton, Walton and Sheringham, and sporting events outside the region. GBR should have the freedom to be entrepreneurial.

East Suffolk Transport Association

The 50 or so mile long East Suffolk Line linking Ipswich and Lowestoft has branches to Felixstowe and a freight line to Leiston. Once double tracked throughout, about 30 miles of it is now singled. This limits its capacity to one through train/hour each way, so the idea is for two stopping services to Saxmundham: East Suffolk Line North and South. The latter would need another passing loop, so it is proposed to reinstate the second platform at Wickham Market, with both the stopping and the through service calling at the station.

In July, ESTA Vice-President Peter Aldous wrote to Julia Pyke, the CEO of Sizewell C, regarding use of the East Suffolk Line for personnel and materials during its construction, and on restoring a passenger service on the Leiston branch. ESTA welcomes the start of work to upgrade it.

Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group

A recent [report](#) by Transport East on behalf of the Eastern Section Board of East West Rail (EWR) makes the case for extending it beyond Cambridge towards Norwich (and Ipswich). The Norwich - Cambridge Tech Corridor is projected to support an additional 70,000 jobs by 2031, but rail links were considered slow, with low frequency and limited opportunities for connections.

‘Significant growth’ of towns such as Thetford, Attleborough and Wymondham is hampered by poor connectivity. Infrastructure constraints included Ely North Junction, Trowse Junction and Trowse Bridge on the outskirts of Norwich. The number of level crossings between Ely and Norwich may also present a challenge to increasing frequency. Dualling of the A11 contrasted with lack of investment in rail.

From December, Norfolk CC will achieve its aim of a half-hour Norwich - Cambridge service each way for much of the day, with a journey time of 70 - 80mins. As well as the direct trains from Stansted Airport, which will connect with the H+24 out of London Kings Cross, the H+54 service will mostly connect at Ely into the Liverpool - Norwich service. So Thetford will have an almost half-hourly service from London in about 110mins. Hourly connections from Thetford will also be good, with 9min connections at Ely, and journey times of just over 100mins.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

GWR Class 175s will replace the IETs between Exeter and Penzance, and also operate on some other services such as Okehampton and Barnstaple, but the Cardiff - Exeter IETs will stay. The full roll out will take around 18 months.

DfT told BTPG: “GWR and the Department are working to develop the appropriate business case submission for approval of direct off-peak services for Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn. This will mean that the requisite rolling stock will be in place against a background of competing demands”.

BTPG responded to Lee Dillon MP re this shift in the rhetoric: “We shouldn’t be in a position of having to go through a ‘business case’ to reinstate a service that in 2022 was only temporarily withdrawn. GWR MD Mark Hopwood has always stated it is the intention to reinstate the direct services to Bedwyn. This is a case of ‘when’ not ‘if’. To now hear a business case is required is very concerning. We’d be very grateful if you could raise this point with the DfT”.

In the long term, could GWR use battery technology to extend the Bedwyn service to Westbury, as per NR’s Wiltshire Rail Strategic Study, with an hourly service?

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members and groups to add weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#) by selecting the appropriate category from the “Membership Types” menu. Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).

NEWS

Hosted by Alstom in August as part of Railway 200, the Greatest Gathering was billed as “the world's largest-ever collection of historic and modern rolling stock”, with over 140 locomotives and railway vehicles from different eras on display. Along with Rf Vice-Chair Neil Middleton, some 40,000 attended the event over the three days, including many families with children. Michael Portillo had the honour of naming two DRS Class 66 locomotives, the first after Karen Harrison, the first female train driver, and the other after himself!

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

The devolution deal for the Hull & East Yorkshire Combined Authority includes around £100m for transport over four-years; could some of this go towards an outline business case to reinstate the Beverley to York line? The new Mayor, Luke Campbell, has agreed local performance indicators and monitoring arrangements for its Northern Rail routes. His ambition is for quicker journeys, and extending electrification to Hull and East Yorkshire, for which Rf has long sought.

Electrification works best and is cheaper as a continuous rolling programme, with the supply chain on tap and gangs familiar with the task and with each other. So with the preliminary work complete and the scheme all set to go, “pausing” electrification of the Midland Main Line (MML) to Nottingham and Sheffield is a waste of money.

Electrifying the Dearne Valley route and the curve onto the Doncaster - Leeds line at Moorthorpe would create a continuous line from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Derby. And in the East Midlands, money could probably be found to continue the wiring to Birmingham. South Yorkshire’s transport authority also wants the other route to Leeds via Barnsley electrified, both for local services and the inter-regional trains to Nottingham and Lincoln.

Other improvements called for in South Yorkshire include hourly services from Doncaster to Scunthorpe and to Lincoln, and reinstating those from Sheffield to Gainsborough Trinity and to Doncaster. Then reconfigure the Nottingham services to Norwich, Leeds and Liverpool, with a Leeds - Sheffield service via Wakefield Westgate running through to Nottingham; Cleethorpes - Liverpool and Lincoln - Leeds would become Lincoln - Liverpool.

RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

A report by Friends of the Derwent Valley line produced with help from Rf makes the case for more frequent stops at Belper on the MML. It has one direct train/day, but otherwise passengers for Chesterfield and Sheffield have to double back via Derby, taking over twice as long, and there is no direct bus service. Estimates of likely extra annual revenue for EMR exceed £500,000 for those two destinations alone.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CA Mayor wants to improve their connectivity, so naturally the lack of news about Ely figured in his discussions with RfEA. And the potential for an additional route via a chord linking EWR to the ECML at Tempsford or St Neots should be considered. Rf suggested that the most cost-effective solution for a Peterborough North station (referred to in his manifesto) could be a turn-back station at Werrington on the Spalding line.

Five miles north of Cambridge, a new town is being built on the eastern side of Waterbeach, with a new station planned to open in 2027. The current station carries about 400,000 passengers a year. Rf says the new one should have turn-back facilities to accommodate a service of 4tph to Cambridge stations, with two stopping services also serving the village station. It has circulated an amended plan, but the local authority seems reluctant to engage with the railway.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTHEAST

Three different TOCs, all owned by GTR, currently run 16 trains an hour each way between Gatwick Airport and London. However, off-peak fares range from £10.70 to £24.10 depending largely on the train, although they all take much the same time to get to London. Despite a lack of information at the airport, trains at a premium fare are underused whilst cheaper ones are overcrowded. And there is no direct service from Brighton to Clapham Junction.

This should be rationalised by absorbing the Gatwick Express service into the Southern service to Victoria, and pricing at Southern or Thameslink rates to ensure it is fully loaded. Retain the brand name as it has public awareness, but increase the line capacity to 4 tph, with two extended to Brighton and calling additionally at Clapham Junction.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

At a meeting in July regarding a Wantage Grove Parkway station attended by Olly Glover MP and RfTV Chairman Richard Stow, Paul McSweeney from Harwell Campus said its projected growth and that of other local science campuses would further the demand for public transport in the area. Mr Glover said he had raised this with the science minister, Patrick Vallance, who was receptive to the idea of extending the Cambridge - Oxford corridor to Wantage.

RAILFUTURE WESSEX

The Rf campaign to restore passenger trains to the Waterside Line between Totton and Hythe has been boosted by Alliance Rail's bid to run open access services from the branch into Southampton and on to Waterloo. Initially, they would start at Marchwood, but the aspiration is to reopen a further station at Hythe. Alliance expects a decision from ORR later this year, and is confident that paths can be found in the complete recast of the SWR timetable planned for December 2026.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN's first mini tourism and leisure campaign promotes walking and cycling routes from stations, so it would like to be made aware of any existing trails, accessible routes and walking initiatives.

CRN supports Grand Central Rail's Station Ambassador programme, which aims to create new opportunities in Bradford, from building inclusivity and youth engagement to boosting rail confidence and employability skills, whilst bringing GCR closer to the community rail movement.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT hails the success of reopened rail lines such as Northumberland and Dartmoor - the Elizabeth Line across London now carries one in seven national rail journeys! Rail helps to reduce regional inequality, allows people to access opportunities previously out of reach, and revitalises long forsaken communities, delivering £2.50 - £4 for every £1 invested. Its latest report, supported by West Coast Partnership, [Making the connection: Rail and the sustainable growth opportunity](#) makes the case for continued investment in every part of the rail network.

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

British Transport Police are investigating after bricks lobbed from a bridge by children shattered the windscreen of a 125mph Liverpool - London train, a traumatic incident that could have been so much worse. The driver bravely continued to Crewe, where the passengers safely disembarked. A trespasser on the tracks Clapham Junction has been jailed for eight weeks. Switching off the power caused 38 trains to be wholly or partially cancelled, and a total of 3,427mins of delays.

Both NR and the RSSB have acted upon ORR recommendations designed to help the rail industry take a more evidence-based and consistent approach in weighing the costs and benefits of safety decisions. In time, this should make for even better results on safety and value for money.

Following a public vote, NR has named one of its fleet of Multi-Purpose Vehicle trains that combat “leaves on the line” Ctrl Alt Deleaf! Other suggestions were Leaf-Fall Weapon and Pulp Friction. In addition to high-pressure water jets, the MPVs can lay a sticky solution laced with sand to help train wheels grip the rails.

When it opens in 2028, the Eden Project will need a much better service on the Morecambe branch; trains to Heysham could use battery power until it is electrified. Open and available 24/7 for the nuclear power stations, it should be used to its full extent. A third (or loop) line parallel to the WCML would allow Lancaster trains to run largely unhindered, paving the way for more services.

Amid mounting concerns over costs, Northern Powerhouse Rail from Liverpool to Manchester via Manchester Airport and on to Leeds and Hull has stalled pending another round of reviews.

The TRU Community Fund has £250,000 to help create or enhance related facilities. Community groups, schools and charities within 5 miles of the route from Manchester to Huddersfield, Leeds and York, or the Shipley Traincare Centre, have until 27 October to apply for grants up to £20,000.

On the Melton test track, the in-cab European Train Control System fitted to an LNER Azuma was shown to work with its lineside and signalling centre components. It clears the way for all of the Hitachi trains on the ECML to use ETCS in passenger service, a milestone in the East Coast Digital Programme.

By offering cheaper rates to its Southampton customers who use rail, DP World has increased their share of container traffic from 20% to 30%; it aims to boost this to 40% by next year. In the past 12 months, its modal shift programme has taken 64,000 lorry loads off the road.

...and finally

On 13/14 September, the UK's last remaining cinema carriage screened its first film in 37 years as part of Railway 200. Opened in 1975 by Princess Margaret as part of an exhibition train celebrating the 150th anniversary, it showed staff training films until 1988, and was then used as a meeting room. Its former manager Alan Willmott died in 2014 fearing it would be scrapped. However, in 2019 Steve Foxon, a curator at the British Film Institute, used his bequest to have it moved to the Swindon & Cricklade Railway, and embarked on a six-year project to preserve Alan's legacy.

And Corpusty Station in Norfolk, which opened in 1883 but closed with the Melton Constable - Yarmouth Beach line in 1959, has also been restored and is open again to the public. The plan now is to add a vintage dining carriage.

A tortoise rescued from the line at Bicester North Station has been returned home unharmed. Chiltern Railways said passengers should report animals on train tracks to NR, and never attempt to retrieve them themselves.

CONSULTATIONS

- City of Edinburgh Council: [North-South Tram Line](#), closes 17 November.
- Isle of Wight Council [local transport plan](#) LTP4 consultation, closes 24 November.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Rail Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited)
- National & regional events
- Local Group events.

October

- Tuesday 14. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also 9 December).
- Saturday 18. Connect Bude AGM.
- Saturday 18. Rf Severnside, The Railway Inn, **Yatton**, 1400.
- Monday 20. Watford Rail Users Group, **Watford** Junction Station, 1830.
- Wednesday 22. Lakes Line Rail User Group, Town Hall, **Kendal**, 1600 and 1730.
- Thursday 23. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh** EH1 2JL, 1900 (Also 18 November, 16 December).
- Tuesday 28. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).

November

- Tuesday 4. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds division, **Online**, 1930.
- Tuesday 4. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 2 December).
- Wednesday 5. Community Rail Network AGM, **Online**, 1400.
- Thursday 6. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division. **Online**, 1800.
- Monday 10. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900.
- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Thursday 20. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.
- Saturday 22. Rf Yorkshire and North West, Mill Hill Chapel, City Sq, **Leeds**, 1300 (tbc).

Further Ahead

- 6 December. Rf East Anglia, The Signal Box Community Centre, Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB, 1400.
- 10 December. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800.

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

Contact the editor by e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, or phone: 01462 815992.

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Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, BS21 7NP – for legal correspondence only.
All other correspondence to: 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU*