

southeast railaction

London and South East Branch - Campaign Newsletter December 2025

railfuture



What future for the Gatwick Express? Railfuture campaigns for changes now

MEETING REMINDERS

Herts and Beds Division

Date: Saturday 6 December 2025

Type: Lunch Social, Meet King's Cross Sta. 12.15pm

Date: Wednesday 14 January 2026

Type: Business meeting, on-line starts 7.30pm

Metro Division

Date: Thursday 22 January 2026

Type: Campaign meeting, Alan Baxter Gallery, Farringdon, starts 7pm

Sussex & Coastway Division

Date: Thursday 4 December 2025

Type: Business meeting, on-line starts 6pm

Date: Thursday 8 January 2026

Type: Evening Social, John Harvey Tavern, 6pm

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GATWICK CAMPAIGN GATHERS PACE

This edition of South East Rail Action is being released online around the same time as our campaign meeting relating to the Gatwick Express, being held on Thursday 20 November 2025 at Salfords Village Hall close to the airport. If you have not done so, we urge you to read our full report, which you may find on the LSE page on the [website](#). We have highlighted many issues that exist with the Gatwick Express and the Brighton Main Line, however in summary we are campaigning for the following to happen now:

1. Gatwick Express to be abolished as a dedicated service and operator, and instead becoming an integral part of Southern's services to the airport - all Victoria services to be operated by Southern, and branded Gatwick Express.
2. Fares rationalised so there is a single fare to/from Central London stations with direct services to/from Gatwick. We envisage that this fare would be slightly more than the current cheapest (Thameslink) but less than the fare for using Southern services, and will give price transparency to passengers and we believe lead to a growth in overall revenue.

These changes will deliver a better service to current passengers now, although we envisage further action will be required once the implications of the second runway at Gatwick have been analysed. As to the above two campaign issues, the business case for these exist now.

On the following pages you will find our letter to the Minister of State for Rail, copied to various other persons and organisations, including airport authorities, railway service and track operators, and local Members of Parliament.

Our websites: www.railfuture.org.uk | www.railfuture.org.uk/London-and-South-East | www.railwatch.org.uk
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On 22 October 2025, Railfuture sent the following letter to the Minister of State for Rail, The Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE. It is reproduced here in full for members' information (only personal information redacted).



*Campaigning for better services
over a bigger rail network*

please reply to:
Neil Middleton
Director, Railfuture
(Address)

Minister of State for Rail:
The Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE

Copied to:

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Transport, responsible for aviation, maritime, and security: Keir Mather MP

Member of Parliament for Croydon East: Natasha Irons MP

Member of Parliament for Crawley: Peter Lamb MP

Member of Parliament for Dorking and Horley: Chris Coghlan MP

Member of Parliament for Reigate: Rebecca Paul MP

Gatwick Airport: Hannah Godfrey, Senior Surface Access Manager

Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee (Gatcom)

The (Gatwick) The Airline Operators Committee / Airport Consultative Committee:

Airlines UK

Govia Thameslink Railway: Angie Doll, Chief Executive Officer

Govia Thameslink Railway: Phil Hutchinson, Head of Strategic Planning

Great Western Railway: Thomas Lydon, Public Affairs Manager

Network Rail: Alex Hellier Head of Strategic Planning - Kent & Sussex

Network Rail: Paul Best, Senior Strategic Planner

Network Rail: James Craig, Lead Strategic Planner

Transport for the South East: Mark Valleley, Head of Strategy

22 October 2025

Dear Lord Hendy,

**Gatwick Airport Expansion - Capacity Issues on the Brighton Main Line
Absorption of Gatwick Express into current services and fare rationalisation**

I refer to the announcement on 22 September 2025 made by the Secretary of State for Transport relating to the granting of consent for the second runway at Gatwick Airport, noting in particular the stated obligation to ensure that at least 54% of future surface access to the Airport is made by means of public transport – by the late 2030s this could be over 110,000 passengers on a typical day. That is before adding on use by those who work at the airport, crew on the planes using the airport and non-airport passengers.

In recent years, the rail offer for Gatwick Airport travellers has been delivered using train calling patterns that seek to meet the combined needs of air and other travellers – for instance "Gatwick Express" is also the service to/from London Victoria for Haywards Heath and Brighton passengers. In practice, premium fares for Gatwick Express mean that the regular advice to passengers from guide books, travel websites, etc. is actually to avoid the two expensive Gatwick Express services per hour and instead use one of the six one or two stop Southern services to/from Victoria – or the four one stop Thameslink services to/from London Bridge.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

Gatwick Express is an important brand that we think needs to continue, but rather than being, as it is at the present, a virtual Train Operator, the name should be applied to every fast service between Victoria and Gatwick (8 per hour). This message is already part of the airport's marketing – I passed through Gatwick at the start of the month and as I approached passport control, the advertising referred to the train every 4 minutes, not the two train per hour Gatwick Express.

Linked to this change from an "operator" to a "brand", fare choices should be rationalised. For example, for a journey from Gatwick to Euston we identified 14 fare choices – unnecessary complexity of this nature is unjustifiable, confuses passengers and may even deter some from using the service.

In our enclosed paper we:

- Explain why we think dedicated Gatwick Express trains should instead be integrated into the Southern service with airport services branded Gatwick Express, where there are just stops at Clapham Junction and/or East Croydon between the airport and central London, and that this should happen 'now'. As part of this, we believe the current Gatwick Express services should stop at Clapham Junction to improve connectivity between there (and the 200+ stations served from there) and Brighton.
- Detail the fares confusion and urge rationalisation, to also happen 'now'.

✍

These are not permanent solutions to capacity issues on the line bearing in mind the huge increase in passengers envisaged as a consequence of airport expansion but will provide some respite and some opportunities whilst the necessary longer term solutions are considered and implemented.

If you have any queries in respect of the report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Neil Middleton

Neil Middleton
Vice Chair
Director (with responsibility for Communications)
e-mail: neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Ltd

Branch Annual Open Meeting and AGM

Advance notice is given that the London & South East Branch of Railfuture will be holding its branch open meeting and AGM on Saturday 18 April 2026, at our usual venue in the Wesley Chapel, 49 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AU, a 5 minute walk from Old Street Underground Station. The format of the meeting will follow recent years, with a guest speaker featured in the morning 'open meeting' session, followed after lunch by the members only AGM. Details will be released in due course.

Whole Branch Issue: Contactless fares

We are not impressed by the fare model in use for the Project Oval extensions of contactless fares - the prime issues being the loss of all but two fares and the absence of railcard discounts when paying with contactless bank cards. This is an issue for those places surrounding, but outside Greater London, where contactless is being introduced.

It seems that there is a London-wide directive of switching to new fares for all stations that are newly accepting contactless. For now our local focus is on pressing operators to offer cheap advance fares at weekends. We will also keep up pressure on the addition of a weekend only flexible fare (although we sense resistance from TfL in introducing a third price point) and for railcards to be supported for contactless. On the latter there is a promise of "at some point" however this is not good enough, and we continue to push for funding to deliver this essential element.

London Metro and Eastern Division (prepared by Richard Bowry)

Beaulieu Park Station, a new rail station in the North East suburbs of Chelmsford, opened on Sunday 26 October 2025. The official opening, with dignitaries such as Kemi Badenoch (MP for North West Essex), James Cleverly (MP for Braintree) and the Minister of State for Rail, was on Monday 27 October, and members of Railfuture were in attendance. It is the first new station to open on the Great Eastern Mainline in over 100 years. Its position next to the A12 makes it ideal for those in the Chelmsford area who don't want to go into the centre of Chelmsford to catch a train, it having around 700 car parking spaces. The off-peak service pattern sees two trains per hour from Liverpool Street, one to Ipswich, and one to Colchester Town, for example after 10am, at the following times (repeated each hour):

Liverpool St	10.02	10.36
Beaulieu Park:	10.38	11.12
Ipswich:	11.24	-
Colchester Town:	-	11.47

Services from Beaulieu Park to Liverpool Street leave at 6 and 36 minutes past the hour. In peak periods (for example before 9am), there are 4 trains per hour to Liverpool Street, as is the case for the evening peak.



Kemi Badenoch discussing the opening with the press



James Cleverly in conversation

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Women's Safety

A University College London student, Camille Brown, has called on Transport for London (TfL) to introduce women-only Underground carriages, and has organised a petition which, at the time of going to press, had gathered over 13,000 signatures. Brown said: "I'm actually really sick of hearing TfL say they've got all these systems in place. They're all retrospect, they're all in the aftermath, they're all reactive. It's too late and that's not good enough."

Women must feel safe to use our transport system and ways of achieving this must be found. The solutions are not easy, but this petition is timely in reminding us all of the urgency of this situation. It cannot be allowed to continue.

Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire Division (prepared by Neil Middleton)

Great Northern (GN) services and TfL

TfL has bid to take over GN services operating from Moorgate. Railfuture is usually sympathetic to TfL bids as it has a good record for investment and reliable operation. However on this occasion we are more sceptical - whilst GTR's delivery of the GN service is far from ideal, reliability being a challenge, as is funding for four trains per hour, we do wonder if the disadvantages of TfL integration may outweigh the advantages. Separating out GN Inners from Thameslink (stations to Peterborough and Cambridge) and GN Outers (serving stations to Cambridge and Kings Lynn) will generate new pain points and costs - what is not currently understood is what those costs would be, including non-financial issues such as less effective disruption recovery. It is also unclear how Hertfordshire users would be able to hold TfL to account and how TfL will handle matters when it does not benefit London residents. By the time you read this, we will be on the campaign trail.

Issues on St. Albans Abbey branch

Abbey Flyer Users' Group (AbFly), affiliated to Railfuture, has been in communication with London Northwestern Railway as to the continuing poor services on the Watford - St. Albans Abbey branch. According to AbFly's statistics, there were a total of sixty nine cancellations on the branch during late September and October. Thirty eight of these were pre-planned cancellations of the first or last services for engineering reasons. Of the remainder:

- 13 were due to leaves on the line (28 September)
- 6 were due to fatality on the main line (2 October)
- 6 were due to unit issues (5, 19 and 21 October)
- 4 were due to crewing issues (19 and 26 October)
- 2 were due to obstruction on the line (5 October).

That level of service is not acceptable and our railways must do better.

East West Rail: We are waiting for news on developments at the moment, however we have pushed our view that Bedford needs an additional platform for EMR's long distance services and that the new Universal station (previously Wixams) on the Midland Mainline should be delivered early to benefit local residents, and we have also asked questions about the new service patterns required between Bedford and Bletchley to meet demand from visitors to Universal (travelling longer distances via Bletchley) and for workers (travelling from intermediate stations).

Kent Division (prepared by Chris Fribbins)

Southeastern has officially integrated with Network Rail's Kent route to operate under a single leadership team called South Eastern Railway, following its return to public ownership. This combination of track and train promises to deliver a more responsive and more efficient service with a number of key personnel taking on new roles.

Some future issues for Kent are:

- The return of international services to Ashford International and Ebbsfleet International stations. This now looks more likely with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) having approved Virgin Trains' application for access to Temple Mills International depot, an important first step towards being able to operate cross border train services from London using the Channel Tunnel. With much still to be done, it is likely to be 2030 before we see any new services.
- The Networker replacements has been delayed with some uncertainty surrounding the future of the UK's rolling stock replacement program. If the replacements have some battery capability, there is a real chance that some services could be extended from Gravesend over an existing freight line to a new station at Hoo St Werburgh, to service the thousands of new homes intended to be built at that location and help reduce traffic issues on the limited road access to it.
- We still hope to see a return of services from Tonbridge to Gatwick, and hopefully further into Kent in the longer term.
- Issues with the rail infrastructure continue in Kent, as in other regions, with failed embankments and vegetation blocking tracks without notice.

Surrey Division (prepared by Stephen Rolph)

Services of Govia Thameslink Railway

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) is one of the UK's largest operators of train services under its four brand names of Gatwick Express, Great Northern, Southern and Thameslink, each with their own liveries and logos. This will all come to an end on 31 May 2026 when GTR passenger services are nationalised. However GTR is such a complex and interesting operation that it is well worth reflecting on its various services. How will these change following nationalisation?

GTR's 'Great Northern' services run north from London to Cambridge and Kings Lynn. 'Thameslink' trains run from Brighton and Horsham through London to Peterborough and Cambridge.

'Gatwick Express', as the name suggests, provides a fast service from London Victoria to Gatwick Airport but for a substantial premium fare and a journey time only slightly faster than Southern services on the same route. What do you get for this pricier service? Multi-language announcements at the Airport, more luggage space on trains and usually some space, as trains are often only partially full. However it's a poor service, just 2 trains per hour without useful connections, for example, to south west London via Clapham Junction, because to maintain the express fiction the trains do not stop at Clapham Junction. Those from south west London are best connecting at Clapham Junction for a Southern train to the Airport, at a much cheaper ticket price.

'Southern' is more complex, running suburban trains in south London, as well longer distance trains from London through Surrey to south coast cities and towns such as Brighton, Eastbourne, Littlehampton and Portsmouth via Chichester, and services along the south coast as far as Ashford. It also runs services along the West London Line but these have been curtailed in recent times although there are demands for these to resume with more frequent services north up the West Coast Main Line (to Milton Keynes, for example) and south to Gatwick Airport and perhaps beyond.

There are reports of trains being seen at Lewes, Eastbourne, the Arun Valley and at various places along the south coast, that are not Gatwick Express services but are disconcertingly made up of Gatwick Express rolling stock. How confusing for passengers unfamiliar with GTR operations and practices to see such train formations. Hopefully nationalisation will bring more joined up thinking so that services are run in a manner that works better for the travelling public.

Sussex and Coastway Division (prepared by John Black)

Rail in our region has become particularly interesting following the announcement from the Secretary of State for Transport giving the green light to development of Gatwick Airport. Once the details have been worked out we will have a second full service runway partly made possible out of the emergency runway/taxiway situated to the north of the current main runway. Our interest is, of course, driven by the impact on services using the Brighton Main Line (BML) and of the requirement imposed that at least 54% of all travellers to the airport should arrive by public transport, found among the conditions applicable to Gatwick Airport Limited (GAL).

Working closely with our Surrey Division and the wider Railfuture family we will be seeking to make sure the expansion plans will not be at the expense of those that rely on the Brighton Main Line artery both to get to much of the rest of the UK by rail and of course to the airport itself.

There's a lot to be considered. As I prepare this article my Railfuture colleagues are making the final arrangements for a campaign meeting to be held on 20 November inviting key senior people from the railway industry, local authorities, local MPs, GAL, and of Railfuture's own members. That meeting will take place at Salfords Village Hall, not far from the airport itself. By the time you read this magazine that meeting will be upon us, and I hope you have or had the chance to attend it. We'd like to hear your views on the issues raised, in particular from our Sussex and Coastway Division members.

Our division continues to hold its own regular pattern of meetings, some on-line and some in person. At one of our recent meetings the division discussed how ticketing may be changing in the near future, in a discussion with the Herts & Beds Division chair and national director, Neil Middleton.

Our next Sussex and Coastway Division meeting will be held via Zoom on Thursday 4 December. Details of meetings can always be found on the Railfuture website. Please join us and help improve the railways in our region.

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Herts and Beds Division

Convenor: Neil Middleton

Meetings: We hold meetings monthly, some on-line and some in person. **Our next meeting is on Saturday 6 December - meet at Kings Cross station at 12.15am for lunch and a mainly social meeting. Next following is a 'business' meeting on Zoom on Wednesday 14 January 2026, starting at 7.30pm.**

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- East - West Rail as it effects Bedfordshire
- New station at Wixams between Bedford and Flitwick
- Contactless fares
- TfL's bid to run Great Northern Inner Services
- Performance issues

Contact Email: neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

Kent Division

Convenor: Chris Fribbins

Meetings: We hold periodic meetings, primarily on-line. We also have an informal meeting in Faversham in May and a summer social event.

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Cross Channel trains stopping at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International
- Hoo Peninsula: Upgrading the freight-only branch line to restore passenger services to Hoo St. Werburgh
- Kent and Gatwick: Improving connections from Kent to Gatwick Airport via Tonbridge
- Kenex tram and Lower Thames Crossing, rail Dartford to Thurrock

Contact Email: chris.fribbins@railfuture.org.uk

London Metro and Eastern Division

Chair: Richard Bowry. Vice-Chair: Charlie King. Committee member: Howard Thomas

Meetings: We hold six meetings per year on alternate months, usually at Basement Room, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, London EC1M 6EL .
Our next meeting is on Thursday 22 January 2026, at Alan Baxter Gallery starting at 7pm.

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Docklands Light Railway extension to Thamesmead
- West Orbital Route, south west to north west London
- Bakerloo Line extension to Lewisham
- Crossrail 2

Contact Email: richard.bowry@railfuture.org.uk

Surrey Division

Convenor: Stephen Rolph

Meetings: We are working on recommencing meetings, details to be released shortly.

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Gatwick Airport - London services: Capacity issues due to expanding airport and anticipated need for additional train services
- North Downs Line: Improving the service between Reading, Guildford and Gatwick Airport
- Southern rail link to Heathrow airport

Contact Email: snrolph@gmail.com

Sussex & Coastway Division

Convenor: John Black. Secretary: Robert Cheesman

Meetings: We hold six or so meetings per year usually on alternate months, at a number of locations, such as Brighton, with some on-line. **Next meeting is on-line on Thursday 4 December 2025, then an evening social at John Harvey Tavern, Lewes, on Thursday 8 January 2026, both 6pm.**

Principal Campaigns: Our current campaigns include but are not limited to the following:

- Uckfield - Lewes: Reinstating a rail link to bridge the gap between Uckfield and Lewes
- More and faster West Coastway services
- Improvements to Marshlink Line, Ashford to Hastings

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We are a national campaign group And a local campaign group too!



Our Branches

Railfuture has 14 branches: so there's one near you!

Devon and Cornwall
East Anglia
East Midlands
Lincolnshire
London and South East
North East
North West
Severnside
Thames Valley
Wessex
West Midlands
Yorkshire
Scotland
Wales

London & South East Branch comprises five Divisions:

- Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire
- Kent
- London Metro & Eastern
- Surrey
- Sussex & Coastway

We campaign for a bigger, better railway.

A Better Railway is a railway which:

- Is fully accessible for all people, from street to platform and platform to train
- Is reliable, with fewer delays and cancellations, and has frequent services
- Is affordable, with ticket prices not rising above inflation
- Is clean, safe and comfortable without overcrowding
- Is welcoming with modern facilities and good customer service
- Is transparent and understandable in terms of ticketing, with comprehensive and appropriate use of technology, enabling passengers to always buy the ticket that is most suitable for them

A Bigger Railway is a railway which:

- Opens new lines, such as the Elizabeth Line and extensions such as to Barking Riverside
- Opens new stations, such as Lea Bridge and Beaulieu Park, Chelmsford

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Membership from just £10

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Contact Our Editor: LSEEditor@railfuture.org.uk



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