

# Yorkshire Rail Campaigner

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*As always, all opinions in by-lined or initialled articles are those of the writer, not Railfuture or its Yorkshire branch (or even this newsletter's editor!)*

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**Serendipitously spotted new East Midlands train**, 5-car unit, all in shadow in its dark purple at Sheffield, Monday morning, 8 December and in service to London St Pancras. EMR's trains are based on now-familiar "IET" class 800 design. Built in County Durham, the *Aurora Class* 810s are a bit different, though, custom-built for the Midland Main Line. Shorter to get 2x5=10 cars into the platform at St Pancras, and with extra diesel power to maintain previous schedules despite the mass of a bi-mode electro-diesel. Of course the extra mass does nothing for energy efficiency, and requires even more power – where's the balancing point energy-wise? Like our branch president Alan Whitehouse in YRC90, we all hate the fact that, for now, MML electrification stops at Wigston just short of Leicester. Zero-carbon runs less than 100 miles from St Pancras.

But it was always a partial scheme. No wires for Erewash route Nottingham-Sheffield. No extension to Leeds. No diversionary routes such as Corby to Syston (north of Leicester). The sentence that comes to mind is "we need a rolling programme." **But we also need bi-mode trains to fill the gaps as the railway transitions to carbon-neutral.** Maybe the problem is lack of strategic planning. Having a plan and sticking to it. Avoiding bad timing. As letter-writer retired railway manager Malcolm Pheasey in *Modern Railways* (Nov'2025) phrased it, maybe the MML "moment is passed". The custom-built 810s could last 30 years; we must hope the moment comes back sooner!

***With best wishes for the festive season. And carry on campaigning in 2026!***

11 Dec'2025 – JSW (text + photo)

**Railfuture Yorkshire branch**

President: Alan Whitehouse.

Vice-presidents: Mike Crowhurst, Alan Williams.

**railfuture**



# Footfall latest, and other hot topics

by our editor Stephen Waring

Office of Road & Rail statistics for station usage (footfall in and out) to end of March 2025 are just out. More detailed analysis to follow in our Spring 2026 issue. Table here (pasted with thanks from the ORR report) headlines Yorkshire and the Humber's top six. Top station is – you guessed it – Leeds.

Comparing these figures with 2019-20 shows that York, Sheffield and Doncaster now exceed their pre-pandemic footfalls with Leeds and Huddersfield not quite there yet. To analyse your favourite stations for yourself see summary at [Estimates of station usage | ORR Data Portal](#). Spreadsheet for all station here [table-1415-time-series-of-passenger-entries-and-exits-and-interchanges-by-station.ods](#). It's big one!

Official people keep consulting on policies and programmes. West Yorkshire's mayor Tracy Brabin wanted views on WYCA the combined authority's draft local transport plan. Our Yorkshire branch committee drew up a very detailed response with comments. Local groups also responded. We are keen to see plans that can show results in our lifetimes, so more emphasis on developing and improving existing services rather than big new lines for the distant future. **We support mass transit** but are more equivocal about long-term high speed routes. We favour development on rail that can deliver in a few years. So we might want affordable improvements to routes like Leeds-Sheffield, Pontefract lines and the Calder Valley, relatively quickly achievable, to prevail.

One theme is the West Yorkshire to South Yorkshire corridor. My group Hadrag, the Halifax & District Rail Action Group was delighted when Railfuture Yorkshire Branch decided to support our proposal for a Bradford-Sheffield service, first choice via Barnsley. That would need the west to south curve Horbury Station Junction to Crigglestone reopening. We think a journey time of about 50 minutes Brighouse to Sheffield would be very attractive, by through service from Bradford and Halifax. A cheaper option capital-wise would be to go via Wakefield Kirkgate and the proposed new station at Rotherham on the main line. Journey time would be a few minutes longer, but Bradford would get through-trains to both Wakefield and Sheffield. Either route would serve Meadowhall – a regional hub with links not to trams and buses – as well as all the shops, houses and local industry.

***Of course we know capacity issues have to be solved not least on the approaches to Sheffield.***

Recently the West and South Yorkshire mayors called for a new fast service Leeds to Sheffield, four trains an hour. Would this need new lines or new routes? Could Bradford-Calderdale-Sheffield link be developed alongside?

Meanwhile Northern – very good in parts – is starting an hourly train fast(ish) Leeds to Sheffield service in the new timetable, Dec'2025. There are issues to resolve not least on premier routes such as York-Blackpool, where we have been seeing short formations, poor performance and cancellations. Two coaches are simply not good enough.

Lots to read in this YRC, from local group reports, through Nina's travels to a thoughtful endpiece by Mike Crowhurst. Minsters Line celebrate an anniversary. And there's a look at phone-based digital ticketing trialling on the Harrogate Line. ***Did you know 95 per cent of people have a smartphone?***

## YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

Station	Total entries and exits
Leeds	27.3 million
York	10.5 million
Sheffield	10.3 million
Doncaster	4.5 million
Huddersfield	3.1 million



TransPennine heads north into what looks like a 4-track tunnel outside Sheffield station. But the cutting narrows through solid rock, tracks reducing to two. Junction for Worksop causes conflict. Further on there could be space for extra tracks on the stretch to Meadowhall. ***Is digital signalling part of the answer?*** – JSW

60 years after East Yorkshire Beeching injustice

# Fight goes on!

by David Pennie, Secretary, Minsters Rail Campaign

It is 60 years this year since the 34-mile Beverley to York line was closed – arguably one of the most short-sighted and unjustified of the Beeching closures. The last train ran on 27 November 1965 on a line which served as a direct route from Hull to York (42 miles). At the time the line was being modernised. Work had started in 1960 and would have included single tracking with passing loops, colour light signalling with centralised control and upgrading of level crossings, greatly reduced operating costs. But the scheme was halted after the Beeching Report in 1963 recommended closure.

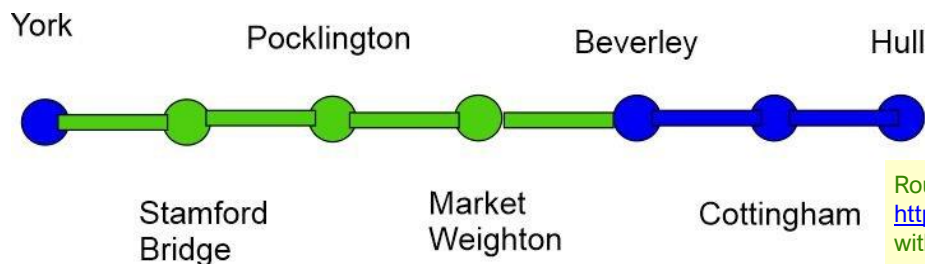
Despite an initial pledge by Prime Minister Harold Wilson to halt the closures, the line was not saved – possibly because to do so would have encouraged people in other areas to push for their threatened line to be reprieved. Later reminiscences of Richard Marsh, Labour Minister of Transport 1968-69, show how politics entered into such decisions, with lines in some marginal Labour constituencies being taken off the closure list<sup>1</sup>. The Beverley to York route runs through a predominantly Conservative area.

The *Minsters Rail Campaign* (referencing York and Beverley Minsters) was established in 2001. In 2004 the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) commissioned a report from the Carl Bro Group to investigate the feasibility of reopening. Because of development, particularly around Pocklington, Stamford Bridge and Market Weighton, alterations to the former route were proposed, with alternative alignments going around these towns. Also, a new connection into York, near Haxby on the Scarborough to York line, would be needed. The study found benefits to reinstating the line for passenger traffic and recommended a Hull-York service calling at Beverley, Market Weighton, Stamford Bridge and Pocklington, with an estimated journey time of under one hour. The environmental benefits, benefits to traffic using the A1079 and A166, the time savings for passengers and other non-user benefits would make the scheme economic.

The 2011 ERYC Transport Plan identified the reinstatement of the line as a long-term goal. Although the 2013 ERYC Local Plan was not able for legal reasons to protect the original route from development, the reinstatement remained an aspiration in this and later Local Plans. As time went by, rail reopenings and reinstatements were becoming more of a political reality. In 2020 the government launched its *Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund*, and in March 2021



Campaign allies: (from left) AECOM's Julian Sindall, Minsters Rail technical officer Roy Begg, with East Riding MPs Charlie Dewhirst and Graham Stuart, at a campaign event for MPs in the House of Commons. Photo: Office of



Route map from <https://www.minstersrail.com> with thanks.

a joint application from the Minsters Rail Campaign and ERYC was successful in being awarded funding for a Strategic Outline Case for the reinstatement. With additional funding from ERYC, consultants AECOM were commissioned to produce this, and it was submitted to the DfT in September 2022. AECOM had been instrumental in the Borders line (Edinburgh-Tweedbank) reinstatement)

AECOM's work found that the reinstatement would bring substantial social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable economic growth and new development. All transport options were assessed, and **heavy rail was found to offer the strongest alignment with strategic objectives**, including competitive journey times and enhanced connectivity between communities, with the major centres of Hull and York, and also regionally. The heavy rail option would also deliver operational resilience benefits for the national network, providing an alternative to the existing main line to Hull along the Humber, which suffers from a high risk of flooding. Like the East-West (Oxford-Cambridge) reinstatement, parts of the line would be new build, but feasible alternative alignments were identified. A positive strategic outline business case opened the way towards the next objective: funding for an outline business case.

**Getting the funding is a challenge, but the Campaign is optimistic that it can be found and further progress made.**

<sup>1</sup> Marsh, of course, later became chair of British Rail under the Heath Government. [Richard Marsh, Baron Marsh - Wikipedia](#) (fascinating read!) – JSW



# PAYG trial on Harrogate line

by Andrew Whitworth

Northern started trialling a GPS-based PAYG ticketing app between Harrogate and Leeds earlier this autumn. It's a joy to use, and has enormous potential.

Pay as you go travel is a great opportunity for the railway to grow, particularly in our region where rail's market share is lower than average. Over many years, rail's ticketing system has become insanely complex while its enforcement has become stricter, and this is now a significant obstacle to rail use – see panel. The simplicity of PAYG should attract leisure travellers and hybrid commuters. It's easy to set up, quick to activate, much faster



Remember these? Now long gone at Hornbeam Park, declared unusable 23 June 2006. (All pics by Andrew Whitworth)

than buying a ticket and there are no worries about whether your ticket is valid for that time, operator or route. It's more convenient and cheaper for many regular passengers, **but also ideal for the millions of people who never – or very rarely – use the railway at all.**

As Mayor of York & North Yorkshire David Skaith said: "Train tickets can be confusing, frustrating and a barrier for people wanting to use the train. This... is a step in the right direction."

## Brief history of PAYG on UK railways

Evidently PAYG isn't simple for the railway to introduce, especially with such a fiendish fares system as ours. TfN have had the goal of such a scheme across the North since their inception in 2015, using contactless debit/credit cards and working on rail and bus networks. Difficulties were encountered with gaining cooperation of bus companies who were developing in-house systems. In 2019 the PAYG aspiration was reduced to rail only, then DfT withdrew their funding for the TfN project and chose to take on responsibility themselves. A £360M investment in November 2021 had a goal of PAYG across 400 stations in the North within 3 years. Another fail! But at least something is now happening - and it's a very promising system. The first generation → → of PAYG

**The journey so far – Paytrain to penalty fare:** The Harrogate Line became a Paytrain route in June 1969. All local ticket offices were closed (except Harrogate), passengers had to pay the conductor-guard and only tickets for stations along the line could be purchased, with rebooking required for more exotic destinations. Utterly straightforward – just like catching a bus!

This approach essentially lasted for decades, though in that time IT advances meant more through fares could be added to guard's ticket machines, and card payments arrived. Rudimentary ticket machines were installed at some unstaffed stations – see illustration from 2006. TVMs were rolled out with an extensive range of tickets from the departure station, including rover tickets and seasons loaded onto smartcards. But there was still no compulsion to buy your ticket before boarding, though there had been huge growth in passenger numbers in the previous two decades which made onboard fare collection and ticket checking increasingly difficult.

In our part of the world, things began to change in the later days of the Serco-Abellio franchise. Financial pressures became more acute, and there was a realisation that fare evasion was rife. The railway was flooded with extra staff, checking and selling tickets on trains but also turning up at unstaffed stations to issue and check tickets. This approach reduced evasion, but was clearly inefficient. Northern started a "Buy Before you Board" campaign in 2016, installed barriers at Harrogate in 2017 then, in May 2018, brought in a penalty of £20 for passengers who had not already purchased their ticket – marking the end of the Paytrain era. TVMs had been upgraded to correctly deal with mindboggling evening peak fare rules – forced on Northern in 2014 to increase revenue, so that many passengers had to select their return journey at the outset. Many still do. Supporting the unreliable and complex TVMs, ticket purchase options included a mobile app since 2017, alongside online sales with emailed tickets. There was now "no excuse" for not having bought (the correct) ticket before boarding the train.

But things went too far. A zero tolerance approach meant many people falling foul of the rules were very harshly treated by Northern and other operators – not for deliberate evasion, but for some minor oversights – or, we think, just a broken TVM! Rather than being given a chance to just pay an excess, or to pay the penalty, they were given a criminal conviction in absentia by misuse of legislation dating from 1889. The 74,000 convictions were later overturned but those affected had suffered serious disruption to their lives.

We are now worlds away from the simplicity of hopping on a bus!

Choosing your return journey on departure is often impossible, and the arcane rules for evening peak journeys (especially those involving changes at Leeds or Manchester) will be lost on most travellers. More recently, Northern brought in advance fares on many journeys to help post-pandemic traffic recovery – including same day advance tickets. Website and app channels strongly push these even if they are not the most appropriate - or maybe not even cheapest – ticket. Flexible options are downplayed. Often availability of advance fares for part of a journey makes split ticketing sensible. Purchasing a rail ticket has become fraught for many trips.

Personally, despite spending much time checking the options, I often later realise my choice wasn't optimal - and feel ripped off.

For the past decade, the rail industry has spoken at length of the need to simplify rail fares - while seeming to introduce greater complexities year by year. And inadequacies in the digital sales channels which now dominate exacerbate the problem. Other than for a regular commuter or the simplest of journeys, I believe our complex fares system means the need to buy a ticket before boarding has become a significant barrier to rail travel. **Which is why a workable PAYG ticketing system is so essential for the future of the railway!**

systems were prepaid like the Oystercard used on London Transport since 2003, though I had first used a similar product abroad as long ago as 1985.

More recent systems have used contactless payment cards, such as to expand use on the rail network outside the TfL area in South East England. Manchester Metrolink have had this since 2019, and the South Wales rail network went live in 2024.

Downsides with these contactless systems include the impossibility of determining exact trains or routes taken, or of reconciling journeys where the passenger didn't tap out (incurring huge penalty fares). Expensive bank card readers are needed, and there are complex security and privacy issues in handling the financial data from payment cards. Families can't be handled. Other issues – like the lack of railcard acceptance – should be solvable given the will.

Many of the problems with systems using contactless payment cards are dealt with in this new generation of GPS-based PAYG apps used in the latest trials. They can be rolled out quickly with no need to invest in bank card readers across the network.

### Northern's Leeds-Harrogate PAYG trial

Northern's first trial, between Leeds and Harrogate, started on 29 September. Running for 9 months, it aims to recruit 1000 passengers to join the test – incentivised by a £15 credit. It uses the Hopsta app supplied by Tracsis. I found it very easy to download, register (including my railcard) and start using in anger, but that shouldn't have been a surprise as this app has been extensively trialled by Scotrail since 2024. After a successful start around Glasgow this trial was extended and now covers a huge area from Edinburgh across to Helensburgh, Ayr and Lanark!

In England, DfT started a PAYG trial in September with East Midlands Railway using an app from Trainline. Northern is initiating two further trials this year – using the Fairtiq app between Sheffield and Doncaster, and the Hop On app between Sheffield and Barnsley.

**You need a smartphone** – 95% of the population have them – and the app is available in Android and iOS versions. A limitation is that it is only available to adults over 18 years, and only caters for a single passenger. Travel is not pre-paid: you register with your personal and bank card details and payment is taken at the end of the day after travel. A range of five common individual railcards can also be linked during registration.

It is only available for standard class travel, but can be used on multiple operators though it is managed by Northern.

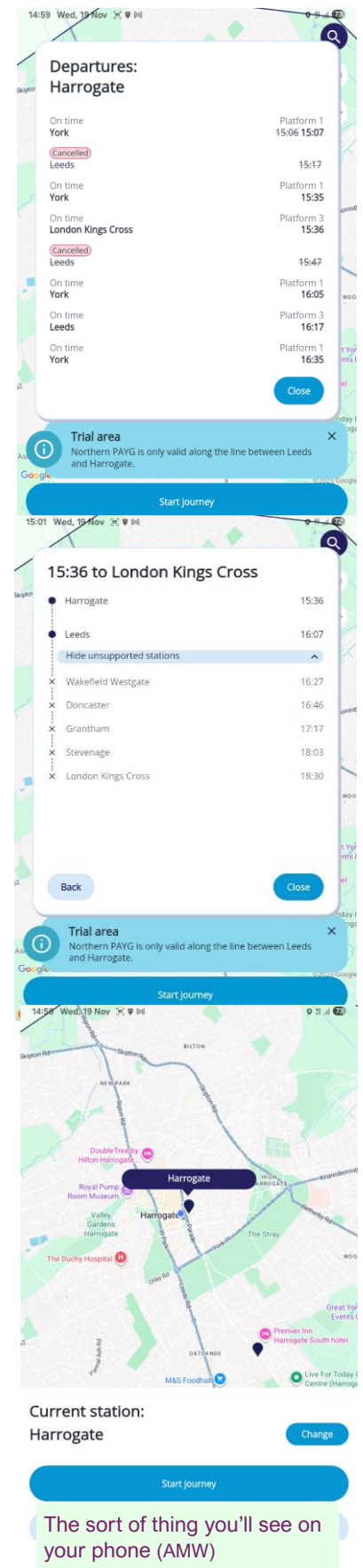
These app-based PAYG systems should be capable of development to cater for family groups travelling together, including relevant railcards, with a single “x adults plus y children” barcode ticket displayed – though manual intervention will be needed at barriers. (How much longer are we going to need barriers? – Ed)

Delay repay refunds have to be requested using normal channels, but one imagines they could be incorporated into the app in the future as an automated feature.

### A journey using the Harrogate Line app trial

You open the app on your phone or other device, and are given a map with your location and nearby stations. Tapping gives you a useful live departure board for each station, with details of station calls for each service and any delays. You feel in control of your journey just with this single app open.

- You tap to start a journey. You are offered your nearest station and asked to confirm. A barcode ticket is then created for passing through barriers and for checking on trains – the ticket has an origin but no destination.
- The app uses GPS to follow the journey for accurate charging and for fraud prevention. It checks the route taken, the validity of the start and end points, and allows resolution of incomplete journeys – the equivalent of forgetting to tap out. But it can also detect exactly which service you boarded, crucial for charging correct fares around peak times. I've tested this aspect and been impressed. It also worked fine on a rail replacement bus service!
- Break of journey is catered for – you end one trip and start a new one at the break point, but the app cleverly combines the legs to charge the correct lower overall fare. →





- After exiting your destination station you tap to end your journey, the barcode ticket is deleted and you receive a provisional fare which is then reconciled using the GPS data to the exact service you travelled upon, for precise application of peak fares rules. This can take 24 hours.

There's a record of journeys made and fares charged which can be used as a receipt for expense purposes.

## Commercial aspects

Aside from the mechanics of operation, there's the commercial issues of how the fares and caps are pitched and how they'll work for commuters and for discretionary leisure travel.

The app is designed to give the cheapest walk-on fare, rather than the best value fare overall. Only single tickets are available – using special PAYG fares based on single leg pricing, which are half the return fares – off-peak and anytime. These are great value compared to normal flexible single fares. It may still be possible to save a bit more with advance singles, but it's probably not worth the risk and inflexibility.

Any recurrent journeys between two stations are capped each week (Monday to Sunday) at the weekly season ticket for that trip. For the most regular commuters it may still be possible to save with monthly and annual seasons.

There is an overall daily and weekly cap which, for this trial, corresponds to the Harrogate-Leeds anytime return and weekly season costs.

Thanks to the cap, PAYG would always be a better option than the weekly season ticket because there may be unexpected days absent from the office, or when journeys are made outside the peak. ***This would also be a boon for disabled railcard holders who can't get discounted season tickets.*** Flexi-seasons, trialled first on the Harrogate line in 2020, offer 8 journeys in 28 days at a discount of 8% on anytime fares and are now available to store in the northern app, to be activated on the day for travel. They are convenient to use, may offer a saving and should still have a role.

Benefits for customers over contactless bank card systems (as used in L&SE) include acceptance of several railcards, availability of receipts for expenses, correct charging of peak fares and easier resolution of 'hanging' journeys.

For the railway, it can quickly be scaled up without investment in bank card readers. EMR said they expected their trial to be revenue neutral, with easier purchase of best value fares growing irregular travel while possibly being offset by reduced takings for regular commuters. I think that's a pessimistic view!



## Roll-out

PAYG rail travel is only ever going to be an extra option, with season tickets and long distance advance fares still playing a role **while ticket offices and TVMs will still provide essential services, catering for younger travellers and those without smartphones and bank cards.** However I believe the opportunity for the railway, and for the travelling public, is enormous. The successful trial in Scotland shows how quickly and easily this new generation of PAYG can be deployed. After a decade of zero progress for a PAYG scheme across the North, we now need to grab the chance to get this rolled out on our railways as quickly as possible. ***I can think of three main obstacles.***

The first is trying to integrate with buses and trams at the outset, which would derail the project. Paying for a bus trip is a very simple process, with contactless payment and capped fares, and this is not a barrier to bus use. Tracsis say their Hopsta app is capable of integration with other modes, but this can be considered later. In the meantime other larger obstacles to integration can be dealt with – such as improved real time information, timetable coordination and more convenient physical transfers, with improved signage.

The second obstacle is the apparent determination to extend "airline pricing" to intercity journeys, building on the awful trial run by LNER. This is totally incompatible with the concept of a simple, accessible PAYG rail network. Tyneside and Teesside can't be left cut off from the rest of the North.

The third possible obstacle is the existence of different local solutions in each county. These would be no help for journeys which cross one or several county boundaries, and could involve the wasteful reinvention of wheels. The imminent bank card PAYG for Greater Manchester rail services will be of benefit for GM residents making multimodal trips, but this will operate alongside other existing ticketing options, and is entirely capable of working alongside an app such as Hopsta. In preparation for PAYG, GM single fares are being changed to be half the return fare, "on the day" advance tickets are being withdrawn, and presumably split ticketing anomalies are also being addressed. However Mayors will be protective of their local 'Bee' and 'Weaver' schemes and may view a rail PAYG rollout across the North as an irrelevance or even a threat.

This Hopsta app could have daily and weekly caps for rail travel entirely within a county boundary matching existing products, as well as the weekly season cap for recurrent journeys. It would work perfectly alongside some local solutions covering all public transport modes within each county.

***Passengers should be able to use a single GPS-based PAYG app to travel by train across the North and the Midlands confident of getting the best value walk-on fare for your journey.***

Points of view from

Nina Smith, Chair, Railfuture Yorkshire Branch

# Northern increasingly impressive!

**“30 by 30”** I am increasingly impressed by Northern. They know they have much to improve. Their Stakeholder Team are excellent in their communications – probably best in the industry. Their revenue and passenger numbers are increasing significantly year on year<sup>2</sup> – commuters have returned, and leisure traffic continues to grow. Northern is ambitious. At stakeholder conferences in November, Alex Hornby, Operations and Customer Director announced “30 by 30” – **an aim to increase passenger numbers 30% by 2030.**

It's a bold plan and one that has the full support of Railfuture. But I can't help thinking it can only be achieved if Northern gets additional rolling stock. Increasing numbers of rush hour and weekend trains are now filled to the gills. Those that are not overcrowded have little extra room, and new passengers are unlikely to become regulars if they have to stand or, worse, turn up at their local station and are unable to get on an overcrowded train. This happens some weekends at Hope Valley line stations. On some commuter services, seats are filling up earlier, and the standing areas are once again becoming packed like sardines during the latter stages of their journey.

**It is thus vital that Northern gets additional rolling stock very soon.** There are probably sufficient second hand electric trains out there to strengthen Northern's electric fleet, assuming HM Treasury allows Northern to acquire them. But for non-electrified routes it's a different story. Northern's first non-electric new trains are not scheduled to arrive until late 2031. Northern also desperately needs more diesel trains to cater for immediate needs. They need the twenty-seven class 158 units that should become available from Transport for Wales in 2027, but other train operators will probably want them too, so how many will Northern get?

I therefore call upon the government to urgently release funding to enable Northern to build more class 195 units “off the shelf” – ideally some extra 3 and 4 car train sets, but at least extra trailer carriages to strengthen some 2 car units into 3 car and some 3 car units into four.

## Rail reform bill

The Rail Reform Bill has begun its journey through parliament. Once passed, Great British Railways<sup>3</sup> can be formally established. Details of the bill which to be rigorously discussed in parliament will include the power of the new consumer body, including whether it will have representation from passenger groups such as Railfuture.

The role of **open access** on the passenger railway will be the subject of debate. Open access only exists because of the failure of franchised operators to fill gaps in routes and services, and to offer more competitive fares. If GBR continues the pattern of failing to innovate, then in my view there is an enormous potential gap-filling role for open access and I hope that both GBR and ORR will allow this. Lord Hendy's believed lukewarm attitude needs to change. It is also important that the new passengers' watchdog is consulted.

**Freight** is another major concern. Will there be sufficient freight paths to achieve the Government's unambitious objective of a 75% increase in freight traffic by 2050, or 3% a year. There is wide public support for reducing the number of lorry journeys, and this is important for climate, air quality, road safety, road congestion and road maintenance reasons. Ambition is needed here, but our already overcrowded railway on key routes throws up real challenges.

**Rail Minister Lord Hendy boasts three big objectives for GBR:** A more efficient, integrated railway; greatly improved performance; and a smaller “subsidy” (I use parenthesis because the cost of running a public service should not be described as a subsidy.)

I fully support the first two objectives but disagree with the third. If the railways can be run more efficiently, then cost savings must be ploughed back into the railway: to provide more rolling stock, and open or reopen new lines and stations. ***Our railway system and our train fleet are inadequate for growing demand, for enabling rail to tempt more people out of their cars, for getting more freight onto rail, and for enabling rail to play an even larger role towards net-zero – reducing carbon dioxide and other emissions.*** (Although given the vast power consumption of the gigantic data centres that AI requires, I sometime wonder if the planet is on a spiral towards being uninhabitable by humans and many other creatures?)

## My travels within the UK

I have made several journeys on different train operating companies recently gaining an interesting insight into each. One lesson was that Northern's newer rolling stock, the CAF 195/331 units, are better laid out for the passenger than several other operators' trains – not least the Thameslink class 700s and GWR Azumas, which have dreadful hard seating thanks (I think) to DfT interference in the specification.

<sup>2</sup> ORR footfall statistics are due as we go to press. Full report in next issue – JSW.

<sup>3</sup> Personally, I would prefer this Johnsonian name to be shortened to just GB Rail or GB Railways – NS. (How about plain “British Rail”? Sorry – JSW)

The biggest passenger comfort problem with Northern CAFs is that they only have one toilet, something which will be corrected in the specification for the new generation of trains, thanks to feedback from Railfuture and others. We can but hope that when the CAFs are due a major internal deep clean and refresh, a second toilet is retrofitted – at least on the 195s that are used on long distance services to Chester, Nottingham, Lincoln and Blackpool.

So let me recount some of my journey.

**Manchester Metrolink and Bee Network:** On one journey, I arrived on time on in Manchester by my local service into Victoria station, and caught a tram to Piccadilly. Much of Manchester's tram system is excellent, but I have two criticisms. One is of the seats which are little more than a plastic shell, OK for cross-town journeys, but less acceptable for Bury to Manchester. West Midlands trams have similar seats, but Nottingham has more acceptable ones. We can but hope that the forthcoming West Yorkshire trams have seats comparable to those on local buses.

**A big improvement needed on Metrolink is for better information to be provided in the main part of Victoria station as to when the next trams are coming, and where they are going; also which trams go to which key central Manchester stops.** There also needs to be good information at Victoria about the Bee Network buses that go from outside the station, as well as those from Shude Hill, just up the road. Despite the undoubted improvements to services made by the Bee Network, TfGM needs to make inter-modal travel seamless for passengers

**Transport for Wales:** My next train was the 12.30 Transport for Wales service to Cardiff, which is booked for a class 68 loco hauling five Mark 4 carriages. I had booked an advance First Class ticket for a reasonable price, hoping to enjoy the excellent TfW catering – you can get a proper breakfast, lunch or dinner on these trains for reasonable cost, as well as lighter snacks. To my horror, the train in the platform was a CAF class 197/1 three carriage DMU. Apparently, there was a fault with the loco hauled train. So we were all crammed into the three car train, with lots of people standing as far as Shrewsbury. I was lucky to get a seat, albeit one over the wheels, so endured a jerky journey that made typing a challenge. Because of the crowding, the catering trolley couldn't get down until after Shrewsbury. When it did arrive, the only food was crisps and cakes, not even sandwiches. As for the 197s, which are similar to Northern's 195s structurally and mechanically, but have end gangways enabling corridor connections between units, the seats are good by current standards. These trains are an adequate replacement for the 158s, but are not suitable for inter-city journey of more than three hours. TfW needs more cascaded Mark 4 sets, so they can also provide these excellent trains on the Swansea and west Wales trains.

My next train was the 16.06 from Cardiff to Swansea – another disappointment. A two car 150 with people standing for a one hour semi fast inter-city journey. Not good enough! At least both this train and the 197 ran to time.

Two days later, from Cardiff to Abergavenny, I travelled standard class in a Mark 4 carriage on a TfW Holyhead train. My airline seat was comfortable, but a bit lacking in leg room.

Up until now, every journey on time.

My final TfW journey was three days later, from Abergavenny to Hereford, the first leg of a journey to Birmingham. The train was a class 197, running a few minutes late. This was Holyhead train, and is booked for a 197, as are all bar one Holyhead trains. These really should all be loco hauled trains with First Class and full catering but, of course, TfW doesn't have sufficient of these and, rightly, the Manchester service gets priority with every second train booked for loco hauled.

**Great Western Railway:** I made my first trip on a GWR Azuma, from Swansea to Cardiff in Standard class. The seats are hard and make the standard class seats on LNER'S Azumas seem like armchairs! This is unacceptable. How do you encourage a non-captive audience to travel by train when they are used to comfortable seats in their car? The Azuma itself is a good train, but these really need reseating.

**West Midlands Railway:** My connection at Hereford from the TfW service was tight, but the Birmingham service was delayed due to another late running service. We lost more time *en route* and were 19 minutes late into Birmingham. The train was a West Midlands Railway CAF class 196 DMU.

Whilst the seats were OK to sit on, there was nowhere to stretch your legs if you sat in an airline window seat. The seats were fixed to the floor by a thick diagonal bar directly in front of a passenger's seat. These bars are normally set further back under the seat, vertical and out of feet's way. I am advised that this design gives a clear floor under the gangway seat, making cleaning easier. So much for putting passengers first!

Not enough space on trains, problems keeping to time. Fair summary of hard-pressed Cross Country? Heading north out of Sheffield. (JSW)



**Cross Country Trains:** After a 10 minute hop to Birmingham International on an Avanti 390, and a day at the NEC, I returned to Manchester on the 17.41, a Cross Country train which starts at Bournemouth and has been late every time I have caught it. 15 mins late this time, and half an hour by Manchester. I was travelling first class (advance), to get a comfortable seat and avoid the sardine like conditions of Standard class on this 5 car train. It's always crowded, so why is it not 8 to 10 carriages? The answer of course being that XC is short of rolling stock thanks to our wonderful DfT making them get rid of their HST sets - now running in Mexico! They need all the voyagers being released by Avanti, and maybe some EMT Meridians as well, although some of these should be used to upgrade and strengthen the Norwich-Liverpool service.

The main benefit of first class on this train was comfort; refreshments were merely a hot drink and a cake. →



→ But **Avanti** run a First Class lounge at the station where you can serve yourself with free hot or cold drinks, and savoury and sweet snacks, And there are using a dedicated toilet facilities.

**LNER:** A week later I went to see family in rural Dorset, using LNER to London for the first time in years, normally preferring Grand Central from Halifax. But LNER was cheaper for First Class advance tickets with generous comfortable seats, a world away from those in Standard Class. Service was excellent, with polite and efficient hosts serving a *gratis* light lunch and beverages.

My only complaint was difficulty in typing on a smart phone, due either to the train's suspension or to the state of the track. I'm not sure which. My return journey two days later was similar, with little difference in the food being served on Sunday.

I will continue to oppose LNER's policy regarding their ticketing "simplification" pilot, but I was impressed with the service I received.

**South Western Railway:** I used SWR in on two autumn trips. September took me from Waterloo to Hampton Court on a new Derby-built Bombardier *Arterio* class 701 train. A new design for Britain, these are 10 carriages long with a continuous straight gangway the length of the train. A good suburban high capacity train, with 2+2 seating. There is also a five car version, which has only one toilet – surely not considered acceptable.

In November, I travelled from Waterloo to Salisbury on 159 trains, a variation of our familiar 158s, Seating was comfortable, timekeeping excellent. Slack seemed to have been built into the schedule. On my return, I had a rail replacement bus as far as Andover – a new minibus with a high-spec interior, marred somewhat by vibrations.

**Southern Railway and Thameslink:** September also took me from Victoria to Cheam on a Southern Derby-built Bombardier class 377 *Electrostar*. Excellent trains: different sub-classes have different seating according to whether suburban or longer distance sets.

Thameslink class 700s were a total contrast, Siemens *Desiro* units are good trains, **but their seats are even worse than I had been led to believe**. The squab feels like a plank of wood with a thin cloth covering. That these are used on the Brighton to Bedford route, a two and a half hour journey, is scandalous and is apparently the fault of our friends at DfT, probably under orders from HM Treasury, a department of state that needs to understand the railway and train travel. **Thank goodness Northern was able to specify reasonable seats on its CAF trains – some things are better here than in parts of the south!**

## Priorities wrong again!

Which takes us back to government priorities. Ely in Cambridgeshire has an important railway junction of national significance. Amongst the services which use it are container trains from Felixstowe Port – huge amounts of freight to (and from) destinations in the Midlands and Scotland – as well as the North of England. But there is insufficient track and junction capacity for the number of trains that could be run, thwarting the urgent need for modal shift road to rail.

Campaigners have been advocating the need for major improvements – Network Rail's **Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Programme** ([Ely area capacity enhancement - Network Rail](#)) – since 2000. The government, like its predecessors, has failed (so far) to find the necessary funding. Recently, transport minister Lilian Greenwood told the Commons that "this scheme is in the pipeline of future enhancements and will be reconsidered as further funding becomes available." [It is perhaps worth adding that there was a debate in the House of Commons on 2 December about the proposal, with multi-party support for the Ely scheme: [see link](#) (page 1136 et seq) – Ed]

The cost would be tens of millions, and perhaps the low hundreds of millions<sup>4</sup>, of pounds, yet this government is prepared to commit £9billion to build a road tunnel under the Thames ("the Thames Gateway Project") which will surely result in a reverse modal shift from rail to road and contribute further to the climate emergency which is causing increasing havoc and suffering. **Surely we should be putting planet before private interests?**

## Fares freeze good – more reform needed!

**Very welcome good news in the Budget is the freezing of regulated fares until 2027.**

There is another fares reform that concerns the non- refundable nature of Advance tickets. A very large number of passengers use Advance tickets because they are the only fares that many people can afford, and sometimes the only fares that weigh the balance in favour of trains instead of going by car. But purchasing these tickets, especially well in advance carries a large financial risk, as these tickets are non-refundable. I nearly had to cancel a visit to my family in Wiltshire for health reasons, and if I had done so, and could not change the tickets to another date, I would have lost over £100. This is unfair. **I propose that all Advance tickets should be refundable minus a penalty of, say, £20; the £20**



Like many modern trains a bit of a curate's egg? LNER Azuma. Nice food in first class, firm seats in standard but better than GWR! Late summer foliage entering Harrogate. (JSW)

<sup>4</sup> Up to £500 million has been quoted but seems to have been played down by the government. [ely area capacity enhancement cost - Search.](#)

would cover outward and return journeys. The refund would be available also in cases where someone misses their booked train and has to buy an expensive ticket for a later train to get to their destination. In this latter case, the transaction could take place at a booking office, on the train, or on-line. **The Government should bring in this reform immediately and not wait for GBR.** – NS 2 Dec and 4 Dec'2025

# Cudworth: the line they closed twice

by Andrew Whitworth

This December, Northern are starting a new hourly fast service between Leeds and Sheffield, calling at Wakefield Westgate and running via Moorthorpe. Anyone who has had to squeeze onto a single Voyager (or a Northern 195) unit to make this journey will know how much this development will be welcomed. At a press conference in October, the mayors of West and South Yorkshire declared their aim to have four fast services per hour linking these two cities as part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail package.

The Mayors acknowledged that capacity improvements at Leeds and Sheffield stations would be necessary to achieve this. But what of the routes in between? This brought to mind a stretch of railway which closed around 40 years ago with little fuss – unlike the furore over the similar Woodhead route. The Cudworth route was a main line that connected Wath Rd Jn (Swinton) with Goose Hill Jn (Normanton). It seems largely forgotten today.

It's a railway with a noble pedigree – built by George Stephenson in 1840 it was the first and, for a decade, the only line linking Yorkshire with London. Following river valleys in sweeping curves, it had an easily graded and fast alignment – though at the expense of not serving Wakefield and Sheffield directly. The scenery may have been pleasant in 1840, but in latter days it was the excitement of heavy industry which characterised the line. Who could forget the blazing fires and acrid smells of the Manvers Main coking plant?

This was part of the Midland main line, intensively used by freight and passenger traffic. In Beeching's 1963 Reshaping report it was to remain open for expresses but lose its local services – these duly finished in January 1968 when Royston, Cudworth and Wath stations closed. However problems with severe mining subsidence on the line led to the decision to reroute expresses via Moorthorpe, and the route is shown as freight only in the March 1967 Network for Development plan. A closure notice was posted and no objections were received. This seemed to be an unloved railway. Expresses were diverted away in October 1968, though heavy freight traffic remained.

Within four years, however, the switch was to be reversed as a result of changes in mining subsidence patterns. This time the Moorthorpe line was to lose its express services to Sheffield from both Leeds and York. Some direct Leeds services started via Cudworth in May 1972, then in May 1973 all Leeds services were transferred, including those calling at Wakefield. York services were diverted via Castleford to join this route.

This situation continued for a happy decade. **An article by Noel Proudlock, a train planner in the 1970s, describes how the potential to upgrade the route to 115 mph running for NE/SW Inter City 125s was considered – promising times of 35 minutes to Sheffield from Leeds, and 45 minutes from York.** However by the mid-1980s further savings were being sought with route rationalisation driven by sectorisation, and subsidence issues had recurred on our line. The prospective opening of the Selby diversion meant York to Sheffield services could be accelerated by routing via Doncaster, with useful connections there. So any incipient plans for a high-speed upgrade were abandoned, regular services ceased using the Cudworth route in October 1982, and the Doncaster plan was actioned in May 1984. Inter City was reducing its fixed costs by concentrating services where possible.

At this point, freight traffic on the Cudworth route was also in decline. Residual seasonal passenger services on the line were proposed for removal, and a second closure was approved, with the last dated services running in summer 1985. Then in June 1987 the railway closed as a through route for freight, being severed at both the North and South ends. Since the end of Houghton Main and Grimethorpe collieries in 1993, only the section from Crofton to the Ardagh glassworks near Cudworth remains use for freight, plus occasional proving runs by trains from Crofton depot.

At the southern end, the formation has been lost to a new road and the huge business park at Wath, making the route very expensive if not impractical to reinstate.

**Which is all very tragic, as this historic and useful stretch of main line railway could well have helped resolve today's capacity problems.**



Meadowhall Interchange was barely a twinkle in planners' eyes when the Cudworth line closed. Now you can change here for Sheffield's trams. But how are we going to get more main line trains through here? (JSW)



# Leeds and Yorkshire coast corridor

by Graham Collett, Railfuture Yorkshire Vice Chair  
with Selby notes by Terry French

**Leeds platform 17 and lift repositioning:** Fellow Rf Yorkshire committee member Kevin Swift and I (*writes GC*) had a good follow-up meeting with James Moy of Network Rail, late October. James said costs are being reviewed and some of the work pencilled in may not happen. However, widening of platform 17, with its extension to take two 3-car trains, and the repositioning of the lifts are seen as priorities. The current lift to platforms 16 and 17 will remain in use during the work. Semi-fast services using platform 17 to Nottingham and Lincoln are amongst the best performers in post pandemic recovery and are currently 34% and 24% oversubscribed. The same platforms also accommodate local trains to Knottingley via Castleford, which is part of the reason why platform extension is needed.

The current infrastructure is holding back capacity improvements on these services by limiting them to 2 cars each. There are no current plans to widen the viaduct shortly after P17.

It is anticipated work will be completed so that services can use the extended platform from January 2028.

**Leeds-York:** TransPennine Route Upgrade work at Church Fenton station is the cause of the current weekend closures between York and Leeds. There will now only be one passing loop instead of the two originally planned as part of the upgrade. Continued cancellations and delays to services are causing passengers to have to wait up to 2 hours at this station, which lacks a **waiting room** and **toilets**. Selby RUG (see points by Terry French below) has continued to take up this issue with Northern and the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (Y&NYCA). We are hopeful that the upgrade work will include both these important facilities as well as improved lighting and lifts.

Just off the “main” line options on improving accessibility at **Sherburn-in-Elmet** station so that TransPennine Express trains can call are being considered. Nearby (in geographical if not rail terms) a study by all the authorities along the (Leeds-) **Knottingley-Goole** line – looking at the wider economic benefits of increasing the service to hourly – has been completed in draft form. A public survey on increasing the service attracted 700 to 800 responses and will be published in the New Year.

**York station issues including accessibility:** As Railfuture lead on accessibility, I attended the November meeting of the fairly new York station accessibility group, chaired by our member Ian Lawson. Good progress is being made in taking up issues which affect bus, rail and taxi passengers in North Yorkshire and ensuring that the needs of disabled passengers are built into future plans. The group is attended by officers from North Yorkshire, the City of York and the Combined Authority as well as several North Yorkshire based transport groups and some national organisations. It was reported that the first meeting of the group looking at the future capacity needs of York station (taking account of the York Central development) had been held.

The current York station gateway scheme is due to be completed in 2026. Beyond that studies are under way to look at station capacity needs by the 2050s. NR has proposed an extended and widened footbridge to link with the new Western entrance and the York Central development. This is likely to lead to a demand for improvements in station facilities and a new, wider entrance. A workshop with LNER, CYC and disabled people’s groups is also planned.

Rf Yorkshire Chair Nina Smith and I met Graham North, rail officer at Y&NYCA, to get an update on Mayor David Skaith’s rail priorities.

**York-Scarborough:** There is a strong economic case for a half-hourly service, but this is unlikely to be possible before May or December 2028. A study of the York-Scarborough corridor which will look at all transport modes and planned housing growth is starting in the New Year.

**Haxby** station is funded by Department for Transport (DfT) and City of York Council and will be built by Network Rail (NR). Work is ongoing to get outline planning approval, with the aim of opening in May 2028. Meanwhile at **Malton** studies have been done with Network Rail on adding a second platform, with options on location.



Malton. TransPennine from Scarborough. A second platform could make it easier to have more trains. Meanwhile do grice the station café, place of absolute joy little changed from our snapper's childhood. (JSW)

A particular concern is to reduce the level crossing barriers downtime, due to the high level of traffic using that crossing. At **Seamer**, housing growth over the last 5 years has boosted use of the station and a larger, accessible car park is being considered. Planned housing developments, a new factory and a planned NHS diagnostic centre will further increase patronage.

At **Scarborough** itself, front-of-station improvements are due to start soon. The current roofing work should end by Spring 2026. Work on potential for further improvements is under way.

**Harrogate and beyond:** A corridor study on York to Harrogate – probably including West Yorkshire(?) – is being undertaken. As previously noted, the proposed third track off the Harrogate line from Skelton Junction into York has been postponed pending other studies on rail flows which could affect this scheme.

**Northallerton and Thirsk:** Y&NYCA is continuing to lobby for a better service for Northallerton. However, the prospects for achieving this in the short term, given the major rewrite of the East Coast Main Line timetable from December 2024 are not good! The prospects for Thirsk are no better, although the creation of a better walking and cycling route to the town centre is planned, as well as a bus link from Ripon.

**Esk Valley good news:** The morning commuter train from Whitby is reinstated in the ECML December timetable (see [Realtime Trains | Departures from Whitby all day on 15/12/2025](#)) and the CA are working with Northern on further service increases.



**Y&NYCA local transport strategy:** A draft LTP is being developed over the next 6 months and will go out for consultation Spring-Summer 2026.

The strategy will need to reflect an expected increase of 60 000 houses across North Yorkshire. A rail plan will form part, and is expected to include mention of **Skipton to Colne reopening**. The Y&NYCA's view is that this scheme will deliver larger benefits to Lancashire and West Yorkshire, so they would expect these authorities to lead. The Yorkshire Plan for Rail (part of the White Rose Agreement) is being studied by DfT, with the recognition that more cash is going to be needed. The combined authority's current budget for rail – less than £100m – can only be spent on studies. Northern's new rolling stock is not expected until 2030/31, so it may be possible to cascade some units from Transport for Wales to help capacity issues. **Bus add-on tickets** to rail journeys are to be introduced in several zones across authority's area, including once rail-served Hawes. We have been invited to send our views on these.

**Selby and District Rail Users Group points:** Graham (above) refers to Church Fenton, with much happening on the TRU works. SADRUG (*writes Terry French, Secretary*) has been advised that the road bridge over the station will have to be replaced to fit in the overhead wires. This is likely to require a lengthy road closure. Also, as part of the works we are campaigning for the station to be made accessibility compliant. At **Ulleskelf Station** we are campaigning along with other stakeholders for a more consistent service which will meet the needs of Ulleskelf residents. We say more trains at Ulleskelf could alleviate parking issues at Church Fenton station. Representatives from our group and local parish councils lobbied Northern Trains at a recent meeting at the office of Sir Alec Shelbrooke, MP

**Selby Gateway and station:** The Group was disappointed that work on the Selby Gateway improvements was postponed to December. Work had still to start as this was subedited this on the 5th. The works are designed to provide a more attractive environment around the station and improve access. Regarding the station refurbishment elements, discussions are still taking place with Network Rail and York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority over funding and delivery. Meanwhile local collage students artwork has been unveiled at the station, in the presence of TPE Managing Director Chris Jackson, and Keir Mather MP for Selby. **More on Selby area in next YRC, we hope!**





# In touch with MP: a lesson in campaigning

By Ann Hindley, Secretary Railfuture Yorkshire

Yorkshire Railfuture was contacted over the summer by Lee Pitcher, MP for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme, asking for a meeting about the Doncaster-Scunthorpe line. We met early October. David Harby was there from Rf Lincolnshire branch. Following the small timetable change granted by Northern for this December, we need further improvements in the stopping service on the line, which currently only runs every two hours (previously hourly). **On our Doncaster-Scunthorpe route, Office for Road and Rail data showing halving of numbers at Crowle and Althorpe (two of the affected stations) jumps out of the page.** (Some Crowle figures in caption, foot of page).

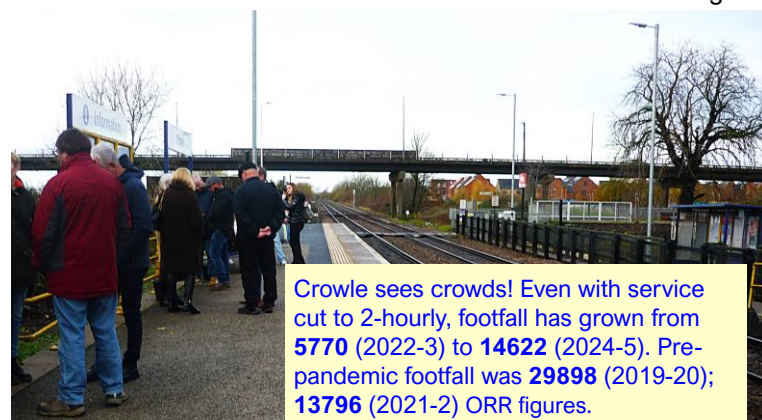
Between us all, we have been able to direct the MP and his researcher to examples of successful campaigning, such as SENRUG on the recently opened South East Northumberland line, and the Hope Valley. All have been able to give him some guidance in terms of what makes for a successful campaign.

Discussions have also taken place around the possibility of TransPennine Express stopping at Althorpe, Crowle, Thorne South, Hatfield & Stainforth, and Kirk Sandal every other hour. Lee and his researcher have explored potential issues with freight traffic. There seem to be none.

An online and paper petition have been circulated in communities on and close to this line and received over 800 signatures so far. This petition was referenced by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, raising concerns with Rail North about the service on the line. Lee has a meeting arranged with SYMCA for the end of November. We know there are a range of obstacles still



Althorpe. 2-hourly train from Scunthorpe has just crossed Keadby bridge over the Trent on its way back to Doncaster in Yorkshire. Neat waiting shelter. (JSW)



Crowle sees crowds! Even with service cut to 2-hourly, footfall has grown from 5770 (2022-3) to 14622 (2024-5). Pre-pandemic footfall was 29898 (2019-20); 13796 (2021-2) ORR figures. (Photo by Ann Hindley)

in terms of finance and political will, but it is

positive that Lee and his staff found out about the existence of the Yorkshire Branch and were confident that we could provide information and guidance, which we did.

Meanwhile, locally, efforts are being made by a local community group to prepare paper information on the timetable to be circulated in local venues to raise awareness that the service does still exist. **And encourage people to use it.**

## Heading towards progress! by Ian Joustra (HPSRUA and Penistone Line Partnership)

In the final months of the previous government, a sum of £48 million from levelling up funding was awarded for improvements to the Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield line. Inevitably, there was a mixture of spin and opacity around this due to the desires to improve service reliability and speed, enable a half-hourly service, and make stations on the line – notably Honley and Lockwood – step-free.

Collectively, these improvements had been costed several years ago at well over £100 million

After the election the plan was paused, then re-announced, but with the plan to initially allocate £1.4million to produce a business case and identify the initial priorities. SLC Consulting are undertaking this work and are working with stakeholders such as the Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield Rail Users Association and the Penistone Line Partnership, as well as local councils and WYCA/SYMCA.

Meetings so far have felt productive, although we wait to see what will be in the final plan. It feels pretty clear that the 2 trains/hr service remains some way off. A faster and more reliable hourly service would be a good first. →

→ step. It appears that the plan is to cascade class 195 trains to the line in due course. But we saw penny pinching when platforms along the line were extended to allow 3 car trains, but only the 20m per car Class150s which will seem a bit short-sighted. (In two senses of the phrase! – Ed.)

Separate from the levelling-up project is a plan to create a large car park at Penistone station. There have been some very large housing developments in the area recently. A footbridge with lifts should replace the uneven board crossing, that resembles a switchback due to the camber of the line. As trains sometimes cross here, and the line is on a sharp curve, there are also safety concerns around its use, particularly as the car park will be on the opposite side of the line from the main entrance.

However, funding for this is not yet secured. →



Two trains (above) at Penistone, variations of the early Sprinter “150” design. One of just two intermediate passing loops in the 20 mile single line from Huddersfield to Barnsley. Photo taken from path passengers must use to access the foot-crossing in order to cross line. Boarded level crossing, right, leads to Sheffield-bound platform – bumpy for wheeled users? Photos by Ian Joustra.

→ Operationally, the line is now almost exclusively worked by 3 car trains, so overcrowding is less of an issue other than at peak and school times. The work at Huddersfield station has extended the platform closer to the station entrance, and right opposite the door to the ‘Head of Steam’. While the service is fairly reliable, the long single track sections and tight turnround times at Sheffield (which is more congested anyway) means that a one-off delay will be carried forward onto subsequent services for much of the day.

# Rails, roads and planes

Endpiece – a bit provocative at times!

by Mike Crowhurst, Yorkshire Railfuture Vice President

(with apologies by Stephen Waring for editorial insertions)

We can’t electrify the Midland Main Line. Can’t build HS2 north of Handsacre. Can’t (yet) build new track at York station for the Harrogate line and ECML. Incredibly, can’t even finish the resilience work at Dawlish. But we can build Heathrow Runway 3, and a new road tunnel under the Thames. New station at Haxby is back on the agenda – a tossed bone?

We do need **some** road schemes. The dualled A66 over Stainmore has been overdue for decades; the single road is lethal. The Lower Thames Crossing will benefit two of the poorest areas in the South East, although the access routes may be overblown: [Lower Thames Crossing - Wikipedia](#). A rail alternative? Well, you might try and restore a link in the Tilbury area, perhaps extend the line from Southend Victoria under the river to join the Sheerness branch – at huge expense!

On a more positive note big works on TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) have continued throughout 2025 and will continue through 2026 and beyond. I am happy to report that my local station Garforth now has its accessible footbridge – like Selby on the same line. And the lifts are working – most of the time. Network Rail send round a more or less monthly bulletin of work planned that might disturb residents. But nobody seems to tell us – especially those of us that are not wired up with computers – when the service is going to be cancelled at weekends. Local services get replaced by buses, through ones take the route via Castleford. →



→ One such week was that of Railfuture's national AGM in Newcastle, so any thoughts of attending and taking a trip on the Ashington new line were abandoned – apologies! The November branch meeting meant using the replacement bus – fare payable – or service bus, free to permit holders, but taking 45 to 50 minutes each way. On such weekends the expensive-looking coach replacement, has been seen sitting in splendid isolation in the station car park, seemingly getting few if any takers. One week there was a coach there all day Saturday, blocking the adjacent service bus stop. It did not return Sunday. What a waste!

Ominously the Network Rail bulletin describes the work as in preparation for electrification *in the future*. Let's hope it happens: good news is we have seen pile-driving for masts. Felt like Mt Kilauea had opened a branch line!

Much was made of silence over the conference season on Mayors Burnham and Rotherham's favourite scheme linking Liverpool and Manchester via both airports (and Warrington). Is this a case of no news is good news?

- Better access to airports may be welcome, but there are already two, arguably three, rail lines linking the two cities. [Edinburgh and Glasgow have three or four passenger rail lines linking them of course – Ed.]
- Secondly, how many people need to travel between airports?
- Thirdly, the proposed new line will go further round but at higher speed, so similar time? More energy used for what passenger benefit?

The scheme appears to reopen a disused east-west route, with parts of what had been HS2, including the costly tunnel under south Manchester. Would the money be better spent widening the Chat Moss (Newton-le-Willows) route adding an extra track on the longest station-free sections. Could existing access to Liverpool Lime St station suffice?

The real gap is east of Manchester towards Sheffield. Much more difficult.

### Work in progress

Turning to TRU work now in progress, Huddersfield is being transformed. I note the old station had 6 platforms: 3 through, 3 bays. The new layout, to be complete in about a year, will also have 6 platforms, but they will be 4 through, and 2 – longer ones. The first of the new bays is an extension of the existing Penistone line platform. Overall one extra through platform will replace one bay. Will it justify the cost and disruption? (The latter including Huddersfield-Brighouse being replaced by buses until the end of next year.)

At Huddersfield of course, four tracks from the east will bottleneck to two, hopefully with a third track to be added beyond the tunnels west of Huddersfield station as far as Marsden. (At one time there were 4 tracks from east of Mirfield all the way to Stalybridge, with the Micklehurst loop for the slow lines west of Standedge Tunnel.) Travelling through Mirfield you can see the work going to create the new pair of fast lines. It seems unfortunate these can not extend as far as Dewsbury station.

With a new line to Bradford a long-term aim we can do little more than speculate about what route this might take.

### Speculation on airports

Here's a bit of provocative speculation on airports. Much excitement becomes audible from time to time about Finningley, Doncaster airport reopening. I have a suspicion this will come to nought again and again, unless and until all airports east of the Pennines from the Tees to the Trent close, starting with Leeds & Bradford (Yeadon). Otherwise there will simply be not enough business to go round and compete with Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle et al.

Finningley is a much better site than Yeadon, better runway, maybe less prone to fog than Yeadon's hilltop site. The others are small fry: East Midlands is largely freight, Teesside barely alive. Finningley, at least arguably, would be easier to connect to the railway than Yeadon – a loop off the East Coast Main Line has been talked about – with links in all directions. It might even encourage better services along the Doncaster-Lincoln line.

Down south, I have formed the view that **if we must** have more air travel to save the economy from collapse, then the option with maximum economic benefit for minimum environmental damage is to bring Gatwick's second runway into full operational use. This seems a better option than Stansted expansion. I am absolutely certain that under no circumstances should Heathrow's third runway go ahead. The whole area is overcrowded, on the ground and in the air. Over many years Heathrow terminals have multiplied but promises of a south/west rail link have never delivered.

But perhaps the question should be **"can our planet's environment afford airport expansion?"**

### Failure of BCR

Peter Bryson of SELRAP, the Skipton-Colne reopening group, has, I think, achieved the previously unattained objective of getting letters on the same subject published simultaneously in both *Modern Railways* (August issue published late July) and *RAIL* (late July). Both letters made the same point – failings of the benefit-cost ratio and business case approach to project evaluation. Skipton station is now busier than one of those serving Heathrow Airport. The branch should put Peter's name forward for the Railfuture Campaigner of the Year.

Finally *Modern Railways* has been aflood with comment on GBR and rail reform from Roger Ford (forensic analysis) and Ian Walmsley with his customary occasional cynicism. Over 20 pages in the November issue.

A piece by Richard Brown, author of memoir *Changing Times Changing Trains*, set an optimistic tone, looking to the future and how railways *ought* to work. Government must give up micromanagement of the railway.

The crosshead is **Back Off Whitehall**.



## Diary: *confirmation and details to follow*

**Monday 12 January 2026, branch meeting online, 10.30.**

**Saturday 14 March, Leeds, Yorkshire Railfuture Annual General Meeting**

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**Please send us your contributions for Spring 2026 issue: by last day of February 2026**

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

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

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