

RAIL USER EXPRESS



railfuture

Campaigning for a bigger better railway

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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Climate change is with us - as it ever was and ever will be. And the lesson from history is clear: adapt or die. For the railways this means greater resilience for the existing network, but also reopening lines to restore alternative routes. The candidates are familiar: Carlisle – Hawick – Tweedbank; Skipton – Colne; Beverley – York; Uckfield – Lewes, and Bere Alston – Tavistock – Okehampton. But this imperative surely adds a new dimension to their respective business cases.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line

ORR figures for station usage on the FNL from 1 April 24 to 31 March 2025 should give Scotrail and Scottish Rail Holdings cause for concern. Overall they are down 8.74% year-on-year, and almost 22% since 2018. Money will need to be spent, and the argument that a business case cannot be made for such expenditure because of the comparatively few people living in the area needs to be dropped. The railway is an integral part of Scotland's infrastructure and must work properly.

In the 6-months to 7 January, both north- and southbound services saw around 30 days when at least one train was cancelled, excluding weather related days when few or no trains ran. And punctuality was far below Scotland's target, with an average of about 80% of trains arriving within 5mins of their scheduled time, but only 68% for the 0700 from Inverness and 56% for the 1600 from Wick. Several were over 1 hour late. The reasons for this poor performance include a lack of infrastructure (ie passing loops), unreliable rolling stock and a high level of train crew illness.

Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group

PENRUG reports many cancellations at the Norwich end of the Liverpool service for various reasons: 28 in October, 39 in November and 42 in December. These figures do not include services that left Norwich but did not reach their scheduled destination, nor services that arrived in Norwich but had not come from their scheduled starting point.

Plans for a new reservoir between March and Chatteris reached the latest pre-application consultation stage in the autumn. Delivering some of its longer distance construction materials by rail could save 350-400 HGV movements/day. The project team is exploring with NR two options for a railhead, and onward transmission to the site via the A141 or a new road.

With buses replacing trains between Norwich and Ipswich at weekends in October, Norwich - Stansted Airport services were often standing room only as London bound passengers sought an alternative route. Greater Anglia (GA) ran some extra trains between Norwich and Cambridge.

At Wymondham, southbound passengers can only access Platform 2 via the footbridge. The DfT has confirmed that Access for All plans to improve its accessibility have been approved for progression to the next stage of development. However, there are more steps in the process before final plans and timelines can be announced.

East Suffolk Transport Association

Last Summer, ESTA Vice-President Peter Aldous engaged with the Sizewell C project, and its effect on train services during and after the construction period. Its Head of Regional External Affairs and Development thanked him for the feedback: "We will ensure that your views are included, and forward an invitation to any forthcoming meetings on this subject."

At ESTA's autumn meeting, Alan Neville of Greater Anglia spoke of the increased rail usage thanks to the new rolling stock and facilities. His colleagues were examining suggestions made by ESTA to tweak the timetable, and he hoped to come back in the New Year with news of what was possible.

ESTA's tabletop exhibition has been displayed in Halesworth, Lowestoft, Saxmundham, Beccles, Westerfield and Felixstowe. It starts with the events that led to the formation of ESTA in 1965, its successful fight against the proposed closure of the Ipswich – Lowestoft line, and the gradual modernisation of trains and service improvements. ESTA is now looking for further opportunities to display it, possibly adapted to promote the series of "Discover" leaflets, two of which (on the Waveney Valley and Blyth Valley) will need new editions, as stocks are virtually exhausted.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

BTPG can sometimes get a quick result. When the 1836 Paddington departure was being re-routed via Bristol and the 1808 was set to be a five-car train, it contacted GWR and they allocated a nine-car unit to avoid overcrowding, and that continued every day for a week.

GWR has yet to respond to BTPG regarding its concerns that IETs freed-up by Class 175 trains in the West Country will not return to Paddington to operate the off-peak service to Bedwyn. From May 2026, it plans to increase the Oxford - Bristol Temple Meads service from two trains a day on Saturdays to every other hour Monday-Saturday, and then hourly from May 2027. This will require two and four IET sets respectively, significantly reducing the chance that the freed-up IETs will return to the Bedwyn service. Naturally BTPG has protested, and the MPs are taking this up.

Hitachi is working on diesel fuel pump issues with the IETs that have caused delays, short formations and cancellations. However, because each failure requires the engine to be removed, and as there is roughly one per carriage, this isn't a quick exercise.

RAILFUTURE

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

NEWS

A very productive Railfuture-sponsored [Parliamentary Reception](#) held on 3 February focused on the Railways Bill and enabled Rf Board members to interact with MPs and the wider railway community. The ground-breaking event also saw the launch of [A Growth Opportunity for Railways](#), a discussion paper on the impacts and potential for GBR.

RAILFUTURE DEVON & CORNWALL

TavyRail, the campaign to reopen the Bere Alston to Tavistock line, has affiliated to Rf. It could form part of the Plymouth Metro that is being developed to improve sustainable transport links to the city, and to reopen a station at Plympton. Devon CC included the line in the Local Transport Plan 2025-2040, and Peninsula Transport in its Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-2050. It now needs funding to go through DfT's Transport Appraisal Guidance business case development.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Discussions are ramping up on the design of GBR and the 30-year Long Term Rail Strategy. The latter aims to bring long-term clarity over the development of the railway, and guide decision making based on five strategic aims. CBT is engaged in discussions on how community rail's role might be further strengthened aligning with these objectives, and working hard to understand the opportunities for its insights to be heard and used through the changes ahead.

In his guest blog for CBT, Rf Honorary President Christian Wolmar highlights just how progressive Welsh transport policy has been in recent years: "Quietly and unobtrusively, Wales has become the transport example that much of the rest of Britain should follow". Transport for Wales has done much to promote sustainable transport options that place the environment and the wellbeing of future generations at their heart.

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

Rail passengers across Britain are being put off claiming refunds for delayed journeys by the complicated and inconsistent claims system, missing out on over £80m/year in compensation. Trainline has launched a "Fair Play on Delay Repay" campaign alongside a petition on Change.org calling for reform of the system. Those buying through independent retailers face an even more complex process: over half of claimants reported their most recent submission required six minutes or longer to complete.

The latest milestone in the £11 billion Transpennine Route Upgrade, Mirfield station in West Yorkshire now includes step-free access, longer platforms and improved facilities.

Amanda Hack, MP for North West Leicestershire, claimed that her Westminster Hall debate on 28 January took efforts to restore passenger services to the Ivanhoe Line between Leicester and Burton a "real step forward". It would be split into two phases: Coalville - Derby via stops at Ashby, Castle Gresley and Burton, and then a link with Leicester including a new Leicester South station close to the King Power Stadium. The RYR bid was found to have a strong case but was scrapped by Labour amid a series of cost-cutting measures, and the Leicestershire CC cabinet member for transport doubts that the project will gain support from the current government.

Alongside Homes England, the Greater Cambridge Partnership is funding a new station in Waterbeach, about a mile-and-a-half north the current one. It will have wider platforms and a cafe, waiting room and toilets, 100 cycle spaces. and a new car park with electric vehicle charging points.

Biggleswade station is now fully a step-free. In a written update to Parliament, Transport Minister Lord Hendy said that of the 50 stations for which Access for All feasibility studies were announced in May 2024, 8 would progress "directly to delivery" and 23 to the "detailed design" stage, but that 19 would not be progressed.

The Chief Strategy Officer of East West Rail (EWR) met Government ministers to discuss how the new Planning and Infrastructure law will help deliver critical infrastructure more quickly and improve public engagement during the planning process. Although it removes the requirement for a statutory consultation ahead of applying for a Development Consent Order, EWR will still undertake a full route-wide consultation this spring.

EWR has selected Bletchley West between Bletchley and Newton Longville as the site of a new Train Maintenance Depot. It would include sidings capable of stabling up to 20 five-car trains alongside a modern workshop and facilities for train washing, heavier maintenance, traction power, staff accommodation, parking and a secure gatehouse.

After a fare dodger admitted travelling on GTR services without buying a ticket 112 times, the judge warned that he could face a custodial sentence because of the number of offences. He could also be ordered to pay more than £18,000 in unpaid fares and legal costs.

An NR [video](#) showcases its latest plans to transform Liverpool Street station, Britain's busiest; over 1,000 people backed them on the City of London's planning portal. With passenger numbers forecast to rise from 100 million to 158 million by 2041, in addition to those on the Underground, the proposed redevelopment is designed to accommodate over 200 million in the decades ahead. On 10 February, the Planning Committee of the City of London passed a resolution to grant planning permission for the redevelopment."

Running every six minutes during the day on weekdays and Saturdays, the new limited-stop SL11 bus linking Abbey Wood to North Greenwich via Thamesmead and Woolwich cuts journey times and improves connections to the Underground, Elizabeth line and DLR. TfL said the route would align with proposals to extend the DLR from Gallions Reach to Beckton Riverside and Thamesmead, which received Government funding in the Autumn Budget.

...and finally

Railway enthusiast Pete Waterman OBE has added some Inspiration to his record-breaking track – a beautifully rendered scale model of the Railway 200 exhibition train that's touring Britain. Identical in every detail but 76 times smaller, it was created over 300 painstaking hours by Andrew Willsher, who matched every colour shade, 3D printed his own custom parts, and used tiny tweezers to apply nearly 350 graphics, some of which are just 1mm tall.

The Northampton & Lamport heritage railway runs for 2 miles between Pitsford & Brampton and Boughton on the old Northampton - Market Harborough line, closed by BR in 1981 but a candidate for reopening. It operates on most Sundays as well as on some Saturdays and Bank Holidays during special events. 2026 marks 30 years since the official opening ceremony in March 1996, so there will be an 'NLR30 Gala' over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

CONSULTATIONS

- Luton Council: [Local Transport Plan 5](#), closes 19 February.
- Lewes District Council: [Local Plan, phase 2 - Spatial Strategy for Development \(incorporating Site Allocations\)](#), closes 28 February.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG): [National Planning Policy Framework](#), closes 10 March.
- Wealden District Council: [Revised Wealden Local Plan](#), closes 20 March.
- MHCLG: [Establishing a Development Corporation in Greater Cambridge](#), closes 1 April.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultations.

EVENTS

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

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

February

- Tuesday 17. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 31 March and 12 May).
- Friday 20. Rf Northern Branches webinar, 1030.
- Saturday 21. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Saturday 28. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ.

March

- Saturday 7. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Pauls Church, Hatfield Road, **St Albans**, 1100 (Also 9 April, Zoom, 1930).
- Saturday 7. East Suffolk Transport Association, **Beccles** Library, Blyburghgate, 1400 (also 16 May (AGM) in Halesworth).
- Monday 9. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 11 May).
- Wednesday 11. Rf West Midlands, Moor Street station, **Birmingham**, 1745 (Also 8 April and 13 May).
- Thursday 12. Rf Yorkshire **Webinar**, 1030.
- Thursday 12. Rf London & South East, Metro & Eastern division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1900 (Also 21 May).
- Saturday 14. Rf Yorkshire AGM, Mill Hill Chapel, City Square, **Leeds**, LS1 5EB, 1300.
- Thursday 19. Community Rail Awards, Pride Park, **Derby**, DE24 8JB.
- Thursday 26. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 7 May).
- Saturday 28. Lakes Line Rail User Group AGM, Stonecross Manor Hotel, **Kendal**, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 8 April. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, (Also 10 June (AGM) in Cleethorpes).
- 14 April. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- 18 April. Rf London and South East Branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, Farrington, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1100.
- 12 May. Rf Thames Valley AGM, West Oxford Community Centre (Mary Town room), Botley Road, Oxford OX2 0BT. 19:00-21:00.
- 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**, Holland.
- 19 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Lovat Arms Hotel, **Beauly**, 1045.
- 4 July. Rf AGM, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF.

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

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