

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

As always, feel free to forward RUEx to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources). If you want further details of any of the stories mentioned, look on the relevant website or, failing that, get back to me so I can send you the full text.

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, see website [here](#) (from the "Membership Type" menu, select "RUG").

Guest User Group of the Month : Copeland Rail Users' Group

CRUG, representing the western and northern sections of the Cumbrian Coast Line, has been around for some time – they celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2013 and now have over 100 members. Harrington station in their area was the first to benefit from the "Harrington Hump" raised platform section, an innovation that resulted from CRUG's lobbying about inconvenient platform heights.

Apart from inadequate station facilities, a prime concern for the group is the infrequent train service, with poor connections at each end of the line and lack of trains on Sundays. There was disappointing news this summer, when it was learnt that the Dept. for Transport had rejected Cumbria County Council's bid for a pilot Sunday service between Whitehaven and Barrow. CRUG argues that this is the only rail line of any length in England without a Sunday service – the fact that the area is a major tourist destination makes the decision all the more deplorable. Members of CRUG do their bit for tourism by helping to maintain stocks of timetables in shops and hotels.

Just when Cumbrian Coast travellers thought they had seen the last of the Pacer units, they're back again causing passengers to complain of the dreadful bone-shaking ride on the many jointed rail sections. There is, however, some good news: plans for the new £3m Workington Station Hub were recently published and completion is expected in 2016.

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from rail user groups around the UK, starting from the Far North and working south. As always, I'm very grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

Friends of the Far North Line – improvements needed in journey time and reliability

FoFNL extends a warm welcome to the new ScotRail operator Abellio and looks forward to working with the company. The urgent need is for a reduction in journey time and an increase in punctuality. They say the line is an all-year lifeline, less dependent on summer visitors than other rural railways. There's the hope that the Far North Line will be included in the "Great Scenic Railways of Scotland" project which involves specially refurbished trains, although the group points out that their stock has already been fitted out with most of the features called for in the project.

Timekeeping on the line over the summer months has left a lot to be desired (as confirmed by an analysis of data on the recenttraintimes.co.uk website) and FoFNL says the industry surely has some remedial work it needs to do to make the trains run on time. The group will be asking Abellio not to copy the off-peak ticket restrictions imposed on Northern Rail passengers because it's already hard enough to make a return journey with anything other than a full price ticket. Network Rail has embarked on a fresh Route Study for Scotland and FoFNL intends to submit comments, confining its thoughts to matters affecting rural lines.

New ticket barriers have been installed at Inverness station and FoFNL thinks they're more a hindrance than a help. The barriers have greatly reduced the waiting area on the main concourse, and there's a risk that arriving passengers will miss their onward connections as they queue to pass through. They want members to spend a few minutes watching passenger flows, then to send in their observations.

There's satisfaction that the new station at Conan Bridge is proving popular, but the group says there has been an impact on timekeeping. In July, an official ceremony took place at Helmsdale, at which FoFNL's President, John Thurso MP, opened the refurbished station house, adapted as self-catering accommodation. Celebrations were also held at Ardgay station (originally Bonar Bridge) in October to mark the 150th anniversary of its opening – a photograph shows ladies from the local Heritage Society sporting period dress.

Friends of the West Highland Lines – *more appropriate rolling stock on the horizon*

The Autumn edition of West Highland News has details of Abellio's winning bid for the ScotRail franchise, but comment has been held over to the next edition. The group's aspiration for tourist trains appropriate for sightseeing has been partially met in the promise for a fleet of refurbished units specifically for this role. There's also welcome news that the franchise will deliver 10-15 Scottish Community Rail Partnerships.

Elsewhere, we read that seven in ten of Scotland's 351 stations now have empty buildings back in use or boast floral displays tended by volunteers, and that around 50 stations now have cafes. One member of FoWHL has just set up his own website designed to help golfers visiting Scotland to use the ScotRail network to reach their golfing destinations.

The other franchise in the news of interest to Scottish rail users is the award of the Caledonian Sleeper franchise to Serco. This contract will result in four new 18-carriage trains, and the West Highland News invites readers to send in constructive design suggestions for the interior and exterior of the new sleeping coaches. Serco has ordered six rebuilt Class 73 locos for use on sleeper services, and FoWHL wonders if this is a good choice given their dated appearance and the question of whether they can cope with Highland gradients.

The group comments that the Scottish Government's push to take heavy goods off roads and transfer to rail appears to have stalled: "there is a great need for Government Ministers to offer freight grants to the timber and oil industries."

Lakes Line Rail User Group – *engaging with passengers during the summer season*

A unique ceremony commemorating the First World War took place at Oxenholme Station in July. A "peace pole" was brought by train from Windermere, carried by a scout troop to a site near Platform 1 and installed with due ceremony by the Mayor of Kendal; two buglers then played the Last Post. LLRUG has offered to help pay for a new seat in the remembrance area to supplement the one already there.

In the Northern/TransPennine franchise consultations, LLRUG argued strongly for keeping the Lakes Line as part of the TransPennine network: "All we can do now is wait to see if it really was a consultation, or if the decisions had already been taken!"

Group members participated in "Welcome Days" during the summer season, greeting visitors and handing out travel information on trains heading towards Windermere, then handing out travel surveys on the return journeys. Over 200 completed survey forms were collected in; the results revealed that visitors came from all over Britain (plus some from abroad) and made overnight stays worth more than £60k to the local economy.

The group has a new website at <http://www.llrug.co.uk/> and the principal officers of the group now have "@llrug" email addresses. A coffee morning raised over £160 for group funds and the LLRUG stall at Blackburn Model Railway Show made over £230 in sales. They're planning to take their stall to the Christmas Lights Switch-On at Ambleside on 15 Nov.

Ribble Valley Rail – speed restrictions and antiquated trains are suppressing demand

The group's response to the Northern and TransPennine franchise consultations is reproduced in full in their Autumn newsletter. Here are some of the points made in their document:

- The Clitheroe Line project has proved to be an excellent example of partnership in action. Volunteer members of Ribble Valley Rail spend countless hours keeping Ribble Valley stations in good condition.
- It is clear that there is significant suppressed demand for train travel by would be passengers who choose not to endure travelling in the antiquated and often overcrowded stock.
- The current 45 mph limit north of Blackburn is no longer acceptable.

A table is included in the response, showing that passenger growth at stations on the line over a 6-year period (based on ORR statistics) averages 60%!

A bench has been installed at Clitheroe station in memory of the RVR's late Chairman and founder member, Peter Moore – Peter's family were very pleased with the gesture, and a photograph shows them sitting on the new bench. Further photos in the newsletter illustrate the progress of reconstruction work at Manchester Victoria and Blackburn stations.

Anyone wanting to enjoy a countryside walk from Clitheroe station can follow the directions given in "Short Easy Walk No 5" on page 11 of the newsletter. Elsewhere, we read that the group will sadly be unable to run a Santa Special this year as there are no units available in December, partly due to the ever-growing demand for train travel into Manchester for the Christmas Markets.

Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association – ever more meetings to attend!

Month by month, OPSTA is establishing contacts and working with ever more groups and agencies. They've attended the inaugural meeting of the "One West Lancs Transport Thematic Group" which represents several bodies with a strong interest in effective public transport. Earlier in the year, they worked on the West Lancs Transport Masterplan, and they're hopeful that OPSTA views have been heeded. And, of course, they participated in the recent Northern and TransPennine franchise consultations.

The local authority for Southport and Sefton has established a "Southport Rail Transport Forum" to champion rail issues for the area, and OPSTA representatives have attended meetings of the group. Members of the Forum have held discussions with neighbouring city authorities to assess the impact of the Northern Hub project on Southport and on rail services from West Lancs into Manchester – a travel survey is planned for the Autumn to assess the demand over this route.

Changes to the timetable for the Ormskirk-Preston line in May resulted in a lot of adverse reaction. OPSTA made a passenger feedback form available via its website and is undertaking a formal passenger count. The group is now cooperating with the West of Lancashire Community Rail Partnership to conduct a full survey of the service pattern on the line. On the subject of the new evening peak restrictions that now affect Northern ticket holders, OPSTA says the Company needs to monitor the impact of the change and be transparent about their findings.

The group intends to hold a public meeting in conjunction with Lancashire councillors to gauge the level of local interest and likely use of a re-opened station at Midge Hall. They're also involved with various agencies in developing the economic case for connecting the two lines via a new curve at Burscough Junction.

Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester Line group (STORM) – “mean-spirited” ticket policy

STORM recently wrote to the Minister of Transport explaining how unseasonably unfair recent changes in ticketing policy are. They then issued a press release explaining that the Minister had instructed local train operators (but not trams) to stop allowing the use of cheap day return tickets between 4pm and 6.30pm. “This applies to users of all our local stations including Rochdale and Castleton, increasing the cost of travelling to seasonal events such as the Christmas markets, pantomimes and the like. In London and the SouthEast the policy only applies to tickets being used to travel away from the city not into it - why is Greater Manchester treated differently? This mean-spirited diktat, that could hit the seasonal trade in the city centre quite hard, sits very oddly with the Chancellor’s recent promotion of a ‘powerhouse’ in the north.”

The group is sceptical that promises to withdraw the Pacer units can be fulfilled: “To buy new diesels for delivery by 2019 would be difficult if not impossible and cascaded diesels from electrification projects will probably not be available in time either, given the current delays to projects.”

There’s welcome news that Northern have confirmed the Santa Special from Todmorden will run this year on Sunday 7th December. The Littleborough Band is booked and Santa is brushing down his red suit. STORM will be providing mince pies. (*Leaving Ribble Valley Rail to feast on sour grapes? – Ed*).

Minsters Rail Campaign – making the case to local authorities

Campaigners hoping to re-open the York to Beverley railway line have hosted a meeting in York to try to garner support from local authorities. Minsters Rail Campaign chairman, Peter Hemmerman, said councils from Hull, York, East Riding of Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Ryedale and Network Rail were all represented. “We had a frank exchange of views after outlining our position and hopes for the future of the rail line through East Yorkshire,” he said.

He believed there had never been a better time to examine the case for increased rail travel in the region but a united front was needed to push for sustainable transport options. He said East Riding of Yorkshire Council supported the line in principle but had concerns whether the cost would ever be affordable, while representatives of York, North Yorkshire and Ryedale agreed a viable business case needed to be made but said this would have to go through all council leaders and the Local Enterprise Partnerships for funding bids. – *story in the York Press*

Harrogate Line Supporters’ Group – successfully influencing local authorities

HLSG intends to arrange meetings with the three shortlisted bidders for the Northern franchise. The group notes that North Yorkshire County Council placed the development of services on the Harrogate Line as top of their list of priorities, as set out in the authority’s response to the Northern and TransPennine franchise consultations. The group feels it can take some credit for initiating the recent discussions between the Leaders of Harrogate Borough and City of York councils, which led to a joint declaration of support for investment in the line. A two-page report in the local press on the benefits of Harrogate Line Electrification also drew heavily on information provided by the group.

There was official recognition of the campaign for a new station to serve Leeds-Bradford Airport when Transport Minister Baroness Kramer gave reassurance that the scheme would be given full consideration in a forthcoming study into improving airport connectivity. Also, the proposal for a new station at Flaxby Moor received a boost when the developer for the nearby business park included provision for the station in their recent pre-planning application.

Christmas came early to Harrogate when the Commercial Director of Northern Rail announced a “six-figure” investment in Harrogate Main Station and invited suggestions for which improvements were most needed. Needless to say, HLSG members have been sending in their wish lists thick and fast!

Halifax & District Rail Action Group – morning trains to London could be speeded up

The Grand Central Railways roadshow has been visiting towns and engaging with the public. When the Company visited Halifax, HADRAG members were on hand to share ideas for improving trains, stations and service reliability – the group is hoping that rail managers will adopt their ideas for speeding up the early morning trains to London.

After sending off their submission to the Northern and TransPennine (TPE) franchise consultations, HADRAG is now putting the group's aspirations to the shortlisted bidders for Northern. To illustrate their case for better services on the Calder Valley line, they've devised a map which shows individual services as separate lines with station stops for each clearly indicated. The group calls for the reopening of Elland station within 5 years and electrification of the complete Calder Valley network of lines by 2024.

One of the group's members has been analysing the Government's claim that Northern is the most heavily subsidised train operator. He says the North's railways combined have a similar mix of urban, inter-urban and rural services as either Scotland or Wales – thus if Northern and TPE are considered together, the subsidy per passenger mile is, in fact, less than that for the Welsh and Scottish train operators. Elsewhere we read that the group is disappointed that the Northern and TPE franchises are to be kept separate.

Restrictions on off-peak fares depressed the mood in September, and HADRAG's committee fired off its concerns. Northern Rail managers were keen to talk to them with "refreshing honesty", but they didn't come away from meetings with any great optimism that the imposition would be removed: "we can at least hope the new arrangements will be evaluated and maybe adjusted."

Huddersfield, Penistone & Sheffield Rail Users' Association – rail should be a premium service

From September, new restrictions have been placed on the use of off-peak tickets in the evening peak, and HPSRUA is struggling to understand the logic of yet another set of rules applied to tickets. Apparently the fare increases are to pay for improvements, but the Government cannot confirm that the whole amount will be spent on this. Yes, fares in the north are not as expensive as elsewhere, but that is a local decision made by transport authorities to encourage travel away from congested roads.

HPSRUA submitted a detailed response to the Northern and TransPennine franchise consultations, and they've contacted all three bidders for the Northern franchise in the hope of having conversations with them over the coming months. The group says: "Greatly improved rolling stock is essential. Passengers should not have to put up with hand-me-down diesels - rail is a premium service."

As yet, there is still no sign of new passenger information screens at Penistone Line stations; new screens are due to be fitted at three of the stations. HPSRUA points out that fitting them at all stations is a commitment within the current Northern franchise. However, the group acknowledges that the recently-upgraded public address system is working well - they particularly like the additional announcements made by younger travellers.

Noting that China's Academy of Engineering is proposing to build railways across Asia, Europe and even to North America, regular magazine contributor, Colin Hill, thinks the Chinese should be called upon to re-double the Penistone Line ... which they could easily achieve before breakfast!

Friends of the Sheffield to Lincoln Line – *sub-standard facilities at Retford Low Level*

A story in the Retford Times tells us that Bassetlaw MP John Mann is leading a call by rail campaigners to improve facilities at Retford's low level station. Mr Mann was approached by the FoSLL group (Sheffield to Lincoln line trains call at platforms three and four of Retford Station). The group says passengers regularly complain of poor facilities provided on the low level platforms compared to those on the high level platforms serving the East Coast Main Line.

"Our group has been going a year now and passengers have been telling us they have a hard deal with facilities at Retford compared to the high level platforms," said group member Paul Johnson. "East Coast have painted the concrete shelters, but they're not glazed and winter is coming. There are no toilets on the low level and there is only a lift on one side". Mr Johnson also reported that the waiting rooms at the high level often closed early due to staffing levels, and that staff do not regularly man the low level platforms, only if they are needed.

Friends of the Brigg & Lincoln Lines – *all parties come together to fight for rail*

FoBLL's campaign for improved rail connections moved up a notch when their local MP, Andrew Percy, met Rail Minister, Claire Perry, at Barnetby Station. Andrew is campaigning to ensure that direct services between Cleethorpes and Manchester are maintained and that the south Humber rail line is considered for electrification. He also took the opportunity to lobby the Minister on the Cleethorpes-Brigg-Sheffield line, and later commented: "I think what has most impressed Claire is how local people, businesses and MPs of all parties have come together to fight for our local rail services."

Working in conjunction with the Gainsborough Bus & Rail Group, FoBLL set up an on-line survey into passenger demand for the Sheffield – Lincoln/Cleethorpes services via the Brigg line. The website used was overwhelmed by the number of responses, and an alternative survey site with unlimited response capability had to be found.

Northern Rail's stakeholder event in Hull provided FoBLL with an opportunity to lobby the company's managing director for a regular train service on their line and for much-needed improvements to Gainsborough Central station – the group is looking forward to the MD's visit to the area as part of his fact-finding tour of the network.

East Norfolk Transport Users' Association – *wants an end to years of neglect*

Responding to the Greater Anglia Franchise consultation, ENTUA issued a 5-page document which begins with some background notes saying how through services to Great Yarmouth have diminished over the years and how the station itself has deteriorated dramatically so that it is no longer fit for purpose.

The group wants to see regular through trains to Cambridge, with the service eventually extended to Stansted Airport. They also argue for direct trains to London, the Midlands and the North West. Other points include: elimination of speed restrictions, the need for late evening trains and the provision of additional capacity: "it is not uncommon to see a single-car Class 153 unit and sometimes at peak times!"

The document ends with the suggestion that the 20-mile line between Norwich and Great Yarmouth should be electrified at some stage during the next franchise.

Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users' Group – fighting to keep their through service

According to PENRUG, the main threat facing Norfolk passengers at present is the proposal to withdraw the hourly expresses from Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield to Ely, Norwich and Thetford, a proposal which also affects Fenland. They say that breaking up this vital nation-building railway would be bad for the taxpayer, bad for business and academia, bad for tourism and bad for the less mobile. Local councillors have suggested two new stations east of Thetford, however PENRUG advises caution saying that there needs to be a study into journey times and stopping patterns.

The group says that the main issue for passengers on the route from Birmingham, Leicester and Peterborough to Cambridge, Ely, March and Stansted Airport is capacity. Elsewhere in their October newsletter, they argue for robustly-monitored compliance targets for station facilities - toilets, waiting rooms and retail advice, pointing out that it's wrong to spend public money on station facilities which are then locked out of use. A bizarre piece of advice from the newsletter: we're told that electronic cigarettes cannot now be used on Liverpool-Norwich trains!

PENRUG was invited by the Dept. for Transport to answer questions relating to the proposed direct award of the East Midland franchise. Among their responses was a call for a "whole route" approach to engineering access as a step towards a seven day railway, and the suggestion that there should be more effort to attract and support business travel.

Oxon & Bucks Rail Action Committee – the work has begun!

At last, work has started to re-open the East West Rail Line. Among the initial benefits to rail users will be Chiltern's new service to Oxford, and OBRAC suggest that this could be extended to Cowley if the branch were to be re-opened to passenger services. The economic benefits of EWRL have been re-evaluated taking into account the much-enhanced specification: electrification, 100mph running, freight potential, and further suggestions for passenger services including a Heathrow link.

A separate study has been published focussing on the next section of the route: from Bedford to Cambridge. OBRAC reports that this document was widely welcomed by councils, both along the route and throughout the wider region – even the Mayor of London voiced his support. The vision of a Scientific Research corridor stretching from Oxford to Cambridge was promoted by speakers at Railfuture's Cambridge conference in June 2014.

Representatives from OBRAC continue to attend Network Rail's consultation meetings explaining the progress of the work; other attendees include council officers and local residents. A meeting about the crossings on the Aylesbury to Princes Risborough line is due in late January 2015.

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail Users' Group – management contract may delay projects

Govia Thameslink Railway are said to be monitoring the number of cycles on trains to see if any further restrictions are needed - the MS&F Rail Users' Group continues to encourage people to use folding bikes or to wait for off-peak times before taking their full-size bike on the train. The group is asking GTR to increase provision for cycle parking at their stations. They're also encouraging people to use booking offices to buy their tickets, as evidence of usage of these facilities is critical to their viability.

Late news: GTR has decided to lift cycle restrictions on the 8:15 morning service in order to see whether a beneficial redistribution effect takes place. Also a new cycle rack has been placed at Shepreth station car park.

The group is concerned that, under the new 'management contract' structure, all revenue from train operations goes directly to Network Rail, not the train operating company - this means that any local schemes the group has campaigned for, and which GTR has carried over from First Capital Connect, will be subject to review by the Dept for Transport on the basis of cost effectiveness. They feel that all their schemes are worth pursuing, so they'll be working with the new operator to make the case.

In October, station gardeners were busy preparing the tubs for winter. They've also had to carry out remedial work on their poppy and wildflower garden after it was accidentally strimmed and treated with herbicide by a Network Rail contractor. Now that the community development charity Groundwork has taken over running a local youth club, the line's Community Rail Partnership has been in contact with the charity exploring ways to involve young people in railway projects.

Chesham & District Transport User's Group – *managers now talking to each other!*

After much campaigning on the issue of better connections between Metropolitan Line and Chiltern Railway services at Chalfont & Latimer, CDTUG is pleased that the managers of the two services have at least agreed to talk to each other about meshing their services. Proposed changes to Chiltern services from September 2015 to incorporate the new Marylebone-Oxford trains are broadly welcomed by CDTUG, as the development offers the potential for reduced journey times for Chesham passengers travelling to/from London. However, the group would still like to see faster off-peak services on the Met line and will persist with its campaign on this issue.

Another welcome development is the proposal for Crossrail to serve Watford Junction and Tring, complementing the new Croxley Rail Link; the group points out that this offers the potential of an additional route into London for Chiltern area residents.

There has been much talk of supermarket "click and collect" facilities coming to stations in the London area, and CDTUG finds itself commenting on proposals from both Tesco at Chesham and Waitrose at Chalfont & Latimer. The group's main concern is over whether the scheme would require space to be released in the station ticket hall or car park for the installation of collection lockers, and they're seeking clarification from London Underground about the matter.

Barking-Gospel Oak Rail Users' Group – *extension to Barking Riverside presents challenges*

The proposal for a railway extension to a new station at Barking Riverside would allow a development of more than 1,500 homes to go ahead. The original proposal involved extending Docklands Light Rail services to the new station, but now it is proposed to extend Barking-Gospel Oak (London Overground) services.

BGORUG responded to the revised plan by issuing a 4-page report expressing concerns about whether services on their line would be able to cope with the increase in passengers, especially in view of the somewhat limited investment in additional capacity planned for the period to 2040. Recent concerns for BGORUG include how disabled passengers will be dealt with following the withdrawal of the train guards, and the inevitable disruption for passengers during the lengthy line closures that have been mooted for electrification works.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group – *rail managers fail to appreciate problems for commuters*

BTPG was dismayed to read, in Network Rail's Western Route Study (published October 2014), the following statement: "Following electrification to Newbury, the 2019 Industry Train Service Specification assumes that the current London Paddington – Bedwyn service will operate with electric rolling stock and therefore be truncated at Newbury. A diesel shuttle service is proposed between Newbury and Bedwyn."

The group says that it looks as if the Dept. for Transport and Network Rail still have their head in the sand about the problem this will cause commuters. They're encouraging supporters to sign their e-petition calling upon the DfT to specify, in the forthcoming franchise extension document, that Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury must retain their current level of direct Paddington services. They tell us that a local estate agent has calculated a 15% drop in house prices should these cuts go ahead.

Trans Wilts Rail – passenger survey ahead of first anniversary of enhanced service

Some 20 volunteers counted and surveyed passengers on TransWits services between Westbury and Swindon from 11th to 13th October, to give the Community Rail Partnership and Wiltshire Council an insight into how the new services on the line are coming along - not only in terms of passenger volumes, but also whether (and how) people travelled before, why they are travelling, how they get to and from the stations, and what they would like to see for the future.

An astonishing total of 600 completed survey forms were collected in, some from people who had travelled from far afield. There was a good mix of travellers: commuters, those on business, students going to school or college, and leisure users.

Services were increased last December from 2 each way a day to 8 each way. An anniversary event is planned at Westbury for the morning of 14 Dec 2014, then Santa trains will run in the afternoon.

Friends of the Lymington to Brockenhurst Line – visitors treated to colourful displays

Thanks to FoLBL members, passengers on the line this summer have been able to enjoy the magnificent show of geraniums in the wall baskets at Lymington Town station, and also the displays of drought-tolerant and salt-tolerant plants (sedums etc) in the boat-shaped planters on the exposed platform at Harbour station.

A record number of members (40 to be exact) went on the summer outing to Bradford on Avon, which included a boat ride on the Kennet & Avon Canal. The next social event (24 Nov) will be a talk on the history of catering on trains entitled ... “Dinner in the Diner”.

Tarka Rail Association (Exeter-Barnstaple) – retracing history and looking to the future

On Page 1, we’re told that the scope of items in TRA’s newsletter range from 1863 to 2049: “not bad for a 28-page document!” The earlier date refers to an article on the history of the now-closed branch line to South Molton. The later date indicates the period covered by Network Rail’s recently-published consultation draft of the Western Route Study – the TRA will be commenting in due course. They’ve already sent in their views in advance of the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement, asking for a commitment to rolling out electrification to the South West, a commitment to upgrading the line between Exeter and Axminster, and an undertaking to reinstate the Okehampton-Tavistock railway.

Members of TRA’s committee looked in on a meeting of volunteers on the Heart of Wessex Line which runs from Bristol to Weymouth. They were impressed with the friendliness and team spirit within the HoW Partnership, and the way they involve the whole community by publishing line guides and putting on special events: “This was a fascinating fact-finding day and quite clearly many of their initiatives would be transferable to the Tarka Line.”

At the Association’s AGM, guest speaker Richard Burningham from the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership expressed the view that the TRA, in conjunction with other partnership members, had achieved so many results by playing “the long game”, ie a continuous campaign of “polite persistence”. Ridership on the Tarka Line is up an impressive 173% on 2001 figures.

The centre page spread in the TRA’s newsletter carries photos illustrating the high standard of entries in this year’s Tarka Line Station Garden Competition. The winner was Yeoford station, with Chapelton in second place.

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAILFUTURE RAIL USER GROUP AWARDS 2014

Winners were announced, and presentations of prizes and certificates were made by Railfuture's President, Christian Wolmar, at Railfuture's Autumn Conference in London on 1st November. The panel of judges was drawn from Railfuture's Vice Presidents, and the results were as follows:

☺ BEST WEBSITE

Joint winners for the Silver award: (1) Trains for Deal - their main website is www.trains4deal.com and they have a successful campaign website at <http://trains4kentcoast.co.uk>. (2) South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group with their easy-to-navigate website at www.senrug.co.uk.

The Gold award went to the Severnoaks Rail Travellers' Association. The judges found their website at <http://srta.org.uk> to be a really useful "one-stop shop" for rail users.

☺ BEST NEWSLETTER

The judges awarded a Commendation to the Friends of the West Highland Lines for their quality magazine, *West Highland News*.

The Silver award was presented to the South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group.

The Gold award went to the Huddersfield, Penistone & Sheffield Rail Users' Association for their *Track Record* magazine – the judges were particularly pleased that it was addressed to the wider community, avoiding jargon: "it passes the 'platform' test!"

☺ BEST CAMPAIGN

The judges gave a Gold award in this category to Trains for Deal: their campaign for HS1 services via Deal and Sandwich, plus a new Kent Coast "rounder" has proved successful, and they've identified the next steps to continue the campaign.

☺ BEST NEW GROUP

The "Oliver Lovell Award" for best newcomer went to the Friends of the Brigg & Lincoln Lines. The judges said their message "deserves recognition, and we look forward to hearing more in development of this local campaign."

☺ JUDGES' SPECIAL AWARD

The winner in this category was the South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group with their highly innovative project involving young people. SENRUG organised a competition amongst local schools to create a 7 to 10 minute DVD setting out a business case for re-opening the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line; you can view the winning entry from the link on SENRUG's website.

More details about the winning entries can be seen on Railfuture's website [here](#). They're the ones to beat when you enter your group for the 2015 Awards!!!

2015 sees the 35th anniversary of Railfuture's national conference of Rail Users Groups.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY BRANCH

With help from branch members, the Secretary of Railfuture Thames Valley put together a letter of objection to building development on the trackbed of the former line between Bourne End and High Wycombe; reopening the line is one of the branch's top priorities.

Committee members have attended public meetings and displays associated with the East-West Rail Link and the redevelopment of Oxford station. The branch will have a joint stand with the Witney-Oxford Transport group at Oxford Green Fair on Sat 6 Dec 2014. The two organisations have been working together on options for a rapid transit link between Witney and Oxford as part of a Baseline Report being published by Oxfordshire County Council - a public consultation is expected next July.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SE

The branch has concluded that any successful business case for extending the Uckfield line to Lewes has to include direct links to Brighton. There are various ways this could be secured, but the branch's preference is for a turnback loop at Lewes (trains from Uckfield would pass through Lewes station facing east, then swing around south of the town to join the line to Brighton). They will be seeking the inclusion of the Lewes Loop in local development plans for the area, and electrification throughout is another campaign goal.

The new Essex Thameside franchise commenced on 9 Nov, and the London & SE Branch was pleased to see that regular weekend services between Liverpool Street and Barking via Stratford were included, an enhancement the branch had advocated. Members of the branch routinely participate in the work of transport forums and working groups throughout their region, examples being the Gatwick Airport Transport Forum and the Steering Group of the MarshLink Community Rail Partnership.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

BBC TV's *Look East* featured the "Wisbech 2020 Vision" meeting held in the town on 15 October. Particular attention was given to the March-Wisbech rail reopening scheme. The contrast between the fortunes of Wisbech and the dynamism of the rest of Cambridgeshire came across vividly in the programme. Interviews were carried out with John Clark, Leader Fenland District Council; Steve Barclay the local MP; Lillian Greenwood MP the Shadow Rail Minister; & Peter Simpson the Chairman of Anglian Water. There appeared to be strong support for rail reopening and presumably all the stakeholders will now lobby for this.

Peter Wakefield of Railfuture East Anglia commented: "This afternoon's presentation in Wisbech of our brochure setting out the case for rail reopening was a tremendous effort and success for all concerned."

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

NETWORK RAIL PUBLISHES ROUTE STUDIES – *drafts for consultation*

Development of the **Anglia route study** began in January 2014. On 5 November 2014 the Anglia route study draft for consultation was published. The consultation period will last for 90 days and will close on 3 February 2015.

Work on the **South East route: Sussex** area route study began in December 2013 and the document was published as a draft for consultation on 15 October 2014. The consultation period lasts for 90 days and will close on the 13 January 2015.

The **Western route study** commenced in November 2013, with the draft for consultation published on 10 October 2014. All feedback must be received by 9 January 2015 when the 90-day public consultation period closes.

You can access Network Rail's route studies [here](#). Relevant Railfuture branches are working on their responses to these consultations, so please get in touch with them if you have any comments.

ESTIMATES OF STATION USAGE – *due out soon*

The Office of Rail Regulation is due to publish Estimates of Station Usage figures for 2013-14, a little earlier than expected, on 4 December 2014. - *thanks to Roger Blake for spotting this*

RAIL PASSENGERS' RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS – draft for consultation

The EU Passengers' Rights and Obligations Regulation sets out a number of obligations which the rail sector must comply with in full by 2024. The aim of this consultation is to gather evidence to enable the Dept. for Transport to gain a better understanding of where the rail industry is already meeting or exceeding the EU standards, and to help us identify where we may be able to bring certain provisions into force earlier than the 2024 deadline required by the EU regulations.

No final decision has been taken on the questions/issues covered in this consultation document. By taking part you are providing valuable evidence to help shape Government decisions, and the direction of the rail industry in this area. – *from the Foreword to the document on gov.uk*

You can download the document [here](#). Railfuture's Chris Fribbins is coordinating a formal response to this consultation, so you may wish to pass your comments to chris.fribbins@railfuture.org.uk or, of course, you can send in your own response to the DfT by the deadline of 23rd December 2014.

RECENT REPORTS FROM PASSENGER FOCUS

1 Passenger information screens at railway stations

This report looks at passengers' experiences of current passenger information systems at stations, and their aspirations for the future, to help inform future developments with information systems. The research was carried out by Passenger Focus in partnership with National Rail Enquiries and Network Rail.

2 Rail passengers' priorities for improvements

Twice each year Passenger Focus publishes the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) to measure passengers' satisfaction with various aspects of their rail journey. From time to time they also carry out research into passengers' priorities for improvement, irrespective of their current level of satisfaction with a particular factor. This report presents the latest research.

Both reports can be downloaded from the Passenger Focus website [here](#).

SOUTH WEST TRAINS SIGNS UP TO A GENERIC CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INDEX

"If you're a customer of South West Trains you'll be pleased to learn that we have signed up to the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI), a nationally comparable measure of customer satisfaction run by The Institute of Customer Service.

"We would really value your input as a customer, allowing us to measure how we compare with other organisations. We'd like to invite you to take part in a survey about how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with our service. All responses are completely confidential, and we will receive only grouped analysis, so please feel free to be completely honest with your feedback. Click on [this link](#) to take part." – *SWT announcement spotted by Denis Fryer of South Hants RUG*

If you would like to find out more about the UKCSI you can see the details [here](#).

CROSS COUNTRY FRANCHISE – DIRECT AWARD

CrossCountry's current franchise runs until Oct 2016, after which a Direct Award is anticipated. The following is taken from the Company's news-sheet "In Focus"...

"Each Direct Award is basically a 'mini-bid' for a new franchise contract, building on the services that are currently being provided; and the DfT negotiates solely with the incumbent franchisee without the need for a competitive tendering approach. However, even in a single-bidder negotiation, there is no guarantee that the DfT must agree terms with the incumbent franchisee, and any proposal

submitted must meet the DfT's expectations for value for money for the taxpayer and an improved service for customers.

"We will begin a programme of consulting stakeholders across the areas we serve in the New Year to learn their aspirations for CrossCountry. In the meantime, if you have anything you would like us to be aware of then do get in touch."

ANGER AT EVENING PEAK RESTRICTIONS

TravelWatch NorthWest issued a press release expressing disapproval of the massive increase in fares that would result from excluding the evening peak hours from the validity of off-peak tickets on Northern Rail services. "This has caught leisure travellers visiting Manchester City Centre for nights out who now have to pay an extra 20% to 50% for their train journey. ... As we approach the Christmas holidays thousands of extra passengers will be travelling into Manchester for shopping, the Christmas Markets, and nights out. If they catch a train from a station within Greater Manchester between 16.00 and 18.30, as many will, they will face paying a supplementary fare. This is totally unacceptable and we call on Northern Trains to review its policy."

EXTRA SERVICES ON THE BITTERN LINE

The summer timetable hourly frequency of Sunday services for Abellio Greater Anglia's Norwich to Sheringham Bittern Line route has been extended to run throughout the year from Sunday 5 October. This is the first time there has been an hourly service on Sundays during the winter period and throughout the year on the Bittern Line. The six extra services to help provide the hourly frequency on Sundays mean that 13 services will now run in each direction with the first departures from Norwich and Sheringham at 08.36 and 09.42 respectively, with last trains departing Norwich at 20.36 and from Sheringham at 21.42. – *from ACoRP's Train On Line newsletter*

PASSENGER TRAINS COULD RUN ON COWLEY BRANCH LINE

Passenger trains could be running on Oxford's Cowley branch line within five years. Chiltern Railways' plans to run services along the line for the first time in 50 years are set to be unveiled next month. The company says it wants to use the line to connect Oxford Station with areas such as Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Oxford Science Park and the BMW plant.

Chiltern managing director Rob Brighthouse said: "While for the last 50 years the line has been used solely for freight, we feel that huge potential stems from the possibility of Chiltern operating passenger services along the line by the end of the decade, perhaps as an extension of our route from London to Oxford (via Bicester) which opens in 2016. Central to our proposal is the creation of two new stations on the line: at Oxford Science Park and Oxford Business Park. – *from an article in the Oxford Mail spotted by Andy Long*

Andrew McCallum, secretary of Railfuture's Thames Valley branch, was quoted in the article as saying: "Rather than occupying space at Oxford station, [trains] can run down to Cowley which could take about 5 mins, drop people off, come back in another 5 mins and then go back to London."
--

ARMAGH REOPENING CAMPAIGN

Ten thousand people have signed a petition in favour of re-opening the rail link between Portadown and Armagh in Northern Ireland. The petition was submitted on Monday in Stormont by SDLP assembly member for Newry and Armagh, Dominic Bradley. The link would connect Armagh with the main Belfast-Dublin line, which passes through Portadown. The line between Portadown and Armagh closed in the 1950s and sections of it have been built over. – *bbc.co.uk*

PYE CORNER BUILT IN RECORD TIME

Baroness Kramer visited the construction site of Pye Corner railway station in Newport recently ahead of the new station's completion and opening on December 14. The £3.5 million new rail station has been jointly funded by the Welsh Government and the Department of Transport's New Station Fund. Work started on the station in April 2014, one of the quickest new station builds the Department of Transport has ever seen. Pye Corner's construction will be a template for other stations because it worked so well.

It is hoped the single platform station, which will feature CCTV, a car park for 60 cars and electric car charging points, will help to relieve congestion on the roads and boost the local economy. The station will be served by the existing hourly Ebbw Vale to Cardiff service with the potential for additional destinations to be introduced in the future. – *South Wales Argus*

A GOOD MODEL FOR A RAIL USER GROUP

Paul Salveson was invited to speak to the AGM of Tyne and Wear Public Transport Users Group in October, which was held in the Irish Centre on the edge of Newcastle's Chinatown.

Paul says "The group is equally diverse, bringing together a range of community groups across the Tyne and Wear area who are concerned about transport. It has a very different feel from many 'users' groups' who often can be a bit crank-ish and middle class, though in a nice sort of way. This group has hit on a very good model, bringing in community groups which may not have 'transport' in their title but recognise the importance of having good quality transport services for their communities."

✂ cut out and keep -----

On 7 Nov, the Yorkshire Post quotes the Prime Minister as saying:

"In terms of Northern Rail I understand the concerns about the franchise. We all want to see Pacers go, and bidders for the Northern franchise will be required to propose plans for the removal of Pacers when they submit their bids in 2015. **Those trains are going** - there will be a progressive upgrade of trains right across the system."

EVENTS *for the next 2 months*

The events listed here are copied across from the Events listing on Railfuture's website.

Coloured blobs differentiate between types of events...

- National & regional rail events.
- Railfuture events (rail user group representatives are welcome to attend).
- Local Rail User Group events. ■ Events organised by other railway societies.

November

■ 17 November 2014. Monday. Bedford Commuters' Association AGM. RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford, from 19:30, with railway managers in attendance. More info: [BCA](#)

■ 18 November 2014. Tuesday. "The rebirth of the Great Western Main Line". Speaker: Stuart Baker. Location: Cheltenham, GL50 2SY. 19.30. More info: [RCTS](#)

■ 18 November 2014. Tuesday. Association of Community Rail Partnerships members' seminar for the South of England in London. More info: [ACoRP](#)

■ 19 November 2014. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton Line. No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes DN35 8AX. 19.00. More info: [FBR](#)

■ 19 November 2014. Wednesday. Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association. Guest speaker: John Ryan, Wirral Transport User Group. Location: Disraeli's PH, 26 Church Street, Ormskirk, L39 3AN. 19.30. More info: [OPSTA](#)

- 20 November 2014. Thursday. Seminar "Next steps for transport policy in London and South East England". More info: [PFL](#)
- 22 November 2014. Saturday. Thames Valley/London & South East joint meeting. Speaker: George Bathurst of Windsor Link Railway. New Hope Centre, 95 York Road, Reading RG1 8DU. 11.00. More info: [WLR](#)
- 22-23 November 2014. Saturday-Sunday. **Railfuture stall B61 in Hall 5 at NEC**, Birmingham.
- 24 November 2014. Monday. Proposed station at Old Oak interchange with Crossrail/HS2 - consultation closes. More info: [Old Oak consultation](#)
- 25 November 2014. Tuesday. "Extensions to the Underground - past, present and proposed". Speakers: David Leboff and Jon Kirkup, Major Programme Sponsorship, TfL. Location: Woking, GU22 7HA. 19.00 for 19.15 start. More info: [RCTS](#)
- 25 November 2014. Tuesday. "HS2: Building in the benefits at the local level". More info: [HS2-PTRC](#).
- 27 November 2014. Thursday. Air Rail UK, London. More info: [AR](#)
- 28 November 2014. Friday. Ashchurch, Tewkesbury & District Rail Promotion Group public meeting. Tewkesbury library, Sun Street, Tewkesbury, GL20 5NX. 19:30. Guest speaker: Chris Green. More info: [AT&DRPG](#)
- 28 November 2014. Friday. Modern Railways' Fourth Friday Club, with 'Golden Spanners' Awards. More info: [4Friday](#)
- 29 November-28 December 2014. One month closure of Abbey line from Watford to St Albans Abbey. Feedback to: [watfordfeedback](#)

December

- 1 December 2014. Monday. London and South East regional branch, Surrey division meeting. Redhill. 18.45. More info: [Surrey](#).
- 1 December 2014. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, Parson Lane, Clitheroe, BB7 2JN. 19:30. More info: [RVR](#)
- 1 December 2014. Monday. Watford Rail Users Group open meeting at Watford Town hall, Rickmansworth Road, Watford. 18.45. Contact [WRUG](#)
- 2 December 2014. Tuesday. Bath rail electrification public drop-in session at Brunswick Room, Guildhall, Bath BA1 5AW. 16.00-19.30. More info: [NR](#)
- 2 December 2014. Tuesday. "Sheffield Supertram". Speaker: Tim Bilby, Head of Finance & Commercial, Stagecoach Supertram. Location: Sheffield Hallam University, S1 2NU. 18.00 for 18.30 start, to 20.30. Booking not required for this free event. More info: [CILT](#).
- 2 December 2014. Tuesday. "Reconnecting Leek and associated matters". Speaker: David Kemp, Commercial Director, Moorland and City Railways. Location: Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DF. 18.00 for 18.30 start, to 20.30. Booking required for this free event. More info: [CILT](#).
- 2 December 2014. Tuesday. "Highspeed Hastings - a new 'Brede' of total route modernisation". Speaker: Roger Blake, Railfuture. Location: Lewes, BN7 2XH. 18.30 for 19.00 start, to 20.45. Booking required for this free event. More info: [CILT](#). See also: [MarshLink](#).
- 3 December 2014. Wednesday. Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement.
- 4 December 2014. Thursday. Station usage estimates 2013-14 published. More info: [ORR](#)
- 4 December 2014. Thursday. London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. More info: [Sussex and Coastway](#).
- 4 December 2014. Thursday. Don Valley Railway meet at the Harlequin Pub, 108 Nursery St, Sheffield, S3 8GG. 19:00. More info: [DVR](#)
- 4 December 2014. Thursday. Next Generation Rail conference. Crewe Hall CW1 6UZ. 08.30-16.00. More info: [NGR](#)
- 6 December 2014. Saturday. Railfuture stand at Oxford Green Fair, Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1BX. 10.30-16.30. More info: [OGF](#)
- 6 December 2014. Saturday. Lincs/East Anglia branches joint meeting. Museum and Art Gallery, Priestgate, Peterborough, PE14 1LF. 13:30. More info: [EA](#)
- 7 December 2014. Sunday. Proposed extension of Bakerloo line - consultation closes. More info: [Bakerloo consultation](#)
- 8 December 2014. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group Christmas Special for members. 19.00. More info: [BRAG](#) and [ESRA](#)
- 9 December 2014. Tuesday. "The Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association". Speaker: Richard Carr, SAYLSA Development Manager. Location: Glasgow, G2 6HQ. 18.00 for 18.30 start, to 20.00. Booking required for this

free event. More info: [CILT](#).

■ 9 December 2014. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users Group meeting. Chesham Town Hall HP5 1DS. 19.30. More info: [CDTUG](#)

■ 13 December 2014. Saturday. London and South East regional branch, Herts & Beds division meeting, St. Albans. 10.30. More info: [Herts and Beds](#)

■ 13 December 2014. Saturday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association AGM. White Lion, Machynlleth. 11.00. More info: [SARPA](#)

■ 14 December 2014. Sunday. National rail timetable change.

■ 14 December 2014. Sunday. Celebration to mark the first anniversary of the Transwiltts Rail service at Westbury Station from 10am, to include round trip to Swindon. Santa trains run in the afternoon.

<http://www.twcrp.org.uk/santatrip.html>

■ 16 December 2014. Tuesday. "New Tube for London". Speakers: Kevin Moore and Andy Guest, London Underground Ltd. Location: Redhill, RH1 1NN. 18.30 for 19.00 start, to 20.30. Booking required for this free event. More info: [CILT](#).

■ 18 December 2014. Thursday. Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association Christmas Special. Speaker: Chris Green, former managing director of Network SouthEast. Details and booking form: [bbrua](#)

■ 22 December 2014. Monday. "Great Western Electrification Programme". Speaker: Jacqueline Day, Network Rail. Location: Maidenhead, SL6 3AX. 19.15 for 19.30 start. More info: [RCTS](#)

■ 25-28 December 2014. Thursday- Sunday. Closure of London Midland main line from London Euston to Hemel Hempstead. More information: Email watford.feedback@londonmidland.com

January

■ 5 January 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, Clitheroe from 19:30.

www.ribbonvalleyrail.co.uk

■ 8 January 2015. Thursday. London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. More info: [Sussex and Coastway](#).

■ 9 January 2015. Friday. Draft Western Route Study - consultation closes. More info: [WesternRS](#)

■ 13 January 2015. Tuesday. Draft South East Route: Sussex Area Route Study - consultation closes. More info: [SussexRS](#)

■ 14 January 2015. Wednesday. London and South East regional branch, Eastern division meeting. 18.30. More info: [Eastern](#).

■ 15 January 2015. Thursday. Proposed Essex Thameside c2c December 2015 timetable - consultation closes. More info: [c2cDec'15](#)

■ 19 January 2015. Monday. "The Network South East story". Speaker: Chris Green. Location: Shenfield, CM15 8LB. 19.30. More info: [RCTS](#). Buy the book from the Railfuture shop: [NSE](#)

For events further than 2 months ahead, see the [Events listing on Railfuture's website](#).

Please say if you no longer want to receive Rail User Express, or if someone else in your organisation wishes to be included on the circulation list.

This bulletin has been sent by...

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