

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.

The websites of rail user groups mentioned below are listed [here](#).

Please support Britain's number one advocate for the railways and rail users!

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, please contact the [Membership Secretary](#)

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH**Campaign to Open Blackford Railway-station Again (COBRA) – Perth & Kinross**

Blackford station, located about halfway between Stirling and Perth, closed in 1956, and COBRA's campaign to get the station opened again started in 2002. The group says that a reopened station costing around £1.2m would serve a population of around 10,000 and provide access to leisure amenities nearby. Current evidence suggests that a significant number of commuters from the Perth area travel to Dunblane by car to pick up the train to Edinburgh or Glasgow ... but there is enough space on rail-owned land around the site of Blackford station for a car park which would take some off this traffic off the A9 trunk road.

The [COBRA campaign](#) has attracted widespread support from residents, local communities, businesses, transport bodies, local authorities and politicians at local, regional and national levels. They've even had a message of support from Private Eye Editor, Ian Hislop, after he presented his TV programme about the Beeching closures called "Off The Rails".

We continue with the usual roundup of news from rail user groups around the UK. I'm grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group – ABT reopening inches forwards

SENUG's chairman reports that he is at last making progress in persuading the County Council to lead a partnership which will take forward the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne (ABT) reopening campaign to the next stage: a "GRIP 3" study. The group has been advised in the past by two Transport Secretaries that the scheme cannot progress without clear local authority support.

When proposals for a supermarket and filling station at Seaton Delaval came up before the planning committee, SENUG urged the County Council to make allowance for pedestrian and vehicular access through the development to the potential site for a new station on the ABT line. The revision was approved (indicating an awareness amongst decision makers that reinstating a passenger service may become a reality) and furthermore the developer was able to demonstrate how station car parking could be provided adjacent to the development.

SENUG's newsletter carries an invitation to "Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/SENUG".

Furness Line Action Group – Dalton gets the hump!

Although FLAG acknowledges that electrification for the branch to Windermere would be good news, they say this would leave the Furness line even more out on a limb. They suggest that a possible solution is to design electric and diesel units so they can couple together, allowing Barrow and Windermere to be served by splitting services. The group also argues that any saving of journey time between London and the North West once HS2 is operational would be lost if onward journeys to South Cumbria involve lengthy waits for connections at Lancaster or Preston.

FLAG opposes the merger of the TransPennine and Northern franchises, not least because separation ensures that Barrow retains its through service to Manchester Airport. The group notes that First TransPennine Express also opposes merger, judging from the company's written evidence to the Brown Review on rail franchising.

We read that "Dalton gets the hump" for two reasons: (1) a promised customer information system that has yet to materialise, and (2) a minor station between Blackpool & Preston with less than 2,000 passenger/year has had a complete platform rebuild, while Dalton (after years of complaining) only gets a short hump to raise the platform height for its 44,280 passengers/year. Furthermore, this figure of just over 44k is disputed – FLAG's own passenger count puts it at more like 80,000!

Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association – VIPs visit Ormskirk Station

A "photo-shopped" image on the front cover of OPSTA's March newsletter shows a double-ended locomotive; one end is a Virgin Pendolino and the other a FirstGroup HST! – the curious picture makes a fitting introduction to an analysis of the West Coast franchising fiasco on the inner pages. Inside the front cover is a photo of Maria Eagles, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, with the local MP and the chairman of OPSTA at Ormskirk station during her factfinding visit to the line.

A feature article in the newsletter describes the major improvements taking place at Salford Crescent station. The author points out, however, that improving one part of the rail network invariably places more strain on other unimproved areas. OPSTA members may still find that they cannot get on their train at Salford due to overcrowding - what's needed are longer trains and longer platforms across the network.

Elsewhere, we read that the Friends of Meols Cop Station have been busy mowing and strimming the grass areas and getting their planters ready for the new season. Two large water butts have been installed at the end of the platform, and lockable metal covers have been fitted to the taps to deter vandalism.

Huddersfield, Penistone & Sheffield Rail Users Ass'n – Sheffield halfway to London!

HPSRUA is strongly in favour of High Speed rail to the North (HS2), but has calculated that their proposed "local" station at Sheffield Meadowhall will be exactly half way between Huddersfield and London in terms of journey time!

The latest passenger figures for the Penistone Line show that patronage is up despite lacklustre train performance. Major work planned for Huddersfield and Sheffield stations will permit longer trains to operate but plans for other stations on the line are more modest. There are no plans for electrification, simply an aim to increase track speeds from 50 to 60 mph (remaining a diesel "island" is likely to mean both the loss of through services and hand-me-down rolling stock to replace the Pacer units). HPSRUA would like to have seen a commitment to a more frequent service – and now the Chambers of Commerce in both Barnsley and Kirklees have come out in support of the group's campaign to improve capacity on the line.

HPSRUA's magazine carries a 4-page review of the Beeching Report entitled "Beeching – Villain or Visionary". It ends with the observation that the 50th anniversary of publication coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Dr Who television series – both included the mantra: Exterminate! Exterminate! Sadly, however: "destruction is much quicker than construction and offers a short term solution favoured by politicians, but ultimately proves more expensive in the longer term."

Make sure you forward Rail User Express to your newsletter editor. There are bound to be items from time to time that are of interest to members of your user group (please acknowledge source).

Leeds Northern Rail Reinstatement Group – the Ayes have it!

Earlier in April, Dr Adrian Morgan of the LNRRG wrote to ask for our help in boosting the “Yes” vote in a poll being conducted by the Ripon Gazette; the paper was asking its readers whether a railway station should be built in Ripon. Adrian was anticipating a large “No” campaign from residents of a nearby village where six houses had been built on the trackbed, but this failed to materialise to any significant degree. The result of the poll was a resounding 96% in favour of a station (422 voted “Yes” and 17 voted “No”). Adrian says: “there were many letters of support, some from people I had no idea supported the campaign”. He thanks readers of Rail User Express for helping to boost the numbers voting “Yes”, adding “I will keep you informed of progress.”

Friends of the Barton Line – efforts of volunteers being undermined

Performance of the service on the Barton Line has been poor of late, and the committee of FoBL is “exasperated by this renewed spate of unreliability and lack of information which is undermining the efforts of those who are trying to promote the line.”

On 4 May, members will be travelling via the Brigg line to Kiveton Park for a scenic cruise on the Chesterfield canal. Then on Sunday 19 May, a group outing with lunch and real ale will mark the start of the summer timetable on the Barton line.

Stourbridge Line Users’ Group – freight may tip the balance for reopening campaign

Driver shortages beset London Midland in 2012, and SLUG, who’ve been monitoring train services from the beginning of the New Year, report that delays and cancellations are still occurring. They think the underlying problem is a lack of capacity at peak times which means that even one cancellation can have dire knock-on effects. The group is asking its members to submit their experiences of disrupted journeys.

SLUG knows that Centro has plans for a turn-back at Rowley Regis so that Birmingham trains can start from Rowley Regis station. The group will be discussing the numerous implications for the Stourbridge Line before deciding whether to support or oppose the scheme.

A member of SLUG took advantage of the Beeching Report anniversary to argue the case for reopening the line from Stourbridge to Dudley and Wallsall in an interview for the local paper. The latest estimate puts the cost at £285m, but the good news is that Centro has commissioned a study to see if the demand for freight will make the line viable.

A feature article in SLUG’s newsletter looks in depth at the rail service in the West Midlands 15 years ago. While acknowledging that there have been improvements on the Stourbridge line since then, the author provides a shortlist of additional services that could prove popular in the area, such as: a service from Stourbridge to Walsall via Dudley, a commuter service to Bewdley on the Severn Valley line, the extension of First Gt Western London-Worcester services to Kidderminster or Stourbridge Junction, the extension of London Midland services on the Stourbridge Line to Cheltenham Spa or Gloucester, and earlier LM trains on Sundays to encourage leisure travel (*some of these points are also being made by the CPLG – see below*).

Cotswold Line Promotion Group – Adelante units continue to disappoint

In recent months, the service on the Cotswold Line has been subject to delays and disruption, and the problems are aggravated by the inability of the customer information system to give helpful information. Unfortunately, the refurbished Class 180 Adelante units are proving problematic to maintain and they can get overcrowded at peak times. Also, there’s a risk that any improvements in service frequency, plus earlier and later trains, may be put on hold now that the refranchising process has stalled. Looking to the future, there’s a worry that the new 5-car (bi-modal) trains being

developed under the InterCity Express Programme will not have sufficient seating capacity for use on the Cotswold Line – maybe the HST fleet will be made to soldier on for a further 10 or 20 year life.

There's a salutary tale from a lady at Hanborough who ventured to suggest that the three planters on the station platform looked a bit dull – of course, she ended up with a major landscaping job on her hands. The development of a new car park and walkway meant that the gardening effort soon spread well beyond the confines of the station platforms.

News from Oxford is that "passenger power" has overturned two unpopular decisions made by First Great Western. The first was an attempt by the Company to reduce ticketless travel by closing an access gate used by passengers in peak hours. The second involved stopping terminating trains at the far end of the platform and making passengers walk 100 yards in all weathers.

London Midland's new Sunday morning Hereford-Worcester-Birmingham train is proving popular. On the first day of running, last December, the CPLG had organised a civic launch ceremony. The group now turns its attention to campaigning for Sunday morning services from Worcester towards Cheltenham, Gloucester and the West of England.

We had better roll out the red carpet down here in Dorset: the CLPG has announced that their excursion train for 2013 will be travelling down to Swanage on 28 Sept – the first-ever HST to visit the branch.

Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users' Group – "we may or may not unlock the toilet"

While putting forward their complaint about the opening hours of the waiting room and other facilities at Thetford, PENRUG has come up against the explanation that there are no specific franchise targets for individual stations, just the need for general compliance across a large group of stations. That's not much comfort if Thetford is your station and you need a toilet!

The group had the opportunity to comment on the Wymondham Area Action Plan. They supported the idea of building houses close to the railway station and wanted to see a good network of cycling, walking and wheelchair routes, plus frequent buses calling at the station. Some improvements to the accessibility of platforms at Wymondham are also needed. PENRUG also commented on a Fenland Council local planning document, again supporting new housing near March station and calling for better access by all modes.

Commenting on the Beeching anniversary, PENRUG's secretary concludes that "the closed railway which would be of most use to us today would be that from Nottingham Midland to Melton Mowbray. Much of it survives as the Old Dalby test track."

East Suffolk Travellers' Association – November survey results published

ESTA continues to deploy its travelling exhibition at local libraries to promote the new hourly service on the East Suffolk Line. The group has also booked space for its stall at outdoor events this summer. Passengers waiting at stations can make use of seats installed by ESTA in memory of people who played a role in saving and developing the line; the committee is now fundraising for a seat at Beccles station, where an additional platform has been built. Meanwhile, the group has persuaded the train operator to put up extra signs at Beccles making it clear which platform is for which destination. Elsewhere, we read that ESTA has been urging the developers of the new nuclear plant at Sizewell to undertake a study into the possibility of reopening the branch line to Leiston for passengers.

Throughout last November, ESTA members submitted bus and train journey reports, and the results have now been analysed. Generally, members were satisfied with services but concerns were expressed about tight train connections at Ipswich. The survey report was sent to transport operators, politicians and other decision-makers.

A meeting with Passenger Focus in January gave ESTA the chance to press for a change in the way “lateness” statistics are calculated – they argue that what’s important is the number of passengers that are delayed, not the number of trains arriving behind time. At ESTA’s February meeting in Saxmundham, one of the guest speakers explained how the new rail chord at Ipswich will enable freight trains to travel direct from Felixstowe to the Midlands and North with the added benefit of creating more capacity for passenger trains. What’s needed now is an additional platform at Ipswich to ease congestion.

Bedfordshire Railway & Transport Association – a newly reformed group

Originally formed in 1997, the BRTA has been resuscitated with the principal aim of pushing forward the campaign to reopen the rail link between Northampton and Bedford via Olney. They point out that this is a huge and growing arc without local railway station access, and that a passenger service on the line could be operated as an extension of the Thameslink network.

The immediate concern is to protect the trackbed from further encroachment of building development. There is a need to influence local and regional policies, get businesses on board and build the financial case for the reopened line.

The BRTA has wider aims of promoting all forms of public transport in Bedfordshire and supporting other rail developments such as East-West Rail and Midland Main Line electrification. You are invited to take a look at their new website <http://rpws.co.uk/brta/> and consider getting involved.

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group - tribute to WW1 soldiers

A poppy planting scheme on land around Shepreth Station is to be undertaken this spring and summer. The idea is to draw attention to the role of the station in transporting wounded soldiers to Shepreth Hospital during World War One. The land in question is owned by Network Rail, who have agreed to clear brambles and rubbish, and to prepare the ground for planting.

Chesham & District Transport Users’ Group – few using the Met for shopping trips

After analysing data about passenger journeys on the Metropolitan Line, obtained under a Freedom of Information request, the group has concluded that there is no evidence that people are using intermediate stations such as Pinner to travel to and from Chesham for shopping purposes. This was one of the main concerns put forward by those worried about campaigning for an off-peak fast service to Chesham. Further passenger surveys may be needed to confirm the data. *[I can’t help thinking that businesses in Chesham are missing a development opportunity here! – Ed]*

Extensive tree lopping along the route has been carried out recently, with London Underground claiming that it was needed in order to stabilise railway embankments; C&DTUG is not so sure that this is the real reason.

Kent Community Rail Partnership – new guide aimed at young rail users

We don’t often hear from Kent, so I was pleased to receive Kent CRP’s annual report from a Rural Communities officer for the County.

The first initiative in the report that caught my eye was the creation of a network of Parish and Station Champions who help to circulate timetables and leaflets around their local communities. Another novel idea is the publication of a young person’s guide to travelling by train, aimed at scholars about to start secondary school and who may be about to use public transport for the first time. The guide includes advice on how to read a timetable and buy a ticket, and how to behave in a safe manner. The CRP has its own “Engagement Officer” who visits schools and talks to youngsters about rail travel.

Kent CRP reports good passenger growth on the Medway Valley Line (Strood to Maidstone and Maidstone to Paddock Wood), but they say use of SwaleRail (Sittingbourne to Sheerness) continues to decline, adding: “we need to come up with some ideas for reversing the negative trend on SwaleRail.” They’ve conducted transport surveys asking local people about their use or non-use of trains and buses – the public expressed concerns about security at stations (particularly for parked cars), inadequate train information and the need for step-free access to platforms.

South Hampshire Rail User’ Group – can rail users influence the choice of train operator?

Although the consultation period was rather short, SHRUG managed to make its views known on the latest proposals for public transport from the local government body, *Transport for South Hampshire*. The group welcomed TfSH’s ideas for better bus-rail interchanges and urged that Totton be included in the list of rail hubs. SHRUG stressed the need to improve service frequency, particularly for stations between Portsmouth and Southampton which only have an hourly train, and they thought that the comparatively high number of bus and train operators in the South would be a bar to achieving transport integration.

Network Rail and First Great Western have agreed to SHRUG’s suggested changes to Table 123 in the National Timetable. Direct trains between Sussex/Hants/Wilts and Gloucs/Worcs will be shown as such, and footnotes will give clearer information on connections between the South Coast and West of England.

Richard Brown’s report on franchising recommended a greater voice for passengers, reflecting the wishes of Passenger Focus and rail user groups. SHRUG feels that the rather short timescale for the report, in the approach to Christmas, may have weakened the consultative process - the group notes that theirs was the only rail user group recorded in the report as having made a submission. “Even if passengers are dissatisfied with an existing franchise operator,” warns SHRUG, “they are unlikely to be afforded the opportunity, and may not have the experience, to evaluate any of the potential replacements. So the outcome could be an even less popular operator!” [see what *Passenger Focus* says about “passenger power” below – Ed]

Friends of Crewkerne Station – the friends hold another Open Day

Having installed a gate to secure the disused “down” platform, the station friends are now busy clearing accumulations of moss and planting up their new flower tubs. Another recent addition is a FoCS noticeboard in the station waiting room. A station Open Day is planned for 20 April, with a photographic display and refreshments on offer.

The committee feels that FoCS may have to become a campaign organisation because of the perceived threat of ticket-office closure at stations like Crewkerne arising from the McNulty Report.

Avocet Line Rail Users’ Group – extra trains needed to cope with record passenger numbers

The ridership figures for 2012 show that passenger growth on the line between Exeter and Exmouth was 9.7% for the year, well above the national average, and that the line is well used all the year round not just in the height of summer. The line has enjoyed Community Rail status since September last year; a major challenge for the various partners is to cope with the extra flows, particularly when there are local sports events. The group was alarmed to read in *Modern Railways* that the aging Pacer units used on their line could readily be adapted to meet accessibility requirements and thereby soldier on beyond 2020.

In a straw poll, ALRUG members cited transport integration as the top topic they would like to see tackled by the Community Rail Partnership. ALRUG was already at work on this, with a sub-group studying journey opportunities using a combination of Avocet Line trains and bus, to see what improvements could be made. Top of their wish list is a proper transport interchange at Exmouth

station. Already, the group has audited all the Onward Travel Posters at Avocet Line stations and they've reported the many inaccuracies to Association of Train Operating Companies.

ALRUG will be publishing the first of a series of walks leaflets entitled "Avocet Ambles" this spring, each containing three walks – artwork assistance is being provided by the County Council. The leaflets will be distributed to outlets within "day-trip" distance of the line, and will be made available on the group's website.

Late news: It's just been announced that the Avocet line is to benefit from seven additional return services from 26 May until mid-September, funded by Devon County Council.

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAILFUTURE AGM IN DURHAM – 11 May

The Annual General Meeting of the Railway Development Society Ltd will take place at the Town Hall, Durham on **Sat 11 May 2013**. There's an impressive line-up of guest speakers ... we have Alex Nelson of Chester-le-Track; Andy Rogers, Project Manager for the InterCity Express Project; and Dennis Fancett of the South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group talking about the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne reopening campaign.

You are asked to confirm attendance by downloading a form [here](#). There's no fee, but lunch can be booked in advance for £8.

RAILFUTURE SUMMER CONFERENCE IN TAUNTON – 22 June

Railfuture's summer conference with the theme of **Future Aspects of Railway Operation** will take place on **Sat 22 June** at the Albemarle Centre, **Taunton** – just a short walk from the station.

Experts will be talking about community rail schemes and planning for climate/environmental change, and there will be guest speakers from rail campaign groups focussing on their own specific projects: the Portishead Railway Group on line reopening, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways on creating an effective network for the city, the New Somerset and Dorset Railway on their long-term aim to reopen the S&D, and the Tarka Railway Association on recent problems at Cowley Bridge Junction.

The fee for Railfuture's Summer Conference is £30 including lunch and conference report (£25 for members booking before the end of April). For further details or to reserve your place please email taunton2013@railfuture.org.uk.

RAILFUTURE RAIL USER CONFERENCE IN OXFORD – 2 Nov

Once again, Christian Wolmar will be presiding over Railfuture's **Rail User Conference** on **Sat 2 Nov 2013** at the historic Town Hall in **Oxford** city centre.

The line-up of speakers includes Stephen Barker of Chiltern Railways talking about the Oxford-Marylebone scheme; Lord Faulkner, co-author of *Holding the Line, How Britain's Railways Were Saved*; Lord Berkeley of Rail Freight Group; Chris Aldridge from Network Rail telling us about future plans for the Western Region; and Ian East MP speaking about the fight to save the Oxford-Bicester service.

The fee for the autumn Rail User conference is £30 including lunch and conference report (£25 for members booking before the end of August). For further details or to reserve your place please email oxford2013@railfuture.org.uk.

RAILFUTURE RUG AWARDS 2013 – if you don't enter, you can't win!

As previewed in the March edition of *Rail User Express*, Railfuture's second Rail User Group Awards competition is now open for receiving your entries. The competition aims to recognise and reward the various achievements of rail user groups over the past year.

A separate document circulated with this (April) edition of *Rail User Express* gives full details on how to enter the competition. You can also download the document from the Rail User Group page on Railfuture's website [here](#). Prizes will be presented at Railfuture's Rail User Conference at Oxford Town Hall on 2 Nov 2013 (see above). *Good luck!*

RAILFUTURE IN WALES – one country but three separate regions

The branch has been looking at the number of passengers making journeys between places in Wales that are a long way apart. It's obvious from the figures that pitifully few people attempt to make journeys between the three regions of south, mid and north Wales. Politicians often claim that Wales is one country; well, it may have been 50 years ago, before rail closures made north-south travel virtually impossible. "If the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth and Bangor-Afon Wen lines were both reopened, and used as part of a Swansea-Bangor service every 2 hours, the figures would look very different indeed."

At a meeting in Machynlleth in February, members expressed satisfaction with the recent refurbishment of Class 158 units used on the Cambrian Line, but wondered why it was taking so long to implement the promised hourly service pattern.

RAILFUTURE VACANCIES – can you help out?

Railfuture is looking for more volunteers to help with its vital work. Currently, the following posts need to be filled:

- Deputy Finance Officer
- Disability Issues Co-ordinator
- Secretaries for specialist groups, including: Policy Group; Media, Marketing & Communications; Special Projects; Passenger Group.

Railfuture would also like to hear from people able to offer the following skills: desktop publishing; web design; video editing; advertising.

For more details, please see [here](#).

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

FORTHCOMING STATEMENTS AND REPORTS

The Government's review of Fares and Ticketing is expected to conclude in the next few weeks, with a report summarising findings. You can read the report on Fares and Ticketing, dated Jan 2013, prepared by MVA Consultancy for the Association of Train Operating Companies and Passenger Focus on PF's website under "Latest Publications". Rail user groups may wish to have a press statement ready for when the Government's report is published.

In June, we can expect to see the Dept. for Transport's response to the Brown Review of franchising.

STATION USAGE STATISTICS

Estimates of station usage for 2011-12 are now published on the website of the Office of Rail Regulation [here](#). The data covers all National Rail stations throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The estimates are subdivided by ticket type (full, reduced and season tickets), whilst information on the county and region of each station is also provided.

FREE TRAVEL EXPECTED TO REDUCE OVERCROWDING

Early-morning commuters on Singapore's MRT metro system will be able to travel for free under a new initiative designed to reduce peak overcrowding. The Land Transport Authority is preparing to begin a one-year trial to give passengers free use of the network across 16 stations before 7.45am on weekdays. The trial, which is being funded by the government, also includes a 50 cent reduction in fares between 7.45am and 8am. Officials hope that by offering free travel they can spread out the morning rush hour and ease overcrowding on busy sections of the network. – *rail.co*

ACTION STATIONS! HERE COMES THE CROSSRAIL EFFECT

Crossrail, the rail link through the capital, and Europe's largest infrastructure project, will cause more property ripples, and have a bigger impact on London than even the latest tube extensions to the Jubilee and East London lines. Transport-led regeneration is the most important factor boosting the value of our homes. – *the opening paragraph of an article in the Homes & Design pages of the Independent, 19 Apr 2013*

TIME FOR PASSENGER POWER!

After the latest figures on railway financing from the Office of Rail Regulation (see [here](#)) revealed that passengers are now putting in almost two pounds for every pound the taxpayer puts into the railway, Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, made a valid point: "the voice of the user and main funder of the railways should be radically boosted...the time has come for passenger power!" Passenger Focus is proposing three major changes to the way rail franchises are awarded:

- Better consultation before rail franchise replacement
- Much clearer sense of what has been secured in new franchise and how will it be monitored
- Boost passenger involvement during the operation of franchises and potential extensions

Passenger Focus has proposed a passenger 'vote' when existing franchise extensions are contemplated. They point out that "some passengers use the services of train companies very intensively – in some cases up to 450 times a year. They are the best judges of train company performance."

CABLE THEFTS AND RAIL DELAYS PLUMMET

Network Rail has revealed that the effects of cable thefts have fallen sharply in the past year, continuing an encouraging trend. The number of incidents reached a peak of **995** in 2010-11 and fell to **845** in 2011-12, but then plummeted to just **245** in the twelve months to March this year. It has been developments away from the lineside which have made a significant contribution to the recent improvements, according to Neil Henry, who is head of operations and performance at Network Rail. He has paid tribute to the efforts of British Transport Police in finding the thieves and also bearing down hard on the scrap dealers who buy stolen metal. – *Railnews, 15 Apr 2013*

RED SPOTTED HANKY IS THE EXPERT'S CHOICE

"I have always advised readers to use only operator websites [*for buying tickets on line*], as they are free of charges. It appears that just one of the external sites has dropped all charges – and it is a very good one: Red Spotted Hanky (www.redspottedhanky.com). This won the Innovation category at the 2011 National Rail Awards. It is excellent, has a 1% loyalty bonus system, even accepts Tesco points under the Clubcard Exchange system, and has no charges of any sort. It seems to be one of the best booking engines on offer. I really advocate that everyone gives it a try."

– *Barry Doe's column in Rail Magazine*

AN END TO DIESEL UNITS WITH UNDERFLOOR ENGINES?

It is widely expected that EC legislation regarding emissions from diesel engines will increasingly make it difficult or even impossible to procure and operate new multiple units having underfloor diesel engines, with an affordable business case. Indeed, EU consultation on possible tightening of the rules is now underway. Existing diesel trains can continue to operate for as long as necessary thanks to an amendment agreed in 2011. – *OPSTA newsletter*

BORDERS RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION WORK STARTS

Main construction work has now started on the new £294m Borders Railway line in Scotland. Network Rail and principal contractor BAM Nuttall say the first works involve the excavation of the track alignment for the new line through the Monktonhall area and the excavation of the site of the new Shawfair station. The earthworks programme to create the line of route and base for the track will be carried out until the autumn.

The new railway, which will enter service in 2015, will re-establish a passenger rail link for the first time in over 40 years from Edinburgh through Midlothian to Tweedbank. The 30 miles of new railway will serve three existing stations and seven new ones, at Shawfair, Eskbank, Newtongrange, Gorebridge, Stow, Galashiels and Tweedbank. – *Rail Technology Magazine*

LAUNCH OF THE “PLATFORM FOR THE ELECTRIFICATION OF SURFACE TRANSPORT”

Eleven organisations from across industries and transport modes joined forces in Brussels on 19 March to create the *Platform for the Electrification of Surface Transport*. The Platform sees electrification as a key method to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport and reduce Europe’s dependence on imported oil. In a common statement issued at the launch, the eleven organisations – Alstom, AVERE, CER, ETRA, EURELECTRIC, EUROBAT, Going Electric, Nissan, Polis, UITP and UNIFE – called upon public authorities to support the further electrification of surface transport on the basis of a multimodal approach. More info [here](#).

MEP Gesine Meissner (ALDE, Germany), who opened the event, stated: “The vision of the Platform is to aim for fully electrified door-to-door multimodal transport solutions. This is an exciting prospect for European citizens and businesses, with significant growth and employment prospects.”

– *ACT TravelWise*

SETTING UP A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The Government website (gov.uk) has a [new page](#) aimed at people or community groups that want to set up a social enterprise. The page acts as a gateway to details of the various business models mentioned. If you want to set up a business that has social, charitable or community-based objectives, you can set up as a:

- limited company
- charity (or, from 2013, a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO is the new legal structure for charities)
- co-operative
- industrial and provident society (these and “co-operatives” are collectively known as “mutuals”)
- community interest company (CIC) - a special type of limited company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders.

The model that would suit most rail user groups is known as an “unincorporated association”. Re-opening campaign groups with ambitions to get on with the work themselves should look into the various social enterprise models listed on the website.

ACoRP COMMUNITY RAIL AWARDS 2013

Entries are now being invited in the Community Rail Awards competition organised by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP). Neil Buxton, General Manager of ACoRP, says: "We have been reviewing the awards categories and have given them quite an overhaul, with significant changes to several categories. The rules of entry will be applied very strictly this year and so will the deadline date." Entries by post or in person must arrive at the ACoRP offices no later than 17:00 on Friday 21 June 2013. Full detail here: <http://www.acorp.uk.com/index.html>

Awards will be presented by the Managing Director of Arriva Trains Wales at the Gala Dinner on Fri 27 Sept, which this year will be held at the Venue Cymru, Llandudno. The Community Rail Festival follows on Sat 28 Sept, with station galas at the two ends of the Conwy Valley line: Llandudno and Blaenau Ffestiniog. Apply to ben.davies@arrivatw.co.uk to book stall space at this event.

FUNDRAISING FROM MERCHANDISE

If your group regularly runs an information stall at local events, it's possible to generate a bit of cash from selling railway-themed gifts like key fobs and fridge magnets. It does mean paying up front for a reasonable quantity in order to make a profit and you do have to find a reliable person to take charge of the sales effort.

In a previous life, I was National Sales Officer for Railfuture, so from experience I can advise that... (i) anything with a train design on it will sell (ii) you can expect to achieve a 20% profit margin overall and (iii) pocket-money items which appeal to children will go like hot cakes at family events!

An increasing number of voluntary groups now have websites that enable members to pay their annual subscriptions online. Once you have the facility to take payments via the internet, you're already part way towards setting up your own online shop. You now have a choice of whether to handle the packaging and despatch yourself or to use the services of an established merchandising agency. Garment printing or embroidery companies, for example, will take individual orders, apply a design of your choice to T-shirts, baseball caps and the like, and mail them out to clients on your behalf. Some book publishers will also undertake packaging and postage, sending you a percentage of the profits – it saves you having to estimate the likely sales and hold large amounts of stock.

☞ If anyone else has experience of fundraising from merchandise, please let us have your top tips!

EVENTS

National & regional rail events are highlighted in **yellow**. Community & environmental events are in **purple**. Railfuture events are in **green** – rail user group reps are welcome to attend!

Sat 27 Apr [Bus Users UK](#) AGM in Oxford

Sat 27 Apr Railfuture [W Mids](#) AGM at Carrs Lane Church Centre (opp Moor St Station) from 11:00.

Mon 29 Apr [OPSTA](#) meet at Burscough Wharf from 19:30. Guest speaker from Merseytravel.

Tue 30 Apr [Saltburn Line User Group](#) AGM at the Conservative Club, Saltburn from 19:00.

30 Apr-2 May [Railtex 2013](#) at Earls Court, London. Showcase of railway products and services.

Wed 1 May [SENRUG](#) meet at Morpeth Town Hall at 19:30, with talk about work of Transport Police

Thu 2 May [Don Valley Railway](#) drop-in meeting at Harlequin pub, Nursery St, Sheffield from 19:00.

Sat 4 May [ESTA](#) AGM at the Church Hall, Melton from 14:00. Guest speaker from Greater Anglia.

Tue 7 May [SARPA](#) meet at Railway Station, Shrewsbury from 17:45.

Tue 7 May [Saltburn Line User Group](#) meet at Conservative Club, Balmoral Terrace, Saltburn.

Tue 7 May [Stourbridge Line User Group](#) AGM & public forum, SVR Station, Kidderminster from 19:30.

Wed 8 May [Friends of the Barton Line](#) meet at the Sloop Inn, Barton from 20:00.

Thu 9 May [ACoRP](#) conference “A Practical Guide to Improving Small Stations” at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham.

Sat 11 May [Railfuture](#) AGM at the Town Hall, Durham city centre. Bookable lunch: £8.

Sat 11 May [BRTA](#) meet at the Bedford Quakers Building, Lansdowne Rd, Bedford from 14:00

Sat 18 May [Cotswold Line Promotion Group](#) AGM at the WI Hall, Moreton-in-Marsh from 10:30.

Sat 18 May [PENRUG](#) AGM at the Riversdale Centre, Thetford from 10:30 with guest speakers.

Sat 18 May [HPSRUA](#) AGM at the Village Hall, Stocksmoor from 14:00. Guest speaker from Northern.

Sun 19 May National rail timetable change.

Sun 19 May [Friends of the Barton Line](#) mark the start of the summer timetable with a Sunday lunch.

Tue 21 May [Felixstowe Travel Watch](#) AGM – details to follow.

Thu 23 May [Edenbridge & District Rail Travellers' Association](#) open AGM at the WI Hall, Edenbridge from 19:00.

Mon 3 Jun [Friends of the Far North Line](#) AGM/conference, Royal British Legion, Thurso from 11:30.

Tue 4 Jun Aylesbury Vale Transport Users Group meet at the Methodist Church Centre, Buckingham Street, Aylesbury from 14:00.

Wed 5 Jun [World Environment Day](#) a global day for positive environmental action.

Sat 8 Jun [Trans Wilts Community Rail Partnership](#) meet at The Laverton, Westbury from 10:45.

Mon 10 Jun [APTU](#) meeting with First Capital Connect and Network Rail (tbc) at the Friends Meeting House, 7 Upper Latimer Rd, St Albans from 19:30.

10-12 Jun [ACoRP](#) members' seminars, by invitation only. 10th York, 11th Wrexham, 12th London.

Tue 11 Jun [FoWHL](#) AGM with lunch at Commodore Hotel, West Clyde St, Helensburgh from 10:45. Guest speakers: Keith Brown (Transport Minister), John Yellowlees (ScotRail) & Paul Salveson.

Tue 11 Jun [TravelWatch North West](#) conference in County Hall, Preston from 10:30 to 15:00.

14-23 Jun [Green Transport Week](#) - make people stop and think about the way they travel.

Sat 15 Jun [Railfuture Yorkshire Branch](#) meeting *details to be announced*

Thu 20 Jun [TravelWatch North West](#) conference *moved to 11 June (see above)*

Fri 21 Jun Closing date for ACoRP Community Rail Awards competition entries.

Sat 22 Jun [Railfuture](#) summer conference on future aspects of railway operation at the Albemarle Centre, Taunton. Fee only £30 (£25 for members' bookings before 30 Apr) – includes lunch.

Sat 22 Jun [Dornoch Rail Link Action Group](#) AGM – *venue tba*

Sun 23 Jun [ALRUG](#) outing to Buckfastleigh with lunch and steam train ride.

Wed 26 Jun [OPSTA](#) AGM at Burscough Wharf from 19:30.

Wed 10 Jul [Friends of the Barton Line](#) meeting & AGM at the Sloop Inn, Barton from 20:00.

Wed 10 Jul [SENUG](#) AGM at Morpeth Town Hall from 19:30. Guest speaker from Northern Rail

Wed 17 Jul [ACoRP](#) station adoption seminar at Gt Minster House, London, by invitation only.

Wed 28 Aug [East Norfolk Transport Users Association](#) AGM and public meeting at St Paul's Church Hall, corner of Salisbury Rd/ Caister Road in Great Yarmouth from 19:30.

Tue 10 Sep Aylesbury Vale TUG meet at Buckingham Town Council Chamber, Buck'm from 14:00.

Wed 11 Sep [Friends of the Barton Line](#) meet at the Sloop Inn, Barton from 20:00.

Sun 22 Sep [Car Free Day](#). Highlight the positive effects of car free travel.

Fri 27 Sep [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Awards 2013, Llandudno.

Sat 28 Sep [ACoRP](#) Community Rail Festival, Llandudno and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Mon 30 Sep Closing date for Railfuture's RUG Awards competition.

Tue 1 Oct Railway Development Society (aka Railfuture) 35th anniversary.

Sat 12 Oct [ESTA](#) meet at St Marks Church Hall, Oulton Broad South.

Mon 21 Oct [ALRUG](#) AGM at the Manor Hotel, Exmouth (tbc) from 19:00.

Sat 2 Nov [Railfuture](#) conference, at the Town Hall, Oxford. Fee only £30 (£25 for members booking before 31 Aug).

Sun 8 Dec National rail timetable change

More events on the Railfuture and ACoRP websites.

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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