



July 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The current volatile nature of the rail service due to industrial action means that many potential users wait to see how it will be on the day they wish to travel. If then they do decide to go by rail, it is imperative that the first step, buying a ticket, is as straightforward as possible. Rf has some ideas on how this might be achieved.

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around Great Britain. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

FoFNL held its first AGM & Conference since 2019 in Dingwall on 17 June, with over fifty in attendance, and speakers from the Scottish Government, NR and Modern Railways magazine. Kate Forbes MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, agreed with FoFNL about the importance of investing in the development of the railways in the Highlands. The highlight, though, was the announcement by Matt Powell, Scotland's Railway's Head of Sponsorship, that the long-awaited passing loop between Inverness and Beauly will be operational in 2024. Previously known as the Lentrans Loop, it is now designated as the Delmore Loop, as it is much closer to Inverness.

Friends of the West Highland Lines

Transport Scotland's second draft Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) has no specific projects for the WHLs or any other scenic line, which is regrettable given the post-pandemic growth in leisure and tourist rail traffic. FWHL suggested splitting the 17-mile long Rannoch - Tulloch section by bringing the existing passing loop at Corroul into the radio signaling system. However, the WHLs could benefit from many of its general recommendations such as improved access at stations and interchange facilities, for example to the ferry at Oban.

At the FWHL AGM, Frank Roach of HITRANS spoke of Fort Transit, a scheme to relieve congestion at Fort William by using an additional train unit to run a through service from Glenfinnan to Corroul, with a new station to serve Fort William High School, and another at Torlundy. There are also plans to upgrade the service to Faslane, where the naval base employs 7,500 workers. A station site has been identified 200m from the North Gate. The more frequent service might even justify electrification of the WHL to that point.

FWHL plan to restore the former signal box building on the platform at Gairlochhead as a community room, whilst the Station Trust redevelops the station building. The goal is to preserve the station as a focal point for services to veterans, their families and the wider community.

NR is installing a monitoring system to provide early warning of earth movements at 30 sites across Scotland's railway, including the Kyle of Lochalsh line. Two banks of wireless sensors will alert the line controller when the slope tilts by more than 5 degrees.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Progress on the line itself seems to be proceeding well: work on two bridges is nearly complete, and March 2024 is still the target date to resume passenger services. However, the largest potential freight customer, Diageo, seems to prefer Thornton, which could also serve the nearby Cluny Bond complex. If no freight terminal emerges, then Levenmouth must be considered for a rail depot to service the Fife network. The local community would benefit from access to relatively high-paid jobs, timetables would go with the flow of travel demand, and there would be less risk of crew being poached by long-distance operators.

Another major concern relates to the false economy of single-tracking the first mile of line from Thornton Junction, as clarified in a letter from the Cabinet Secretary. It would repeat the mistakes in constructing the Borders line, where a lack of passing loops resulted in frequent cancellations and late running. NR already owns the necessary land so, compared to the cost of relaying the entire route with double track and a few crossover points, the cost of this useful addition is trivial.

Lakes Line Rail Users Group

27 April at Windermere saw the climax of the Lakes Line 175 programme. Pride of Cumbria arrived complete with headboard, and Burneside Brass played between the speeches. Passengers arriving at the station were suitably impressed. Fiona Marley-Paterson's [report](#) for ITV Border featured in that evening's news.

The Group's observations over recent holiday periods show that passengers are using the Lakes Line in large numbers: on 2 June, the first train from Manchester brought in over 300 passengers, confirming industry reports that leisure travel is back at, or close to, pre-Covid levels. However, connecting services through Oxenholme are often cancelled, and such unpredictability can only serve as a deterrent.

Northern's regional timetable guide for December was a huge success; the 100-page summer version is even better. It covers every line into Cumbria, plus Morecambe - Lancaster - Skipton; bus times for connections at Windermere, and information on visitor attractions. Northern agreed a print run of 7,500, and Community Rail Cumbria funded a further 2,500.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

Behind the veneer of a single railway network there are at least three sub-networks: intercity, urban/commuter and 'rural'. Within the last category is a sub-species of relatively self-contained lines that are often the first to suffer when there are reductions in service, and the last to get significant investment, as business cases for major enhancements are hard to justify.

Such lines need some fresh thinking, but without disrupting their service pattern. So how about (Great British) Local Railways, set up as a social enterprise, not contracted out to whoever claims to be able to operate it cheaply? Central government would fund it initially, but devolve this over time to local bodies such as combined authority mayors or unitary authorities. GBR would own the infrastructure, but lease it to GBLR to manage, maintain and operate for at least 25 years with a degree of commercial freedom. The employment structure should be based on what is appropriate rather than what is inherited from the last century.

Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership

MEMRAP has well-researched [proposals](#) to restore the Chinley/Buxton to Matlock line in the Peak District National Park. A local passenger service would bring tourists into the heart of the Park, while the through link from the North-West to the East Midlands would be more direct than via Sheffield. But the jewel in the crown is the potential for freight. Millions of tons of Peak District stone heading south by rail start by going north to Sheffield or Manchester by road. A restored Peaks and Dales Railway would remove many of these HGVs from the Park, and also relieve the Hope Valley line.

English Regional Transport Association

As well as a link to Northampton from the Great Central Line mentioned last month, ERTA would like to see a service linking Northampton Castle Station with University/Delapre, Brackmills and Great Houghton, and also the Northampton - Market Harborough line rebuilt.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

Although passenger volume is back to pre-pandemic levels, GWR revenue is substantially reduced due to lower business and season ticket volume. Some off-peak trains have been seriously overcrowded, with the 5-car IET units not providing enough capacity. CPLG hopes that 9-car diagrams can be restored to the Cotswold Line to cater for the new demand patterns.

The North Cotswold Line Task Force has fully-costed plans for a half-hourly service, and to restore the Kidderminster link, subject to double-tracking Evesham – Pershore and Wolvercot Junction near Oxford – Hanborough. Meanwhile however, the IET set used for the 0643 from Worcester Shrub Hill could instead travel to Kidderminster, depart at 0725 and be in London via Droitwich by 0942. In the evening, diverting the 1757 from Paddington via Shrub Hill and Droitwich, it would arrive in Kidderminster at 2025. Departing at 2045, it would reach Shrub Hill at 2104, as now, maintaining connections into Malvern/Hereford.

Together with Worcestershire CRP, the County Council and Wychavon District Council, CPLG is pursuing a bid from GWR's Community Fund to improve bus and train running information, and better coordinate and integrate their services. CPLG has a separate bid to improve the rail service at Ascott-Under-Wychwood.

Rail for Herefordshire and WMT have formed a new Community Station Partnership for Ledbury and Colwall stations. Together with Worcestershire CRP, it hopes to produce a book of essays to promote the attractiveness of the Worcester – Hereford line.

CPLG President Lord Faulkner was a co-founder of and co-chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail. A report in 2019 concluded that steam trains were an essential part of the railway heritage, but there was no practical alternative to the use of coal for steam locomotives. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has seen its price triple, so the Group hopes that the Welsh Government will allow coal mining at Ffos y Fran near Merthyr Tidfil to continue. Its bituminous, low-emission coal is exactly what steam locomotives need.

Tarka Rail Association

It is 150 years since the railway reached Bideford, and 40 years since the last train left and part of the track was converted into a cycling/walking path. As one of the most deprived areas in the UK, Torrington is recognized as the largest urban population without a rail service, so it is good to see local authorities taking its restoration seriously. So too is Rf, who contributed to the initial business case for ACE Rail (Atlantic Coast – Exeter). Responding to its MP Sir Geoffrey Cox's request as to how the scheme might be taken forward, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said that, while the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund is now closed for the foreseeable future, the Levelling Up Fund could be used to upgrade local transport.

How will the Tarka Line and GWR cope with the projected influx of tourism this summer? The inflexible infrastructure and the hourly Okehampton service together leave very little scope for recovery other than cancellations. TRA is pushing for improvements focused on achieving two Barnstaple - Exeter services an hour and shorter journey times.

TOCs have a temporary DfT derogation not to produce paper timetables. However, the industry's Customer Information Group has submitted a business case setting out mitigations to make the derogation permanent. One is that customers without internet access can ask a ticket office to print their timetable [*if they still have a ticket office!* – Ed.]

RAILFUTURE.

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#): from the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).



As well as Rf's RUG Annual Awards, one of which is Best RUG Campaigner, Honorary President Christian Wolmar will present the Rf Campaigner of the Year at its AGM on 16 July. So what's the difference? Whereas the latter is exclusive to Rf members, the whole point of the RUG Awards is that they are also open to individuals and organisations that have yet to join or become affiliated. RUG Award winners get a year's free Rf membership, either as a renewal for current members, or as introductory membership for 'not-yet-members' in the hope that they will then renew it.

NEWS

Talk of ticket office closures is premature: the alternatives can work, but are nowhere near doing so at the moment. Rf has set out its [vision](#) for how rail tickets should be sold, and why in-person ticket sales remain an essential choice. The ticket buying process is not just a cost to the railway – it's also the critical first step in getting any intending passenger to use it.

- Simplify the process by rationalising the myriad of start times for off-peak tickets.
- Contactless and Pay as You Go (PAYG) needs to be rolled out everywhere, and have safeguards similar to those for Direct Debits.
- Make buying tickets online easier, with a single accessible website (as GBR is planning) selling every type of ticket, and the ability to print off an online ticket for those who do not have mobile Internet.
- TVMs need to be user-friendly, and more may well be needed, with staff on hand at busier stations, and a roving concierge available for a few specified hours each week at smaller ones.
- The orange striped ticket or its successor should only ever be an option, not essential (eg at the moment one is usually required for cross-London journeys).

Rf YORKSHIRE

Any prospect of reinstating the Upper Wensleydale Railway line from the Settle and Carlisle line to Hawes has ended. In a survey, four out of five preferred a recreational use for the trackbed, and at its AGM the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority [confirmed its support](#) for this option.

The Hope Valley line between Sheffield and Manchester has seen a substantial increase in leisure traffic, particularly at weekends, but the cancellation of many TransPennine Express services led to gross overcrowding, with some intending passengers unable to board. Northern Trains responded by inaugurating six-car formations on the stopping service. The Hope Valley RUG has long campaigned for increased provision, so very much welcomes this initiative.

RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

There are currently no railway stations within North West Leicestershire, so in its response to a draft local plan, Rf urged the Council to support reopening the Ivanhoe line with stations at Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, as well as the freight line through Castle Donington, which has seen major housing expansion, and could help to provide fast Birmingham - Nottingham services. Rf also queried the sustainability of a proposed housing development south of East Midlands Airport, remote from any public transport corridor.

RAILFUTURE LONDON and the SOUTH EAST

The Barking Riverside extension is part-funded by a development of 10,800 new homes. A test train ran in May, so the passenger service could open before the official 'autumn' date, reviving the long-running topic of river crossings in east London. However, the Elizabeth Line adds a link between Abbey Wood/Woolwich and Custom House, and TfL has a project to extend the DLR from Gallions Reach across to Thamesmead.

The contrast in fortunes north and south of the Thames Estuary could hardly be more striking. On the south side, a planned development of 12,000 new homes on the Hoo Peninsular is struggling to fund the upgrade of an existing freight-only line to the standard needed to run even the most basic passenger service, let alone exploit its potential for a choice of destinations, and create a route for freight avoiding London via a short new chord towards Higham and Stroud.

Meanwhile, in East Sussex, Ringmer continues to attract strong interest from housing developers, with seven applications for outline planning permission for a total of over 600 new homes on six sites submitted in the past 15 months. The three sites between Ringmer and Broyle Side are of direct interest to a potential Wealden Line Extension and station. However, Lewes District Council Planning Committee has refused two of them against the advice of its planning officers, but subject to appeal. The development of ten times that number of new homes over the Local Plan period would be enough to make the case for the new railway!

RAILFUTURE WESSEX

Rf Wessex would like to see the West of England line electrified, as the Class 159 DMUs between Waterloo and Exeter are becoming increasingly unreliable. At first glance it would seem sensible to extend third-rail electrification west from Basingstoke, but there is a case for 25kV overhead from Yeovil Junction, as GWR often uses this section as a diversionary route.

The Basingstoke - Reading line carries heavy freight trains from Southampton, and DC third rail would struggle to supply the necessary power. Also, some are routed from Southampton to Basingstoke via Salisbury, so this may tip the balance towards overhead electrification of the whole West of England line. The choice is not clear-cut, but decisions are needed soon if diesel power is to be eliminated by 2040. A detailed analysis is required of the whole-life cost and the pros and cons of each type of system.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

With Leeds-Morecambe CRP support, a group of ten university students on Northern Train's 'Year in Industry' scheme for 2021/22 have completed an 'Access for All' project. For each of the 21 Bentham Line stations from Heysham Port to Leeds, their booklet details its accessibility and a QR code links to a 3-minute, 360° interactive video showing its layout and facilities.

There is also one on the Class 158 units used on the route. Copies of the booklet are available at staffed stations on the route, and by post from the CRP's offices at Bentham station, LA2 7LF. The videos can be seen on the CRP's website. Simple infrastructure improvements at some stations and plans for accessible car parking spaces will also have a lasting benefit.

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

The DfT has launched a consultation (see below) on the legislative changes required to deliver Rail Transformation: to enable GBR to function as a guiding mind, and allow EU-derived law to be amended by secondary legislation, after consultation. ORR will have a new duty to help further GBR policies approved by the Transport Secretary on matters of access to and use of the railway.

Developed in partnership with industry, the UK Government's plan for the freight and logistics sector, [The Future of Freight: a long term plan](#), aims to deliver a world-class, seamless flow of freight across roads, railways, seas, skies and waterways. A Strategic Freight Unit within GBR will promote rail freight, and there will be a consultation on a growth target.

The Transport Secretary has approved a Transport and Works Act Order to transform train journeys between Huddersfield and Westtown (Dewsbury) as part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade. [Fly-through footage](#) shows how the changes will double the number of tracks from two to four, upgrade Huddersfield, Deighton and Mirfield stations, and deliver a brand-new Ravensthorpe station, together with a flyover to separate the Wakefield and Leeds lines.

The Government is investing over £1bn in digital signalling for the southern end of the ECML between Kings Cross and Peterborough. The work schedule for the East Coast Digital Programme is now being finalized.

Rail Minister Wendy Morton will allocate a further £15m to develop nine Restoring Your Railway schemes across England to reopen disused railway lines, services and stations:

- The Fleetwood Line in Lancashire
- The Barrow Hill Line between Sheffield and Chesterfield
- The Ivanhoe Line between Leicester and Burton Upon Trent
- The mid-Cornwall metro, connecting Newquay, Truro and Falmouth
- Ferryhill Station in County Durham
- Haxby Station between York and Scarborough
- Meir Station between Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire
- Aldridge station and line upgrade in Walsall
- A station for Devizes between Pewsey and Westbury.

DfT has awarded GWR a new three-year National Rail Contract. It took over the franchise in 2015, and in the seven years since, passenger satisfaction has increased from 81% to 91%.

Rail passengers with electric vehicles will be able to charge while they travel thanks to the introduction of 450 new Compleo charging points in green bays at railway station car parks. They can fully charge a vehicle in as little as 3-4 hours, and users pay for what they need via the APCOA Connect app. In this phase, NR has 160 charging points in Reading, 111 in Manchester, 84 in Edinburgh, 56 at Leeds and 41 in Welwyn Garden City. By March 2024, there will be about 779.

The City of Edinburgh Council has granted planning permission for a reception hub and car park at South Queensferry. The Forth Bridge Experience will see groups of 12 – 15 don safety harnesses before being led up walkways to a viewing point at the top of the south cantilever.

East West Rail Co has said that the 21-mile long, £760m [Bicester to Bletchley](#) section is on time and on budget, and should be complete by 2024. It is still examining responses to the Bedford - Cambridge consultation. The aim is to connect Oxford with Cambridge by the end of the decade.

England's Economic Heartland has published a [Three-Year Business Plan](#). The transformational opportunity is EWR; the priority is to secure funding for Bletchley – Cambridge and the Aylesbury spur. Catchment areas drawn up for each station will show how EWR aligns with local economic and housing plans. DfT will also grant EEH almost £1m to develop strategic outline business cases. Another key ambition is to realise the potential of the Felixstowe - Midlands rail freight corridor, crucial to which is raising the capacity of Ely junction.

Demand for eTickets and mobile barcodes has grown from less than 3% of UK sales in 2018 to over 43% by March 2022. Barcode readers now cover every single gate at 21 of GTR's busiest stations.

GB Railfreight has ordered a fleet of 30 Class 99 locomotives from Stadler, financed by Beacon Rail, to replace its Class 66 locomotives from 2025. They will have a top speed of 75mph, and use a high-power low-emission diesel engine on non-electrified sections.

,,,and finally

GB Railfreight has named its latest Class 66 locomotive, 66708, Glory to Ukraine, and fitted it out in a blue and yellow livery, while 66734 has been named Platinum Jubilee and painted purple.

CONSULTATIONS

- Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CA: Draft [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan \(LTCP\)](#), closes 4 August.
- DfT: [Legislation to Implement Rail Transformation](#), closes 4 August.
- Transport for the South East: [Strategic Investment Plan](#), closes 12 September.
- GBRTT: [Rail Freight Growth Target Call for Evidence](#), closes 27 September.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Stand-alone lists are helpful, as newsletters may be discarded. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

July

■ Saturday 16. Rf AGM and RUG Awards, St Michael's Church Centre, The Green, Stoke Gifford, **Bristol**, BS34 8PD, 1100.

■ Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan **Barton**, 1800 (Also 15 Sep at No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes, and 16 Nov.)

■ Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

August

■ Tuesday 2. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)

- Tuesday 9. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Saturday 13. English Regional Transport Association, Barrel Vault, Unit 23, St Pancras Station, **London**, 1500.
- Tuesday 16. Rf East Midlands, Victoria Hotel, 85 Dovecote Lane, **Beeston**, NG9 1JG. 1200.
- Saturday 20 . Rf London South East, Kent Division, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 10 September. English Regional Transport Association, The Swan Pub, 1 Dunstable Road, **Flitwick**, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP, 1400.
- 15 September. Rf Annual Conference, St Georges Centre, 60 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3DL.
- 15 September. Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group, venue TBN, 1930.
- 5 October. Community Rail Awards, **Manchester** Central Convention Centre.
- 15 October. East Suffolk Transport Association, Market Hall, High Street, **Saxmundham**, 1400.
- 15 October. English Regional Transport Association AGM, St Peters Court House, Church Lane, **Berkhamsted**, Hertfordshire, HP4 2AX, 1400.
- 21 October. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Manor Hotel, **Exmouth**, 1900.

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

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