

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

As always, feel free to forward RUG 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").

RAILFUTURE 2020 VISION

Key electoral issues in 2015 are the economy, education and skills training, social inclusion and health. Provision of a growing and effective transportation system and investment in transport infrastructure are highly effective ways of addressing these key election issues.

Railfuture, through its branches located throughout the UK has kept in touch with important transport issues both nationally and locally. Railfuture's 2020 Vision, written by Ian Brown CBE, represents a distillation of the electorate's wishes and expectations for a developing railway for the UK, for delivery during the life of the new parliament.

This document is therefore offered to all candidates as a piece of research into what constituents are saying about railways beneath the headlines. You can download it [here](#) and make use of it when lobbying candidates in your area.

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

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland – *rolling stock shortage may delay start of new service*

The new franchise for ScotRail is due to begin on 1 April, but RAGES was dismayed to learn that the promised local service between Edinburgh and Berwick will not start until Dec 2018 due to a lack of rolling stock. There's hope that introduction could be advanced if Transport Scotland were to finance the extra stock, but in the meantime RAGES has written to the Scottish Minister for Transport to express their grievance.

At a meeting with the new franchise operator, Abellio, RAGES took the opportunity to press for the reopening of the branch line to Haddington, or at least a rail-link bus service for the town.

Members of the group report constant overcrowding on the evening peak-time train from Edinburgh to North Berwick and the introduction of a smaller 3-car unit on the service is thought to be the cause.

Coastliners Rail Users Group – *representing users on the Durham Coast line*

Coastliners held a meeting recently in Hartlepool addressed by David Jones, Stakeholder Manager for Operations and Community Rail Projects at Arriva Trains (one of the preferred bidders for the next Northern Franchise). David had previously met with the group's committee to discuss the Company's proposals for the new franchise.

Harrogate Line Supporters – celebrating the promise of electrification

After six years of campaigning on the issue, the group welcomed the announcement that the Harrogate rail line has been prioritised by the Government for electrification. In a press release, they say: “Improving the rail service with electrification will make an enormous difference to Harrogate. As well as modern rolling stock, which is something we have needed for many years, we will benefit from increased frequency, shorter journey times, and services earlier in the morning and later in the evening, seven days a week.”

The line from Leeds to York via Harrogate appears in Tier 1 of the list just published by the Northern Electrification Task Force as part of their report covering the North of England – Ed.

Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group – new Action Group to promote public transport

Members of the LASRUG and Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line attended a meeting in Settle on 4th March to establish a Southern Dales Transport Action Group. The principal focus was on bus and rail services associated with the A65 corridor between Kirkby Lonsdale and Skipton. Better bus-rail connections would require additional bus services but, as always, the problem was a lack of funding. Nevertheless, it was resolved to publish a Southern Dales Travel Guide containing details of all public transport in the area.

LASRUG are happy that their timetable suggestions for the Bentham Line are reflected in the Dept. for Transport’s *Invitation to Tender* document for the new Northern franchise, and the specified service should herald a new range of travel possibilities for business, education and leisure travel - however, the group will still be pressing for further improvements after the start of the contract. The group welcomes the promise of secure funding for the line’s Community Rail Partnership, which will support a new officer post and lead to more community-based initiatives.

LASRUG feel they are getting more adept at holding coffee mornings: “these are not only great social events but also great fundraisers”. The Friends of Bentham Station thanked LASRUG members who supported and assisted at their own coffee morning in January - after expenses, they raised £250 towards projects at the station.

Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers’ Association – operator continuing with improvements

OPSTA has now been involved in meetings with all three of shortlisted bidders for the Northern franchise. There are only about 14 months left to the end of the current franchise, so OPSTA finds it encouraging that Northern continues to progress initiatives and investment commitments, adding “we should see customer information systems installed at a number of our stations this year.” Also welcome is the statement that the operator will facilitate user group discussions on timetabling.

A petition calling for the retention of the ticket office at Burscough Bridge has been sent to Lancashire County Council, but OPSTA fears that the Council has already made up its mind to close the facility.

The group thinks that there is much untapped demand for the Ormskirk-Preston line, currently operated by a single-car unit. They plan to conduct another full passenger count this Spring, and meanwhile the committee welcomes feedback from members using the service. Worryingly, some users have recently reported a major drop off in fare collection, and OPSTA has brought this to the operator’s attention.

Some of the passengers participating in OPSTA’s recent travel surveys suggested that Twitter would be an effective way of getting the group’s message out to a wider audience. Consequently anyone can now “follow” the group on **@opsta15**.

Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester Line (STORM) – thumbs up for “new” electric trains

Several members of the group have been out to sample the refurbished Class 319 electric units, and report that they are swift, comfortable and nicely fitted out complete with information screens – a great improvement on the Class 156 diesel units they replaced. There’s an accessible toilet but some wondered if a wheelchair user could squeeze through the narrow aisle to access it. One member comments: “These units are between 25 and 28 years old but solidly-built at York - they should do a reasonable job for Northern.”

An Order to build the Ordsall Curve in Manchester sparked a number of comments from STORM members, including this: “While approving the Ordsall Chord is good news for the Northern Hub, and probably for the refranchising process, it is not good news for the longer term strategic rail network for Greater Manchester. It was cancelled last time round (then called the Castlefield Curve) for good reasons, most of which still apply. The complexity of flat junctions will be a rail operator’s nightmare and does not bode well for reliability. Manchester will never be properly sorted until it gets a rail tunnel.”

Friends of the Brigg and Lincoln Lines – a better service on the horizon

FoBLL produced a written response to the Dept. for Transport’s Invitation to Tender documents for the Northern franchise, issued in Feb. The group notes that a stopping service is to be introduced between Sheffield Midland and Worksop from 2019, and they will be pressing bidders to extend the service to call at Retford Low Level and Gainsborough Central, thus bringing a regular service to Gainsborough Central. “We will ask the bidders to consider increasing the current 3-train Saturday only service to four trains by 2017 as there is a demand to travel to Cleethorpes on this line, and we will ask for them to consider some, if not all, of the stopping trains which are to operate between Worksop and Sheffield to be extended along the Brigg Line - this then would give a 30 minute service between Worksop - Retford Low Level and either Gainsborough Central or Lea Road Stations.”

The group considers that the operation of Gainsborough Lea Road station should be transferred from East Midlands Trains to Northern Rail. They also want bidders to commit to a thorough upgrade of Gainsborough Central station.

On 17 March, FoBLL joined other stakeholders for a meeting in Brigg with managers from Northern Rail. After discussions about timetabling and rolling stock, the delegates repaired to Brigg station where they looked at signage and passenger facilities to see what improvements were needed. NR managers were happy about whisky-barrel planters being sited on the platform, provided they were securely fixed down. FoBLL asked for a similar meeting with the managers at Gainsborough.

The group feels that Vivarail’s refurbished London Underground “D-Stock” trains would be an improvement on railbuses working the 72-mile Sheffield-Cleethorpes line, so they’ve approached the company with this suggestion.

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association – at last the penny has dropped!

The Welsh Government’s confirmation of enhanced services on Cambrian mainline was warmly welcomed by SARPA in a press release dated 23 March.

SARPA’s Chairman said “We started campaigning for extra services on our line in 1997 and are pleased at long last that the penny has dropped about the benefits this will provide to communities in Mid Wales in terms of improved connectivity and access to educational and work opportunities. We must remember the hard effort put in by campaigners, some sadly no longer with us, to get to this point. Along the way the campaign encountered resistance and open hostility - however the strength of the arguments, combined with evidence of the success of increased services on rural lines in England, have shone through”.

SARPA sees the new services as a springboard to campaigning for a fit-for-purpose replacement for the current Wales and Borders franchise in 2018.

Stourbridge Line Users' Group – *light rail may be the only option*

Dudley Council and Centro are working with the University of Warwick on a research centre for the development of Ultra Light Rail, and propose using the technology to restore a rail link between Dudley and Dudley Port. SLUG has long campaigned for a heavy-rail link over the route but remains frustrated by the lack of progress, so they've agreed to refrain from campaigning against the ULR proposal nor hinder it, saying: "It may be that a light railway is better than no railway at all."

At long last, funding seems to be in place for the revamp of Kidderminster station. SLUG warns there are still hurdles to clear: local businesses are worried that the development could adversely affect their trade and the Severn Valley Railway will doubtless seek retention of heritage features. Nevertheless, the group hopes that construction will not be blocked, not the least because local residents deserve a transport hub worthy of the area.

The recent landslip between Leamington Spa and Banbury had repercussions for Stourbridge Line services – not only through services to London, but also local services due to allocated trains being trapped on the wrong side of the blockage. SLUG raised their concerns through normal stakeholder channels and, in the second week of the blockage, the local services were substantially restored. The group hopes that lessons have been learned about the need to satisfy customers across the whole network at the earliest opportunity.

"Are we a pro-active or re-active group?" a member recently asked the Chairman. The answer was "both" ... with the caveat that becoming more pro-active would require more time and money devoted to events and publicity, while being more re-active means picking up on every single transport development despite some being covered adequately by other parties. It's a question of balance!

Bedford Commuters' Association – *December timetable a precursor to the full Thameslink service*

Monitoring the implementation of the Performance Improvement Plan on Thameslink services has been a major challenge for the BCA committee in recent weeks. The other issue demanding their attention has been the draft timetable for December 2015, a key point being that this timetable will be a precursor for the full Thameslink service from 2018. The BCA want to see a 15-minute frequency from the northern part of the network to Gatwick Airport as soon as practicable. The full text of the BCA's response to the timetable consultation (prepared jointly with their neighbouring group, APTU) is appended to their newsletter.

One concern of rail users about the new Class 700 fleet, namely the lack of WiFi, has now been resolved but there remain many other deficiencies such as the uncomfortable narrow seats, which the BCA say are not being addressed.

Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail Users' Group – *patronage justifies increased frequency*

MS&F RUG has been discussing a possible campaign to lobby for a half-hourly, off-peak service from the roll-out of full Thameslink services in 2018. Figures show that, last year, Meldreth Station saw a 10% rise in footfall, with roughly a quarter of a million travellers using the station (often filling both the car park and cycle racks). If station accessibility issues were to be resolved, footfall would be even higher - the group is working with local Railfuture members and others to find the ideal solutions for providing ramped access.

The Meldreth Local History Group has unearthed a great deal of information about Meldreth Station (see their website www.meldrethhistory.org.uk) and some of their members recently gave a talk on the subject. The train operator's staff are in the process of tidying up the waiting room at Foxton Station, and MS&F RUG is thinking of approaching Melbourn Youth Club to help create a mural.

Cambridge Heath and London Fields Users' Group – *an Orange future*

Under the heading “The Future is Orange”, CHLFUG’s newsletter editor describes the improvements to stations and rolling stock both before and after services become part of London Overground at the end of May. Train interiors will be refreshed ahead of the new trains expected in 2018. Stations will be deep cleaned and provided with upgraded facilities, including ticket machines and help points. From day one, staff will be at each station every day before the first train runs and until after the last train has departed.

The group is pressing for the unreliable train information screens to be upgraded. They also want more waiting shelters at London Fields, and they’re asking for Chingford trains to stop at their stations to avoid having to change at Hackney Downs.

Windsor Lines Passengers' Association – *one fleet sorted, another proving problematic*

The annual awards competition run by Modern Railways magazine declared the Class 458/1 Juniper units to be the most reliable of all train fleets. The WLPAs commented that this reflects the excellent work of both train crews and the maintenance staff at Wimbledon who have managed to turn the situation right around following the disastrous performance of these units when first (belatedly) introduced. However, the group wonders if history is repeating itself with the newly-reconstructed Class 458/5 units, which are around a year late and suffering teething problems.

In their response to Network Rail’s Wessex Route Study, the WLPAs gave their support to proposals which would increase capacity and they made further suggestions to achieve this goal. The group thought that there should be a review of stopping patterns, and they urged progress on both Crossrail 2 and the scheme to provide southern access to Heathrow Airport.

In a list of topics raised with South West Trains, we read that the WLPAs has concerns over (among other things): lifts out of action, the siting of timetable information about South Eastern trains at Waterloo and disabled access to the former international platforms at Waterloo which are to be used for Windsor Line services. The centenary of electrification is approaching and the WLPAs has offered to fund a plaque to be installed at an appropriate location such as Richmond station.

Guildford Rail Users – *operator seeks support for their development plans*

GRU operates as an informal group communicating via email. Members try to attend train-operator stakeholder events and respond to consultations affecting rail services in the City and surrounding area.

South West Trains solicited the support of GRU and other rail users for the planned development of the route into Waterloo, as set out in Network Rail’s recent consultation on the draft Wessex Route Study. The group’s representative at SWT’s stakeholder meeting about the Study pressed for extra capacity at Guildford station and suggested bi-directional working on both tracks through the tunnels just to the south of the station.

A GRU representative also attended the Air-Rail Links conference in February, not the least because access to both Heathrow and Gatwick are of great interest to rail users in Surrey.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group – *calls to retain direct service fall on deaf ears*

The campaign team at BTPG is “bitterly disappointed” with the news that their direct trains to Paddington will cease from May 2017, except for at least one peak-hour journey. Thus for most of the day, passengers will have to change between a Bedwyn-Newbury diesel shuttle and the soon-to-be-introduced Newbury-London electric trains.

The Chairman writes: “We have been working on this [the campaign to retain a direct service] for 5½ years. Our petition stands at over 2,000 signatures but I feel we haven’t really achieved much. I think

the way forward is to persuade First Great Western to run more than one HST up and back for commuters with an additional one around 09:00 for off-peak visitors to London. Another alternative is to lobby the Dept. for Transport to keep the diesel turbos in service until they plug the gap.” He has since written to the Dept. of Transport urging them to provide a through service using turbos.

FGW has promised a feasibility study into the use of Independently Powered Electric Multiple Units over the route between Bedwyn and Paddington with a view to reintroducing through trains by Dec 2018.

Tarka Rail Association – 25 years of successful campaigning

Back in the 1980s there was a real fear that the line could shut, then, 25 years ago, the Exeter-Barnstaple Line Working Party was set up with the aim of turning around the fortunes of the line. In Nov 2014, the success of what was eventually to be called the Tarka Line Forum (involving the TRA, local authorities and the train operator) was celebrated by a Class 150 naming ceremony. The nameplate reads: “The Tarka Line, The First 25 Years, 1989-2014”. Sections of track are being renewed and a big leap forward is anticipated for 2017: “no-one, but no-one talks of closure or cuts now.”

The committee has responded to a number of consultations recently, the main one being Network Rail’s draft Western Route Study. The full text of their response occupies three pages of the TRA’s magazine, and a recurring theme is that of continued growth and the need for additional capacity. We read that patronage of the line has grown from 225,000 journeys in 2003 to 600,000 in 2013 ... with 1.8m predicted for 2025!

Despite being consulted by First Great Western, the TRA’s concerns about proposed timetable changes affecting stops at intermediate stations on the Exeter-Barnstaple line have not been taken into account – the group is attempting a rear-guard action so that, hopefully, the situation will not be as bad as first thought. Meanwhile, the group has met with FGW to make progress on its strategic aims - they’re pleased to see that some work is taking place to increase line speeds, and that (by means of “innovative scheduling”) additional coaches are being provided on some trains to address overcrowding.

The TRA is working closely with Friends of Copplestone Station to secure comprehensive improvements involving seating, hard landscaping and an extensive planting scheme. The TRA has been instrumental in raising the necessary finance, and they see this as a demonstration project for other stations along the line.

Avocet Line Rail Users’ Group – infrastructure improvements but service remains inadequate

Replacement of rolling stock and movement towards a half-hourly frequency seem as far away as ever, but at least there are signs of improvement to infrastructure on the Exmouth line. Lymptone has a much better waiting shelter, the new station at Newcourt is at last taking shape, and work has started on improving the forecourt at Exmouth station (although ALRUG is disappointed that the unsatisfactory taxi arrangements will remain in place). The group still hopes for further small improvements arising from the Line Forum’s report on station standards.

ALRUG plan to relaunch their manifesto for line improvements to coincide with the opening of Newcourt station. It’s five years since their first aspirations document was published, and sadly the majority of items on that original wish list remain unfulfilled. However, there now seems to be acceptance that the South West region has lagged behind in investment terms, and the Avocet Line would be a major component of the proposed Devon Metro network. ALRUG says that regional funding is now the watchword, and the role of the Local Enterprise Partnership is therefore crucial.

ALRUG is working with the Community Rail Partnership on a project to brighten up Polsloe Bridge station. Schoolchildren have produced a colourful poster for the station, encouraging people to take the train. The poster will be displayed at other stations on the line.

In his "Tail Lamp" column, the magazine editor relates a story about the astonishing construction of a siding at Newcourt during wartime: the scheme was decided on Saturday, materials were delivered the following Monday, by Tuesday the 1000-foot siding was completed and connected to the main line, and the first wagons were in position on the Wednesday. Ironically, this is the site of the new station at Newcourt – now due to open in April despite ministerial pressure to get it opened by the end of 2014! The editor's column ends with a gripe about litter between the tracks at Exmouth, and he wonders if Network Rail's rules on access to the tracks need to be applied so rigorously on rural branch lines – there seems to be an inability to tailor the risk to the location.

The Membership Secretary is pleased to report that 60% of members now pay by standing order, making the administration task much easier.

...news from Railfuture follows...

RAILFUTURE RAIL USER GROUP AWARDS – now open to receive nominations!

The 2015 User Group Awards competition is now open to receive your entries. The categories this year are:

- ✓ Best Newsletter – *not available to last year's winners*
- ✓ Best Website – *not available to last year's winners*
- ✓ Best Campaign
- ✓ Best New Group
- ✓ Best Campaigner – *Railfuture members only*
- ✓ Best Social Media Promotion – *a new category for 2015*
- ✓ Judges' Special Award

The closing date for entries is Tuesday 1 September 2015, a little earlier than last year to give our panel of judges time to visit participants on their travels. Awards will be presented at Railfuture's Autumn Conference in Bristol on Saturday 7 November 2015. Winners will receive a framed certificate and their next-year's subscription to Railfuture free.

Guidance notes on how to enter will be published on Railfuture's website shortly. In the meantime, take a look at the guidance for the 2014 competition [here](#) to get an idea of how simple it is to enter!

RAILFUTURE CONFERENCES IN 2015

- 16 May 2015 RDS Ltd AGM to be held at Savoy Hotel, Queens Promenade, Blackpool FY2 9SJ from 10:45 to 17:00. Complimentary refreshments; lunch, if required, must be purchased in advance (£9.50).
- 20 June 2015 Railfuture summer conference at Newark Town Hall NG24 1DU, from 10:45 to 17:00. **Book by 30 April to benefit from the Early Bird discount price of £25, incl lunch.**
- 7 Nov 2015 Railfuture autumn conference and RUG awards ceremony at Mercure Bristol Holland House Hotel, Redcliff Hill, Bristol BS1 6SQ, from 10:45 to 17:00.

For further information and list of speakers, see: www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences

RAILFUTURE PASSENGER GROUP

The Passenger Group carries the responsibility for submitting Railfuture's coordinated response to franchise consultations. The challenge is to meet the Dept. for Transport's deadline while allowing all interested parties, including relevant Railfuture branches, to have their say. The DfT's recent consultation documents for the East Anglia franchise were to a new format with greater emphasis on infrastructure issues, so it was necessary to involve Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group in the deliberations. Next in line for attention is the CrossCountry franchise consultation.

Meanwhile, the Passenger Group will be looking at standards for station design and would welcome help and comments from anyone with an interest in the subject. Representatives from the group have met with Passenger Focus to discuss issues around the new Siemens Class 700 units and also to maintain a working relationship with them on a wide range of issues.

On 23 March, a code of practice was published by the Dept. for Transport and Transport Scotland, entitled *Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations*. "This code will help train operators and anybody else carrying out rail infrastructure improvements to design more accessible trains and stations. It has been published to ensure that any infrastructure work at stations makes railway travel easier for disabled passengers." - *DfT announcement*

DISRUPTION PROJECT UPDATE

An initial draft of the Passenger Group's *Rail Disruption* report has been published for consultation amongst project partners and the rail industry. Feedback will be incorporated in the final version of the report, scheduled for publication and wide circulation in June 2015.

In the meantime, any rail users suffering disruption to their journey are still invited to complete the online Disruption Survey on the Disruption Project pages of Railfuture's website [here](#). You can also read the 9-page initial draft report via this web link.

RAILFUTURE NORTH EAST BRANCH

The Branch looks forward to developing a constructive relationship with the new operator for East Coast, but has some concerns about the new franchise. They fear the premium of £3bn over 8 years will prove a massive challenge and may herald fare rises or cost cutting. There is uncertainty over whether Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick will continue to be served by East Coast, and whether the proposed additional routes (eg Sunderland via Newcastle) can be accommodated on the already-congested network.

Regarding the new Northern franchise, the Branch has been made aware of some technical issues that may delay Pacer replacement: "but who knows, maybe there is a good fairy at the Dept. for Transport who will come up a with a nation-wide cascade and shuffle programme that will rescue all parties from further Pacer embarrassment!"

Branch committee members have been involved in some of the early information seminars concerning the two new transport bodies: Rail North and Transport for the North ... "We don't know how the two organisations will interface – and probably many of the professionals don't know either!"

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY BRANCH

The Thames Valley Branch Secretary was extensively quoted in a front page spread in the Oxford Mail welcoming the new platforms at Oxford station. The branch has now written to the planners in support of the development. However, the Branch thinks that completing the re-signalling and new platforms by 2016 will be very challenging.

Branch members have recently attended meetings and given their support to a number of other schemes in their area, including the reopening of the Witney and Cowley branch lines, and the initiative by the Windsor Link Railway Company to connect the two Windsor stations with a tunnel beneath the town. The guest speaker at the Branch AGM on 18 April will be experienced rail manager, Adrian Shooter CBE, currently Chairman of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

When Arriva Cross Country asked for ideas for improvements over the course of their long franchise extension, East Anglia Branch responded with suggestions for the one service that penetrates East Anglia: the service between Birmingham and Stansted Airport. The Branch stressed the wider benefits of this service to their region and thought that it deserved better rolling stock with more capacity and shorter journey times. Some additional late-evening and Sunday morning services are needed. Also punctuality could be improved - the Branch thought the Public Performance Measure for the service should be published separately.

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

NETWORK RAIL PUBLISHES DRAFT WALES ROUTE STUDY

On 4 March 2015, the Welsh Route Study Draft for Consultation was published by Network Rail. The study sets out a strategy for the development of the railway network in Wales and the borders to meet future capacity and connectivity requirements. Geographically the study covers all services within Wales, and those that operate across the bordering counties. The consultation period will close on 9 June 2015.

- ❖ Railfuture Wales will be working on its response to this consultation, so please get in touch with them via wales@railfuturewales.org.uk if you have any comments.

A CHANCE TO INFLUENCE THE GOVERNANCE OF NETWORK RAIL

A recently-appointed Public Member of Network Rail describes his position thus: "The role of a Public Member is incredibly important, and also unique - it is essentially that of secondary governance, making sure the Board are doing everything they should to deliver their strategy in the best way. But it's much more nuanced than a traditional shareholder role. We're meeting with the Office of Rail Regulation, the Department for Transport and the Network Rail Board, so we need to be fully briefed on everything that's happening. There's a constant dialogue going on between the Members. But we also have the opportunity to ask the questions the public would like to ask, and that's a responsibility we all take very seriously."

There's more about becoming a Public Member for Network Rail [here](#).

EXTRA FUNDING FOR STATION IMPROVEMENTS

Rail passengers are set to benefit from better journeys after the government announced £60 million of extra funding to transform rail stations around the UK. Train operators and local authorities will be able to bid for a share of the money, which can be put towards improvements such as car parks, ticket gates and better facilities.

This is the second time funding has been made available in this way. The first round of funding, worth nearly £100 million, has transformed 45 stations across the country since 2011. Among the successful stations was Stockport, which received £4.3 million to construct a new 1,000-space multi-storey car park, which opened last year. The Department for Transport is now inviting train operators and local authorities to submit funding bids to Network Rail by the end of May. The successful stations are due to be announced later this year. More [here](#). – *DfT Announcement*

REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGIES UNVEILED IN BUDGET

Chancellor George Osborne announced major transport investment strategies for the North, the South West and London in his Budget, alongside a range of wider infrastructure boosts.

The Government will publish a 'comprehensive transport strategy for the North', a strategy that will outline major projects developed in partnership with local authority group Transport for the North. [The strategy] will build on the concept of HS3 to develop a network of high quality rail connections across the north – the TransNorth vision; bring the benefits of HS2 to the north sooner than planned; and work towards a single smart and integrated ticketing system across the region.

He added 'The Government will now proceed with electrification of the Selby to Hull line, subject to an acceptable contribution from Hull Trains and a business case, to complete the full electrification of the historic trade route between Liverpool and Hull.'

This was followed by plans for the South West. The Government has already committed to making a £7.2bn investment in transport in the region and Mr Osborne revealed today there would also be a 'new rail franchise, which will bring new intercity express trains (IEP) and greatly improved rail services'.

The Budget document read: 'The Secretary of State for Transport will shortly set out details of the new franchise for the Great Western Route, which will introduce the new £3bn Intercity Express trains, more frequent services and faster journey times. The Government has asked the South West Peninsula Task Force on rail to consider improvements to the Exeter to Salisbury & Waterloo (former Southern main line) as part of its work.

'The Government also encourages the relevant local authorities and local enterprise partnership (LEP) to develop a business case for investment in the North Devon Link road to form the basis of a future application to the Local Growth Fund.'

For London there was £97m of funding to support the regeneration of Brent Cross, with plans for a new railway station key to the project, and wider support to help transport and development escape delays through further devolution.

- *From an article in The MJ (Management Journal for Local Authority Businesses) spotted by Andy Long*

The Government's **Northern Transport Strategy** can be read online [here](#).

MORE POWERS FOR NORTHERN AUTHORITIES TO MANAGE RAIL SERVICES

Major step towards devolution of rail services in the north after a new agreement was signed giving local authorities more say in how they are run.

On 20 March, Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin met leaders of Rail North Ltd at the Port of Liverpool to sign a formal agreement devolving more power to the organisation in the management of the two key rail franchises in the north of England: Northern and TransPennine Express

Rail North represents 29 local transport authorities from across the north of England, with a specific remit to promote rail devolution and improvement of rail services. The agreement includes important mechanisms to enable the Rail North authorities to make decisions on changes to their local rail services and make investments in these franchises to make improvements. It also enables further devolution to take place during the life of the franchises.

Under the agreement, the Department for Transport will work together with Rail North, through a single joint strategic board and management team based in Leeds, to manage and develop these two new franchises once they are let. Bidders for the TPE franchise have until 28 May 2015 to submit their bids. For Northern, the deadline is 26 June 2015. – *DfT Announcement*

RAIL SCHEMES IN LEICESTERSHIRE SUPPORTED BY LEP

Three transport schemes aimed at cutting congestion and improving transport links for local residents are being championed by councillors. The trio, involving enhancements to the A5 between the M42 and M69 junctions, the Midland Main Line railway and the National Forest Line (Leicester - Coalville - Burton) have been endorsed by Leicestershire County Council's cabinet following a consultation carried out by regional agency, East Midlands Councils (EMC).

Councillors were told the A5 improvements would alleviate congestion and accommodate economic growth, the Midland Main Line enhancement would even out the curve in the railway track at Market Harborough ahead of electrification, improving connectivity between London, the Midlands and the North, and re-opening the National Forest Line to passenger traffic would also improve connectivity for county residents as well as providing a link to any hub station created as part of the HS2 rail line.

The EMC will approve a final list of priorities by the end of March which will support future consultation and lobbying for the scheme's delivery.

– from an article in the Hinckley Times spotted by Andy Long

EAST SUFFOLK LINES GET COMMUNITY RAIL DESIGNATION

The lines between Ipswich and Felixstowe and between Ipswich and Lowestoft are the latest to be designated as Community Rail Lines by the Dept. for Transport.

Jamie Burles, Managing Director for Abellio Greater Anglia, said: "We welcome the community rail designation of the East Suffolk Lines. Over the last few years, joint initiatives between AGA, Suffolk County Council and the East Suffolk Lines CRP have seen the introduction of an hourly service along the entire route. We've also delivered an ongoing programme of station improvements. The formal designation of the lines will help us maintain this positive momentum and deliver further improvements to services and stations to benefit the customers and communities it serves. We will continue to play our full part in the ongoing future development of this important regional route, starting with the introduction of two additional Sunday services from May this year."

To date, 19 lines with their services have been designated by the DfT as Community Rail Lines. In addition there have been 18 Community Rail Services which have been designated by the government. Designation can allow extra flexibility with the way local services are run, including ticket concessions and access to additional grants for small projects. *– DfT announcement*

NORTH-SOUTH WALES BUSINESS TRAINS FUNDED UNTIL 2018

Wales Transport Minister Edwina Hart has announced that the contract for the north-south express train service will be extended for another three years. The Welsh Government funded-service, also known as Y Gerallt Gymro, will continue to run at the same times as before, offering business class and dining facilities not available in standard trains. The new contract will ensure the service continues until the end of the current Wales and Border franchise in October 2018.

Edwina Hart said: "I am committed to improving journey times and transport links between north and south Wales to promote economic growth. The express train service has proved popular with business travellers and this new contract will ensure it continues until the end of the current franchise. We are continually working to improve this service, including introducing a new business class and investing in rail infrastructure to further reduce the journey time."

The north-south express service operates Monday to Friday, leaving Holyhead at 0533 and arriving in Cardiff Central at 0958, returning at 1716 and arriving in Holyhead at 2145, travelling via Wrexham and Chester. *– Transport Briefing*

CYCLE RAIL FUND – WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The Department for Transport has announced which stations are to benefit from £14.5 million funding in the period 2015-16 to improve cycle facilities ... *and WOOL is one of them! Hoorah!*

The full list is [here](#).

– *DfT Announcement*

BRIGHTON CYCLE HUB OFFICIALLY OPENED

Cyclists in Brighton will be able take advantage of a new £1.5 million cycle and community hub unveiled by Transport Minister Baroness Kramer on 26 March. The new Brighton cycle hub will provide an additional 500 secure cycle parking spaces in a new state of the art facility at the rear of the station open to rail and non-rail users alike.

The centre also offers a bike repair and maintenance workshop, and a coffee shop for visitors. New keep fit facilities, offering classes such as yoga and bike spinning, showers, changing rooms and accessible toilets are due to open shortly.

The additional 500 parking spaces in the new hub brings the total number of cycle parking spaces at the station to around 800, helping cut pollution, ease road congestion and meeting higher demand for facilities allowing people to park their bike and take the train. – *DfT press release*

COMMUNITY RAIL AWARDS

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) will shortly publish details of this year's competition. Nomination forms will be available from hazel@acorp.uk.com. The closing date for entries is Friday 19 June and the presentation evening and gala dinner will take place in Torquay on Thursday 1 October.

REGISTER YOUR GROUP ON THE CBT WEBSITE

The Campaign for Better Transport is working on improvements to the "Act Locally" section of their website. They want as many rail user groups as possible to register their details and, by way of incentive, participants can enter a prize draw – the first prize is £50 worth of rail tickets!! The aim is to construct a searchable map of rail user groups. You will need to get your skates on – the closing date is 6 April 2015. To see what's involved and take part, log on to...

<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/local-campaigners-win-rail-tickets>

EUROSTAR RESPONSES - KEEP THEM COMING!

Trevor Garrod writes: "We have now received a total of 158 responses to our survey on Eurostar journeys. Of these, 91 are in hard copy and 67 on line. These responses are providing very useful information from which Railfuture's International Group will compile a report in the autumn.

"The survey continues until June 30th - so please log on to www.railfuture.org.uk and complete it each time you make a train journey from London, Ebbsfleet or Ashford to Calais, Lille, Paris or Brussels. We urge Branches and Users' Groups to remind their own members as well."

*I've just logged my own Eurostar journey on the website. Things did not go terribly well, so I logged the journey on Railfuture's **Disruption Survey** as well! - Ed*

A SHIFT OF FOCUS

From 1 April 2015, the Office of Rail Regulation will change its name to the ***Office of Rail and Road** to reflect new responsibilities for monitoring the efficiency and performance of England's strategic road network. ORR will take on the responsibility to independently monitor and enforce the performance and efficiency of Highways England.

Passenger Focus will become **Transport Focus**, taking on additional responsibility to protect and promote the interests of road users. *– from an ORR announcement*

*Use of the name, the Office of Rail and Road, reflects the new roads functions conferred on the Office by the Infrastructure Act 2015. Until this name change is confirmed by legislation in October 2015, the Office of Rail Regulation will continue to be used in all documents, decisions and matters having legal effects or consequences.

APPS FOR RAIL PASSENGERS

Mobile apps are becoming ever more popular. But when it comes to looking for information about their journey or to buy tickets, passengers are not particularly excited about using them.

A recent report from Passenger Focus [Rail passengers and apps: what next?](#) shows that passengers were aware of the different rail apps available, but they found it hard to tell the difference between them. They also felt improvements in look and usability would make them more appealing.

Passengers said they wanted off-line access, as a back-up when there was no network coverage, and to be able to use the smartphone as a ticket, although they were not sure this could be done.

PF says "The rail industry must continue to make apps better and also generate interest by ensuring apps actually make travelling by rail much easier. It is also important to remember that not everyone uses smartphones and apps. Traditional ways of providing passengers with information and support from staff must continue alongside new technology." *– from PF's Passenger Voice newsletter*

NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER OPERATORS' MAP - 30th Edition now available

Barry Doe's franchise map has been updated to reflect recent changes, including: Virgin Trains East Coast replacing East Coast, Hull Trains extending to Beverley, ScotRail's change of ownership (from First to Abellio), with the sleepers run as a new separate franchise ('Caledonian Sleeper') and the addition of the Todmorden Curve (west of Halifax) - albeit it won't see a service until May's timetable change. Barry has also refined the details of operator ownership.

Anyone may download copies for private or commercial use, including printing any size, from the 'Rail Operators' section of www.barrydoe.co.uk where links to this and previous editions appear.

MORE ABOUT THE NEED FOR STATION STAFF

In the last issue of Rail User Express, I reported that the **Chesham & District Transport Users' Group** had conducted a survey of station staff activities and written a report making the case for a strong staff presence following booking office closures. Tony Reese, Chairman of **Friends of Crewkerne Station**, got in touch to say that there should be a national campaign to retain station staff, and train operators should not be using solely the level of ticket sales to justify de-staffing. He went on to say that it looks as though the DfT are beginning to wake up to the idea, and certainly it seems as though South West Trains have started thinking on the same lines. "However, I am sure it will take a long time for the message to sink in, and we will still need to keep campaigning."

I was able to put the two groups in touch with each other and Tony now has a summary of CDTUG's report. Here's what the report says about London Underground's initiative to move staff out of their office and onto the platform: "... if anyone asks the staff a question such as why the train is late, they have to go back into the office because that's where the computer is! As a trial, LU issued some stations with *i*-pads and *i*-phones, but a number of staff were threatened by armed muggers and had to hand them over!"

EVENTS

Events for 2015, lifted from newsletters and emails received in recent weeks, are listed below.

Further events for the year are shown in 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.
-
- 31 March 2015. Tuesday. Association of Public Transport Users AGM at the Friend's Meeting House, 7 Upper Lattimore Road, **St Albans**, AL1 3UD from 19:30. Railway managers in attendance. aptu@aptu.org.uk
 - 7 April 2015. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
 - 9 April 2015. Thursday. London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Sussex+and+Coastway>
 - 11 April 2015. Saturday. London and South East regional branch, Herts & Beds division meeting. 10.45. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Herts+and+Beds>
 - 11 April 2015. Saturday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association meet at the Railway Hotel, **Borth** from 11:45. <http://sarpa.info>
 - 13 April 2015. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, **Bexhill** from 19:00. www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk
 - 13 April 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 19:30. www.ribblevalleyrail.co.uk
 - 15 April 2015. Wednesday. LevenMouth Rail Campaign open meeting with speaker from RAGES, at Unit 5, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, **Methil Docks** from 18:30. <http://www.lmrc-action.org.uk/>
 - 16 April 2015. Thursday. Don Valley Railway drop-in meeting at the Harlequin Pub, **Sheffield** from 19:00. <http://donvalleyrailway.org/>
 - 18th April 2015. Saturday. Thames Valley Branch AGM will be held at the West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX2 0BT at 10.30am. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/>
 - 18 April 2015. Saturday. Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line AGM at Victoria Hall, Kirkgate, **Settle**. Registration from 11.00 and formal business from 12.00. www.foscl.org.uk
 - 21 April 2015. Tuesday. Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users AGM at St John's church hall, St John's Street, **Bedford**. 19.20. <http://www.bbrua.org.uk/>
 - 25 April 2015. Saturday. London and South East Branch AGM at the International Hall, University of London, nr Russell Square. Open meeting begins 11:00 with AGM afterwards. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/>
 - 25 April 2015. Saturday. Railfuture South Wales AGM at The Quakers' Meeting House, 43 Charles Street, **Cardiff** CF10 2GB. 13.15-15.15. Members are also welcome to attend the committee meeting 10.30-12.30. southwales@railfuturewales.org.uk
 - 5 May 2015. Tuesday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association meet at The Sportsman, Severn Street, **Newtown** from 18:45. <http://sarpa.info>
 - 7 May 2015. Thursday. **UK General and local elections.**
 - 7 May 2015. Thursday. London and South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division meeting. 18.00. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/>
 - 9 May 2015. Saturday. AGM of the Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users' Group in **Thetford** from 10:30. www.penrug.org.uk
 - 11 May 2015. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, **Bexhill** from 19:00. www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk
 - 11 May 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, **Clitheroe** from 19:30. www.ribblevalleyrail.co.uk

- 12 May 2015. Tuesday. Stourbridge Line Users' Group AGM at the SVR Station, **Kidderminster**, commencing at 19:30. <http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/>
- 13 May 2015. Wednesday. London and South East regional branch, Eastern division. **Stratford**. 18.30. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/>
- 13 May 2015. Wednesday. LevenMouth Rail Campaign open meeting at Unit 5, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, **Methil Docks** from 18:30. <http://www.lmrc-action.org.uk/>
- 16 May 2015. Saturday. Annual General Meeting of the Railway Development Society Ltd (Railfuture) in **Blackpool**. Details [here](#).
- 16 May 2015. Saturday. Annual General Meeting of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group at the WI Hall in **Moreton-in-Marsh** from 1030. www.clpg.org.uk
- 16 May 2015. Saturday. Annual General Meeting of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association in St Mary's Church Hall, **Woodbridge** from 14:00. Speaker from Abellio Greater Anglia. www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk
- 16th May 2015. Saturday. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM at the Regent Hotel, **Oban**, beginning at 12 noon. Speakers from Abellio and Serco. <http://www.westhighlandline.org.uk/>
- 17 May 2015. Sunday. **National rail timetable change**.
- 19 May 2015. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 20 May 2015. Wednesday. ACoRP Community Rail in the City conference. Arrangements still being finalised. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>
- 21 May 2015. Thursday. Edenbridge & District Rail Travellers' Assn. open AGM at the WI Hall, **Edenbridge**, 1900 for 1930.
- 23 May 2015. Saturday. London & South East regional branch, Kent Division meeting in **Faversham**. 14.00. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/>
- 1 June 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 19:30. www.ribbonvalleyrail.co.uk
- 2 June 2015. Tuesday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association meet at the Railway Station, **Shrewsbury** from 17:45. <http://sarpa.info>
- 3 June 2015. Wednesday. ACoRP Station Adoption Seminar in **Manchester**; further details in due course. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>
- 4 June 2015. Thursday. Don Valley Railway drop-in meeting at the Harlequin Pub, **Sheffield** from 19:00. <http://donvalleyrailway.org/>
- 8 June 2015. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, **Bexhill** from 19:00. www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk
- 10 June 2015. Wednesday. LevenMouth Rail Campaign open meeting at Unit 5, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, **Methil Docks** from 18:30. <http://www.lmrc-action.org.uk/>
- 19 June 2015. Friday. Friends of the Far North Line AGM in **Inverness** from 11:00 with guest speaker from Abellio. <http://www.fofnl.org.uk/>
- 20 June 2015. Saturday. Railfuture's Summer Conference in the Town Hall, **Newark**, from 10:45 with speakers representing train operators and local authorities in the area. Details [here](#).
- 23 June 2015. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 27 June 2015. Saturday. Railfuture East Anglia Branch Meeting at St Mary at Stoke Church Hall, Stoke Street, **Ipswich** IP2 8BX from 14.00.
- 6 July 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, **Clitheroe** , 19:30. www.ribbonvalleyrail.co.uk
- 11 July 2015. Saturday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association meet at Wharf Station, **Tywyn**, Talylyn Railway from 11:45. <http://sarpa.info>
- 11 July 2015. Saturday. Annual General Meeting of Bus Users UK Ltd will take place in **Cardiff** at the Pierhead Building. <http://bususers.org/>

- 13 July 2015. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group meet at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, **Bexhill** from 19:00. www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk
- 15 July 2015. Wednesday. LevenMouth Rail Campaign open meeting at Unit 5, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, **Methil Docks** from 18:30. <http://www.lmrc-action.org.uk/>
- 3 August 2015. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail meet at the New Inn, **Clitheroe** from 19:30. www.ribbonvalleyrail.co.uk
- 4 August 2015. Tuesday. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group meet at **Chesham** Town Hall from 19:30. <http://www.cdtug.org/>
- 4 August 2015. Tuesday. Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association meet at The White Lion, **Machynlleth** from 18:55. <http://sarpa.info>
- 1 October 2015. Thursday. ACoRP Community Rail Awards 2015 in **Torquay**. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>
- 10 October 2015. Saturday. East Suffolk Travellers' Association autumn meeting, in the parish church hall, **Aldeburgh** from 14:00. www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk
- 7 November 2015. Saturday. Railfuture's Rail User Conference at The Mercure Hotel, **Bristol**, just a short walk from Temple Mills station. Details [here](#).
- 10 November 2015. Tuesday. ACoRP Members' Seminar North in **Manchester**. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>
- 17 November 2015. Tuesday. ACoRP Members' Seminar South at the Dept. for Transport offices, Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road, **London** SW1P 4DR. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>

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 all the way from Darkest Dorset by...

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