

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

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, and I will send you the source material.

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

It looked at one time as if I would be short of copy this month, but I need not have worried. Times, as they say, are a'changin', and no more so than on the railway network. So my grateful thanks to all for charting its progress from the Far North to the West Country.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line – a step in the right direction

Network Rail's draft Scotland Route Study includes several FoFNL schemes, although there is no guarantee as yet that any will be funded. Proposals include replacing Radio Electronic Token Block (RETB) working with conventional signaling between Inverness and Dingwall, plus a new passing loop, as well as the Geogemas chord that would give direct access to Thurso. Remodelling of Inverness Station would allow the Far North Line to be upgraded to Route Availability 8 for freight trains. However, there is no mention of a loop to split the 24 miles (31 minutes) of single track between Helmsdale and Forsinard, the longest in Britain. A new siding for timber extraction at Kinbrace could provide such an opportunity.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign – Parliamentary recognition

MSPs Claire Baker & Mark Ruskell raised the Levenmouth rail-link in the new Scottish Parliament, where the new Minister for Transport and the Islands is Humza Yusaf. The number of signatures on the LMRC petition having exceeded the 9,000 mark, it is hopeful that the summer gala season will take the figure past its 10,000 target. Look out for them at the Methil Gala (18 June) and East Wemyss Gala (2 July).

South East Northumberland Rail User Group – Morpeth to get the service it deserves

SENUG has welcomed the announcement that from May 2021 First Group will run 5 trains a day from Morpeth to London, as part of its new London to Edinburgh service, with the company acting as an "Open Access" operator. Northbound trains will run non-stop to Edinburgh, and southbound trains will call at Newcastle then fast to London, with some also serving Stevenage. Meanwhile, from December 2019, the TransPennine Express franchise will extend the hourly Liverpool – Manchester – Leeds – Newcastle service to Morpeth and Edinburgh, making it viable to commute to Edinburgh, improving the service to Durham, York and Leeds, and creating a new rail link to the north west.

Copeland Rail User Group – Fuelling regeneration

On the Cumbrian coast line, NuGen's Moorside Project aims to build a new nuclear power station to the north and west of Sellafield. As well as those on site, the proposed railway works include new facilities between Mirehouse and Corkickle, and a passing loop at St Bees'. Stage Two Consultation closes on 30 July. However, Northern's MD, Alex Hynes, has warned that the line could not presently cope with the extra traffic, and called for some of the single-line sections to be doubled. Meanwhile, Councillor Lord Liddle has branded the line "a disgrace, when it should be a tremendous attraction...linking West Cumbria and Sellafield to Carlisle, with regular fast connections to London." Magazine supplements on the Northern franchise hardly mentioned Cumbria, other than its Northern Connect stations, whilst a report in Modern Railways described the line as "not a bad scenic railway were it not for the fact that most of the places are so run-down." [So could Moorside fuel their regeneration? Come on in, the water's warm! – Ed.]

Harrogate Line Supporters Group – *Building on future progress*

The Group welcomes the approval by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) of the paths on the East Coast Main Line that will allow Virgin Trains East Coast to fulfil its planned service to Harrogate from 2019, using the Class 800 trains being introduced under the Intercity Express Programme (IEP). It has also formulated more detailed plans for a Leeds Cross-City rail link between Bradford, Skipton, Leeds, Harrogate, Knaresborough and York, calling at a new Leeds Bradford Airport Parkway Station every 15 minutes in each direction.

Leeds - Morecambe Community Rail Partnership – *A walk on the wild side*

New information boards Giggleswick, Clapham, Bentham and Wennington railway stations signpost the way to walks in the Forest of Bowland, which has been an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for over 50 years. 13% of it is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its extensive habitats of wet and dry heathland, particularly heather moor and blanket bog, whilst many of the fells are designated a Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive. Train services from Morecambe and Lancaster in the west, and from Leeds and the Aire Valley in the east, provide a scenic ride en route to the area.

Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines (STORM) – *competition for capacity*

STORM quotes the Mid Cheshire Rail report of an alarming drop in passenger train punctuality, caused by the growth in freight traffic. Before joining the Rochdale line at Miles Platting, Liverpool to Drax biomass trains take a roundabout route via Altrincham, possibly because of the gradient out of Manchester Victoria. The same problem with Stanlow to Leeds/Jarrow oil trains some years ago was addressed by double heading them as far as Castleton, outside Rochdale, so that they could use the direct line from Liverpool.

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group – *looking forward to going round the bend!*

The Business Case to reinstate the Halton curve between Frodsham and Runcorn has finally been approved. GRIP (Guide to Rail Investment Projects) stage 4 is targeted to run from July to December, GRIP 5 from January - May 2017, with full completion by May 2018. Services should start in December 2018, coinciding with the up-grade of the West Coast Main Line between Weaver Junction and Wavertree, and strengthening the case for improved services on the Hooton/Helsby line, and for links between Liverpool South Parkway and John Lennon Airport. Other schemes that would boost the economy, and reduce congestion on local roads include:

- A western Link to Manchester Airport from the Mid-Cheshire Line
- Passenger services on the Northwich/Sandbach route, with Middlewich station re-opened, and a new one at Gadbrook Park serving the industrial estate
- Improved passenger service on Ellesmere Port/Helsby line, extended to Hooton and beyond Helsby, plus a new station at Thornton adjacent to Chester University campus
- Re-opening St James station, Liverpool, and renaming it 'Baltic Triangle'
- A new station at Liverpool Waters, connected to the rail network via the Waterloo and Victoria tunnels
- A new station at Deeside Park with park & ride adjacent to A648.

The 13 x 5 car sets acquired by TPE and hauled by DRS Class 68s will offer increased capacity as well as being much quieter. They will be allocated to the hourly service every day between Liverpool Lime Street, Earlestown or Newton-le-Willows, Manchester Victoria, Huddersfield, Leeds, York and Newcastle, but could also operate the services from Liverpool to Scarborough, and possibly to Middlesbrough.

Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association – *united we stand*

SCRUA will join forces with colleagues from other Rail User Groups in the area on Wales and Borders franchising issues and other relevant topics. In the 2017 West Midlands franchise, the Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation would like to see the current weekday and Sunday services expanded, Crewe to Shrewsbury stopping services extended to Wellington and Telford, and through services to Liverpool via Wrexham and the Halton curve (see above).

Much of the rolling stock cannot accommodate the increased passenger loadings. Seating is inadequate and cramped; there is insufficient storage for luggage, cycles, wheel chairs and pushchairs; and doors prove difficult for passengers with more than basic hand luggage. The report calls for longer trains with increased capacity, and which allow for the wide variety of ways in which passengers use them.

Hitchin Rail User Group – *Roll on 2018*

GTR have confirmed that Great Northern services via Hitchin would switch to Thameslink via the Canal Tunnel from May 2018, with the full service of 24 trains/hour between St Pancras International and Blackfriars starting in December. Four off-peak services an hour, two each from Peterborough to Horsham and Cambridge to Brighton, will run fast from Stevenage to Finsbury Park, and serve Gatwick Airport. A half-hourly stopping service would operate between Cambridge and Tattenham Corner. However, the peak service was still under discussion, so a draft timetable for consultation would not be available until "towards the end of the year". Meanwhile, rolling stock changes would begin this summer: as Class 377 Electrostars were replaced by the new Class 700 stock, they will replace the Class 317 and 321 units on Great Northern. Timekeeping may improve, as their performance equals that of the Class 365s.

Barking – Gospel Oak Rail User Group – *Frustration following disruption*

BGORUG is calling on Transport for London (TfL) to ensure that, during the 8-month closure for electrification that has now started, no passengers will have to pay any more for their alternative journey, whether they use other National Rail lines and stations, Underground stations in Zone 1, or normal buses. Passengers are urged to keep a careful record of any increase in cost over and above what they used to pay, with a view to claiming back any excess from TfL. It is also concerned that the Rail Replacement Bus Services no longer meet up at South Tottenham station - passengers are expected to use the Victoria Line between Walthamstow Central and Seven Sisters - and the fact that TfL is not planning to introduce longer electric trains until May 2018, almost a year after the electrification work is due to complete.

Tonbridge Line Commuters – *Disruption, resisting usurpation, but winning compensation*

January services were badly hit by Network Rail infrastructure issues, including collapse of the Dover sea wall. Reconstruction is on an even wider scale than at Dawlish, embracing a longer section of railway, a different type of failure, twice the tide height and a much higher wall. A new 235 metre long viaduct, supported by 134 concrete columns sunk into the beach, and protected by rock armour and a new wall, is designed to last 120 years. Network Rail aims to complete the £44.5m project and reopen the line to trains by December 2016. At the end of August, work at London Bridge switches to the other side, so Charing Cross trains will once more call at London Bridge, while Cannon Street services will not. This arrangement will last until the project finishes in January 2018, when all trains will again call at London Bridge.

TLC is concerned with the practicality of TfL taking over some of its suburban services. The Sevenoaks - Orpington line currently runs at capacity, so how would diverse train operating companies coordinate and prioritise their services, especially during any disruption? What if a train that was required to cover the stops of a failed train were operated by another company? [Which of course was one of the drivers for combining the Thameslink, Southern, and Gatwick Express franchises! – Ed.]

TLC won a significant victory in a claim for Delay Repay compensation. A journey from Cannon Street to Marden involved an advertised connection at Tonbridge. The first train ran 20 minutes late so the connection was missed, resulting in a 35 minute delay at Marden. However, Southeastern claimed that Delay Repay applied only if one or more legs of the journey were delayed by 30 minutes or more, contradicting its own Passenger Charter which states that "if you arrive at your destination station more than 30 minutes late, as a result of a delay to a Southeastern service you can claim compensation using our Delay Repay policy, irrespective of the cause". Following TLC intervention, Southeastern agreed to pay compensation in this specific case, but were silent on the general principle involved. However, the Chief Executive of Transport Focus confirmed that such passengers are entitled to compensation, and would raise the matter with Southeastern to avoid any further misinterpretation.

South West Trains – A shot in the Dorset arm

By agreement with Dorset County Council, South West Trains summer specials started on 21 May, and will operate on Saturdays and Bank Holiday Mondays between 21 May and 3 September inclusive. The 0750 service from Waterloo to Salisbury is extended to Dorchester West and Weymouth (arr 1126) via Yeovil Junction and Pen Mill. The train then makes a return journey from Weymouth to Yeovil Pen Mill, calling at Maiden Newton, Chetnole, Yetminster and Thornford, before returning to Waterloo as the 1656 from Weymouth – an ideal day out. The Waterloo services restore a direct link between Maiden Newton and London for the first time since 1968.

RAILFUTURE

Saturday, 21 May saw the RDS Ltd AGM in Milton Keynes. A welcome address by Councillor Steve Coventry, the Worshipful the Mayor of Milton Keynes, who was himself once a train driver, was followed by one on East West Rail given by Iain Stewart MP, a member of the Parliamentary Transport Select Committee and Chairman of the All-party Parliamentary Group for East West Rail. He emphasised that it was just one of many rail projects competing for limited funds, so it was essential to keep making the case, and raising awareness of the impact that any delay would have on the local economy.

Iain was followed by a presentation by Allison Cosgrove on the reopening of the Waverley line in the Scottish borders. As has been widely reported, this project has proved to be a resounding success: footfall has far exceeded expectation, and it is already bringing new business to the towns and villages along the line. So it was interesting when it emerged in the ensuing discussion that its Benefit/Cost Ratio had been assessed as little more than 1:1, when that for East-West Rail was 6:1!

In the AGM itself, that followed in the afternoon, Chris Page was elected unopposed as Chairman of the company, along with Roger Blake, Allison Cosgrove and Chris Hyomes as Directors. Full details are here: <http://www.railfuture.co.uk/elections/railfuture/board/2016/>

RAIL USER GROUP



Railfuture's annual Rail User Group Awards aim to recognise and reward the achievement of the country's 300 RUGs in fulfilling Railfuture's mission: to be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users. They will be presented at its annual conference in Birmingham on 12 November in the following categories:

- 1 & 2 - Best newsletter - Gold and Silver awards [not available to last year's winners]
- 3 & 4 - Best website - Gold and Silver awards [not available to last year's winners]
- 5 - Best social media promotion
- 6 - Best campaign
- 7 - Best individual RUG campaigner [for Railfuture members only]
- 8 - Best new group
- 9 - Judges' Special Award

The closing date for nominations/submissions is Saturday 3 September 2016. For details about how to make a nomination, see the website at: www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards. Just click on the logo on the left side of the Railfuture homepage.

PASSENGER GROUP

The Group meeting in Birmingham on 2 April covered a wide range of topics. The Trains Europe ticket office at St Pancras International was under threat of closure, to provide more space for retail/catering outlets. However, Eurostar directs passengers booking to destinations beyond France and Belgium to this office. Following closure of the Voyages-SNCF (formerly Rail Europe) ticket office in Piccadilly, it was important to maintain a European ticket office at the station. The issue will be raised with MEPs, and also with HS1 who own and manage the station.

In a discussion of the pros and cons of different ticketing formats, it was reported that Centro were against the abolition of the current card ticket as there would be no cost benefit to them. Were paper tickets more customer friendly, putting their convenience ahead of that of the train operator? Or were they redundant, so that Railfuture would be seen as resisting progress? Change should not be accepted for its own sake. Paper tickets provided clear evidence of the correct payment. Passenger Group needs to monitor ongoing experiments (and suggest some of its own); volunteers were required to lead and contribute on this issue, and also to assist with research into and monitoring of rolling stock issues.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the Railfuture response to the Select Committee consultation on "Improving the Rail Passenger Experience", which was coordinated by Chris Fribbins, Head of Passenger Group, and submitted on 23 May. It may be viewed at: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1292>.

On 6 June Chris gave oral evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee, a real feather in Railfuture's cap. Issues to be discussed included ticketing, in particular the cost of a single ticket against a return for the same journey, and the growing need for public transport links to and from stations, in view of the reduction in car ownership, particularly amongst the young.

NORTH WEST BRANCH

The North West branch will hold a branch meeting in Carnforth on 18 June.

NORTH EAST BRANCH

Arriva would like to operate its 'Connect' service between Middlesbrough and Carlisle via Stillington, but this will require the co-operation of Network Rail, as the line is currently freight only. A new station at Ferryhill is also being mooted. 83% of north of England business people questioned in connection with the Northern Powerhouse concept wanted a 125mph trans-Pennine rail link, as it would "have a tangible impact on business and access to customers". A report sent to Chancellor George Osborne noted that the 283 mile train journey between London and Paris took less time than between Liverpool and Hull, although the latter was only half the distance! Sedgefield MP Phil Wilson is supporting the reinstatement of the Leamside line via Sherburn. Various scenarios for the line range from a high-speed by-pass for Durham (using a dismantled link), a local passenger service, or even its incorporation into Tyne and Wear Metro.

Rail Week from 27 June to 3 July is a national initiative primarily to make younger people aware of the many challenging career opportunities available in the rail industry. It is promoted by the organisation of Young Rail Professionals (YRP), which is concerned by a looming skills shortage on the railway. Further details are on the Rail Week website: <http://www.railweek.com/>

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

In its latest franchising schedule, the Department for Transport (DfT) expects the next West Midlands franchise to allow for greater local control over these services. The UK Government has also agreed in principle for the next Wales and Borders franchise to be led by the Welsh Government, which is planning to start its procurement approach earlier than shown in the schedule. The update also provides for a "Potential new East West rail franchise: possible development and competition period", starting in 2018.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523791/may-2016-rail-franchise-schedule.pdf

The DfT's rolling stock perspective 2016 aims to make it a better client for passengers and taxpayers, and improve information and transparency for stakeholders. All new trains should comply with revised Sustainable Development Principles, which will include the on-board facilities and functionality that passengers now require: free Wi-Fi that works, reliable mobile reception, charging facilities, comfortable seating, quality provision for those with reduced mobility, reliable ventilation and air conditioning, adequate space to store luggage, and trains that can be easily cleaned both internally and externally.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524445/rolling-stock-perspective.pdf

The DfT has announced the winning bids in its sustainable travel and rail tourism awards:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525522/sustainable-travel-transition-year-2016-to-2017-successful-bidders.csv/preview

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rail-tourism-winners-announced>

The ORR seeks to assist the delivery of a safe, reliable and efficient railway, and ensure that money is well spent. Its first major consultation, the 2018 periodic review (PR18), will play a central role in determining what Network Rail should deliver between 2019 and 2024, as well as the necessary funding and incentives:

<http://orr.gov.uk/consultations/open-consultations/periodic-review-2018-initial-consultation>

As part of the consultation process on the InterCity West Coast franchise, currently operated by Virgin Trains, DfT asked Transport Focus to research passengers' current experience, and explore their needs and aspirations for future services. Whilst passengers were generally happy with value for money, journey experience, reliability and punctuality, some key areas were identified for improvement:

- A fare structure that is transparent and easy to understand
- A simple, seamless ticketing process
- Luggage storage, Wi-Fi and toilets
- Staff visibility, and the approach to customer service
- Overcrowding of concourse and train boarding issues at Euston Station
- Customer recognition and reward.

Transport Focus also reports that initiatives taken by Network Rail and the rail industry, such as stopping rowdy passengers from boarding some trains and increasing the presence of staff, have improved passengers' sense of safety at stations and on trains. A visible staff presence stood out as being really assuring. Key findings of the report, "Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways", include:

- The greatest cause for concern for passengers' personal security continues to be the anti-social behaviour of others, both at the station and on the train
- A visible staff presence at stations and on trains reassures passengers, and enhances their perception of security
- Stations where there is no staff presence should have live-monitored CCTV and linked help points
- Targeted and time-limited bans of alcohol, which are enforced and communicated properly to passengers, can be effective.

and finally...

According to a report in the Telegraph, the Cabinet Secretary and Treasury officials are urgently reviewing the HS2 project amid growing alarm at its spiralling price-tag. If costs for the scheme cannot be brought down, one option would be to delay or abandon altogether the Manchester section. Or, as a letter in its Sunday paper put it:

"SIR – Oh! Mister Porter/I caught the HS2/I wanted to go to Manchester/But [it only went to Crewe](#)"!

EVENTS (See also the [Events listing on the Railfuture website](#))

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- National & regional rail events.
- Railfuture events (rail user group representatives are cordially invited).
- Local Group events.

June

- 13. Monday. Watford Rail Users' Group, AGM and Open meeting. Training Room 2, **Watford** Town Hall, 1815/1845.
- 13. Monday. Bexhill Rail Action Group, Hastings Direct, **Collington**. 1900-2100. Also 11 Jul, 8 Aug, 12 Sep, 10 Oct, 12 Nov. December in a local hostelry. <http://www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk/>.
- 15. Wednesday. Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton RUG, Village Hall, **Foxton**, 1930-2100.
- 18. Saturday. Railfuture North West branch meeting, **Carnforth** station heritage centre, 1330
- 18. Saturday. Summer Conference at the Scottish Mining Museum, **Newtongrange**, 1000 for 1045-1700. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>
- 23. Thursday. North East Branch, Brunswick Methodist Church, **Newcastle-upon-Tyne**, 1900.
- 25. Saturday. East Anglia Branch, St Mary at Stoke Church Hall, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, 1400.
- 25. Saturday. Passenger Group Meeting, International Hall, Lansdowne Terrace, **London**, 13:00. Also 24 September (Birmingham) and 10 December.
- 27. Monday. Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association AGM, Golden Pheasant, **Plumley**, 1930.

July

- 4. Monday. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, **Clitheroe**. Also 8 August.
- 9. Saturday. Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association, **Machynlleth**, 1145. (Also, 8 October (AGM), 1100; 13 August, Borth, 1215; 10 September, Welshpool, 1130; 1 November, **Newtown**; 10 December, Aberystwyth, 1145.)
- 18. Monday. Harrow Public Transport Users' Association, Baptist Church, College Road, **Harrow**, 1930. Also 26 Sep (AGM).
- 20. Wednesday. Association of Community Rail Partnerships, Members' Seminars North; Bar Convent, **York**.
- 21. Thursday. Association of Community Rail Partnerships, Members' Seminars South, DfT, **London**; <http://www.acorp.uk.com/events.html>
- 20. Wednesday. Friends of the Barton line AGM, *Sloop* inn, **Barton**, 2000. enquiries@bartonrail.org.uk. (Also 16 Nov and 21 September, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** Station.)

Further Ahead

- 29 September. ACoRP Community Rail Awards 2016, Floral Hall, **Southport**.
- 6 October. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh**, EH1 2JL, 1930. (Also 3 November, and a special meeting on 24 November with Christian Wolmar and Neil Harris).
- 15 October. East Suffolk Transport Association Autumn Meeting, St Johns Church Hall, **Woodbridge**, 14:00.
- 17 October. Avocet Line, AGM - **Topsham**).
- 12 November. Saturday. Rail User Conference at the Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, 1000 for 1045. <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/>

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