



January 2017

Welcome to the Rail User Express.

Feel free to forward it to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources). For further detail of any of the stories mentioned, consult the relevant website, or come back to me via ruglink@railfuture.org.uk for the source material. Do say if you no longer wish to receive Rail User Express, or if you know of anyone who would like to be added to the circulation list.

My Christmas reading included LTC Rolt's book "Red for Danger". It should be compulsory (and compelling) reading for anyone involved in railway operation in any capacity, charting as it does the evolution of safety on the railway, as lessons were learned from fatal accidents - albeit too often acted upon only belatedly.

One such lesson was that a driver must never enter a section of single-line track where tokens are used without positively confirming that he has the correct one for that section. In 1921, at Abermule on the Cambrian line, a chain of mishaps and misunderstandings led to a driver being handed back the very same tablet that he had given up only a few minutes earlier. When he failed to check it, it was his death warrant.

So in the BBC2 programme "Flying Scotsman from the Footplate" it was good to see the token exchange being performed very thoroughly, although the verbal confirmation and acknowledgement only came over clearly in the subsequent "Sounds of" version without the commentary. As Abermule drove home only too clearly, a rash assumption that all is as it should be could be the final piece in a jigsaw of horror.

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

FoFNL discussed the line's poor performance with Transport Minister Humza Yousaf MSP and Transport Scotland Head of Rail Bill Reeve. They presented a paper showing how a Lentrans Loop would greatly mitigate the impact of late running on the 13 miles or so (21mins) of single-track railway north of Inverness. Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing MSP has set up a Review Team comprising Abellio, Network Rail (NR), HITRANS and FoFNL to examine short and long-term solutions. With the Scottish High Level Output Statement due in June 2017, there is much to be done to get infrastructure enhancements into CP6.

Campaign to Open Blackford Railway station Again

In response to a query from [Tony Smale](#) regarding [Railfuture's list of reopening campaign groups \(RoCs\)](#), COBRA said that its campaign to reopen Blackford Station was 'resting but not dead'. Gleneagles station is only about 2.5 miles to the east, but with the 2014 Ryder Cup looming, local buses there were banned, as the exit led straight onto the 70mph A9 dual carriageway. However, rather than reopen Blackford as an alternative, Perth & Kinross Council and TACTRAN, the Regional Transport Partnership, opted instead to spend £7 million refurbishing Gleneagles Station, and building a new access road; although much safer, this is a long way round from Auchterarder. Despite local opposition, Highland Spring has since been granted planning permission to use Blackford Station goods yard to dispatch its bottled water as container traffic. Site development may not start until 2018, but three test trains did run in 2012 using DRS Class 66 locos. *[More enlightened, then, than Diageo at Cameron Bridge on the Leven line – Ed.]*

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The Scottish Rail Strategy aims to tackle inequality through “a railway that supports sustainable economic growth by providing services that are affordable and accessible to all” - but overlooks many glaring gaps, such as the Leven line. To ignore the largest town in Scotland with a population of over 10,000 and no rail connection, but with a potential catchment of over 45,000 and an intact but mothballed line is absurd. According to Fife Council: “Levenmouth Railway represents a once in a generation opportunity to deliver lasting economic change to deliver jobs, skills and opportunity to one of the most deprived communities in Fife.” In 2017, the Scottish Government will be making key transport investment decisions, so a major effort is called for to achieve the Campaign objective.

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

RAGES is delighted to announce that, in the New Year's Honours List, its Vice Chairman Barrie Forrest, was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community of Reston and Auchencrow. He has served on the Community Council for almost 40 years, acting as Chairman and Vice Chairman in that time. Barrie is also well known for his work with Railfuture Scotland and the Capital Rail Action Group.

Virgin Trains East Coast has introduced two new services to Dunbar and Berwick:

- Saturdays only: 20:00 Edinburgh to Newcastle, calling at Dunbar 20:20, Berwick 20:45, Alnmouth 21:06, Morpeth 21:26 and Newcastle 21:43
- Sundays only: 08:45 Newcastle to Edinburgh, calling at Morpeth 09:00 Alnmouth 09:16, Berwick 09:40, Dunbar 10:04 and Edinburgh 10:28.

Neither service is shown in the VTEC or ScotRail Winter Timetables, but both are on-line at National Rail Enquiries. RAGES would now like to see Dunbar served by a mid-morning Edinburgh to King's Cross service, and a mid-morning to noon King's Cross departure.

Copeland Rail User Group

Sellafield Ltd has started an experimental coach service from Cockermouth and Workington, and would like a bus lane to beat the jams – whereas an improved rail service would also benefit the public. Meanwhile, Northern have been asked to align its timetable with working patterns at both Sellafield and Whitehaven.

Furness Line Action Group

FLAG reports a very positive meeting with the management of Northern. Class 195 CAF units and Class 331 EMUs will both arrive in December 2019, when Barrow will join the “Northern Connect” network. However, delays in WCML electrification put back the December 2017 timetable changes until May 2018. Refurbished Class 158 DMUs have LED lighting, new carpets, seat cushions and covers, a modern passenger information system, dedicated wheelchair spaces with a call-for aid facility, and improved toilet areas with baby changing facilities. Free wi-fi and other enhancements are also promised.

Commendable efforts by Northern to clamp down on unpaid fares risks putting law-abiding passengers under undue pressure. Preventing access to the platform is fine – until your ticket has been packed away in the expectation of an on-train check. Nor is it very smart to have platform checks on passengers who are rushing to make a connection, or have both hands full of food and drink.

Lakes Lines Rail User Group

Windermere electrification has slipped into Control Period 6 (2019-24). However, as a Northern Connect station, it will see improved facilities, as will other stations. The new West Coast franchise – now renamed a Partnership to accommodate HS2 - has slipped to April 2019 or 2020. Meanwhile, the service from Euston to Oxenholme is still unsatisfactory, as are connections from there to Cross Country services at Crewe and Birmingham. The Group wonders why Lake District rail services are so often disrupted on weekends and Bank Holidays; this may be the least worst option for a metropolis, but not for a National Park!

Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group

A railway operator may not withdraw a passenger rail service from a line or a station without a statutory process including public consultation. Overcoming the opposition can prove very expensive, so they avoid the closure process by providing a “ghost” service, such as the one Morecambe-Leeds train/day via the Hest Bank to Bare curve, and Stockport – Stalybridge: one train a week in one direction only!

Friends of Settle-Carlisle Line

A new book by Martin Pearson reveals the inside story of why the S&C was saved from closure in the 1980's; its Foreword, by Michael Portillo, is featured in the current issue of RAIL magazine. Since early 2016, the S&C has been completely closed between Carlisle and Armathwaite following a landslip at Eden Brows. The major repair project is on course, and the line is due to re-open as a through route by 31 March.

Ribble Valley Railway

The Ribble Valley Rambler between Blackpool North and Hellifield continues to run on Sundays throughout the winter months. A new depot in Blackburn will house DMUs displaced from Blackpool North once the line to Preston is electrified. Drivers, conductors, managers and signing-on staff associated with the depot will be accommodated in offices on Blackburn station.

The Northern Weekly Salvo (Paul Salvesson)

The Christmas Salvo featured [a ghost story](#) with a railway theme. It was originally published in the ASLEF Locomotive Journal in December 1985. Paul has updated it a little, and made the locations 'real places' - mainly Astley Bridge Junction, his former signal box just outside Bolton. The railway then is unrecognisable now, so it's a bit of social history on one level, although the actual events didn't happen; there was no 'Tonge Viaduct Disaster'!

Goods traffic has returned to the Heart of Wales Line - using a scheduled passenger service! Organic vegetables grown on The Gower that used to be taken to the distribution point in Llandeilo by car are now loaded onto the early morning train at Llanelli; the new 'caboose' at Llandeilo acts as the local warehouse. It is a collaborative project between Arriva Trains Wales, the Heart of Wales Line Development Co. and Black Mountain Foods, a local organic food supplier. Another first for the Heart of Wales Line!

In 2016 a feasibility study was carried out for a long distance walking route between Craven Arms and Llanelli on the Heart of Wales Line. The trail is designed to make use of existing public rights of way and to intersect with some excellent and established walks including the Shropshire Way, Offa's Dyke Path and Beacons Way. It will be suitable for people looking for a long distance challenge, but equally for those who wish to walk the trail in sections, using the train to access day or weekend walks, and will be partly financed by a [crowd funding campaign](#).

Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines (STORM)

The new bay platform at Rochdale allows trains travelling from Manchester to reverse without affecting other services through the station. Diesel trains that are usually stabled in Manchester Victoria can now be rerouted to Rochdale, making space for electric trains. The line speed at various points has increased to 85mph, with a short section of 90mph on the approach to Newton Heath depot. The Clitheroe-Manchester service is extended to Rochdale, whilst the Blackburn-Todmorden-Manchester service may be extended to the Airport.

Work to transform rail travel in the north was completed on time between 18 December and 2 January. Around 700 engineers tackled the longest and most complex stage of the project to build the Ordsall Chord, including 300-metres of new track. Linking Manchester's Piccadilly, Oxford Road and Victoria stations, the Chord will open up new direct routes to Manchester Airport from across the north, ease congestion and allow more trains to run. NR is now waiting on a decision from the Transport Secretary on its Transport and Works Act application that would allow the construction of platforms 15 and 16 at Piccadilly. However, even if the scheme is approved, it will look again at its cost-benefit ratio, as with every project.

[Railway Gazette](#) reports that, with the support of the Rail North partnership of local authorities, Northern is working with rolling stock company Porterbrook Leasing to address the ongoing shortage of DMUs by converting ex-Thameslink Class 319 EMUs to electro-diesel multiple units. To keep changes to a minimum, an automotive diesel alternator under each of the driving trailer cars will feed the existing traction motors via the train's DC bus. Northern plans to operate this Flex variant on the recently electrified Manchester - Liverpool and Liverpool - Preston routes, but with a choice of diesel, 25 kV 50 Hz overhead or 750 V DC third rail, the trains will be able to operate seamlessly over both electrified and non-electrified routes.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

The Group responded to a suggestion for "tram-trains" on the Leeds-Harrogate-York Line, including a spur to Leeds Bradford Airport and street running around Leeds City Centre, with an article in Railwatch. This prompted a reply from James Harkins, Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group. However, HLSG Technical Adviser, Mark Leving, has set out a number of objections. Line speeds in excess of 60mph limit are possible in a number of locations; 75, 80 or 90mph on some stretches. The Leeds to Harrogate section was resignalled with a 75 mph limit between in 2014; Harrogate to York is due to be resignalled and partially double-tracked in the next phase of investment. Sharing the track with slower tram-trains could jeopardise the promise in the current franchise of a 15min frequency between Harrogate and Leeds plus a two-hourly service between Harrogate and London Kings Cross.

North Cheshire Rail Users Association

Design work for both the Halton Curve and the Weaver to Wavertree upgrade is on track; on-site survey and preparatory work is starting, mainly around the Frodsham Embankment. A Liverpool - Chester service over the Curve from December 2018 will transform the rail dynamic of North Cheshire and South Wirral, and boost the case for an improved service on the Hooton/Helsby line. The weakest link in rail access to Liverpool Airport Terminal from north Cheshire, South Wirral, Wrexham and the North Wales Coast, is the 2mls or so from Liverpool South Parkway, (LSP). The April 2016 Passenger Forecast of 5,615,000 by 2019 would represent a 40% increase over 2014, benefitting employment, education, tourism and business.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

The Public Performance Measure for the line has fallen below 83% against a target of 92.2%. Although most of the delays are of less than 8 mins, that is time enough to miss a connection. When serious delay does occur, information to the public has been lacking, or even at odds with reality. Both the Ordsall Chord and electrification of Manchester - Preston via Bolton should complete by December 2017.

The [Mid-Cheshire Rail Link business proposal](#) to reopen the Northwich-Middlewich-Sandbach line was well received, and was featured in Rail magazine 814, 23 November – 6 December. By rail, the 9 mile journey currently takes 1h 39m via Crewe and Chester, or 2h 18m, with a single hour-long connection at Stockport! Simon Barber commends a new planning app from Transport for Greater Manchester that will suggest the best station to drive to, to catch a train. This app limits journeys to those which start or end in the Greater Manchester area, so he hopes that other journey planners will also be adopt this feature.

Friends of the Brigg Line

The Brigg Line is a Northern Rail, Saturday only service from Sheffield to Cleethorpes via Worksop, Retford, Gainsborough, Brigg and Grimsby. The average footfall has increased by 30% every year from 2012-2015; around 90% are first time travellers. FoBL would like to see a Community Rail Partnership for the 11 stations in the Shireoaks, Barnetby and Lincoln triangle. Maddeningly, a slippage of just one minute in the December 2016 timetable means that the 0803 service from Sheffield no longer meets the published minimum connection times at Retford for the 0854 to London Kings Cross, or at Barnetby for the 0939 to Market Rasen and Lincoln.

East Suffolk Travellers' Association

From December 2019, ESTA would like to see an even-interval service between 0530 and 2230, but this not currently possible on weekdays because of an unused path reserved for a Sizewell freight train; Greater Anglia will question the continuing need for it. NR wants to relocate Westerfield station, and is no longer seeking commercial gain from the scheme. More controversially, it would also like to create more freight paths between Ipswich and Felixstowe by replacing the passenger service with buses. Dr Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal, is critical of this idea, but welcomes NR's agreement to retain the foot crossing at Halesworth station.

Bedford Commuters' Association

The full Thameslink service from December 2018 will see 24 trains/hour each way between Blackfriars and St Pancras. To ensure that trains present on time and in the right order, their approach will be managed by a Traffic Management System being developed with Hitachi. Together with Automatic Train Operation, European Train Control System and the Connected Driver's Advisory System, it will track trains on the network, and advise drivers of the optimum safe speed at which to run.

The new East Midlands franchise will create distinct services for long distance travellers, and for London commuters out to Corby and Kettering. However, Bedford needs more than just a commuter service; BCA wants its two trains an hour to Leicester and the north reinstated, and the half-hourly service to London extended into the morning peak.

Barking – Gospel Oak Rail User Group

By late February, London Overground expects to resume the Goblin service with the same rolling stock and to the same timetable as before the closure.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group

A Freedom of Information request regarding the landslip at Chorleywood is still outstanding. Since the introduction of ANPR, an as yet unspecified period of grace is allowed in the Chesham and Chalfont & Latimer station car parks. Due to a 40% reduction in core funding from Central Government, local authorities will have to cut the subsidies to local bus services.

Windsor Lines Passengers Association

The Secretary of State has rejected the devolution of suburban routes to TfL. The Mayor is appealing this decision, but it seems now that it cannot happen before the end of the new South Western franchise term.

Salisbury to Exeter Line Rail User Group

[SERUG](#) has now expanded its activities to cover all intermediate stations between Salisbury and Exeter, with over 7 million passenger movements a year (up 5% last year). However, signal failures have affected the line, and with poor line adhesion and the ensuing delays accentuated by the single line working, punctuality has been poor. Reinstatement of double track between Wilton Junction and Tisbury, or even just phase one around Dinton – one of SERUG's strategic aims – can't come soon enough.

Although, with the gold spanner award, the failure rate of 159's (especially 159/1) has been low, SERUG hopes that the new franchise will replace these near 30 year-old trains, which go off lease next month. That was also the termination date of SWT's franchise, but this is now August 2017 - right in the middle of the Waterloo upgrade! The bidders for new franchise, to be awarded in April, are Stagecoach and First Group.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

All is not well on the Cotswold Line: the CLPG newsletter begins "Now is the Autumn (& Winter?) of our discontent"! Journeys to/from London are taking up to 15mins longer than they did 12 years ago, whilst there has been a perfect storm of delays and cancellations resulting from broken rails, signalling problems, train unit failures and staff shortages, coupled with poor information during planned engineering works. The Dec 2018 timetable promises service improvements, but there is little progress on infrastructure. CLPG expressed its concerns about the viability of a new Worcester Parkway station to all 57 county councillors. Also, there is no afternoon shift at Evesham, whereas comparable stations in the area are staffed all day.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

The Association continues to talk to Southern management about the ongoing industrial action, has written to all of its MPs, and had discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport. All claim that only the Unions can resolve the disputes, and that the RMT should ballot its members on the Southern offers. Mick Cash of the RMT has ignored this suggestion, but the Union is now talking to the Secretary of State.

RAILFUTURE

Railfuture welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join Railfuture [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 Railfuture and its Campaign updates by clicking on [News and views](#), , [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Railfuture submissions](#).

PASSENGER GROUP

Allison Cosgrove is the new Head of Passenger Group. Howard Thomas has agreed to continue as Deputy Head, as have Nick Lewis as Meeting Secretary, and Don Peacock as Treasurer. Ian Bolton continues as Head of Policy, with Norman Bradbury as his Deputy.

Railfuture hails the popularity of rail, as evidenced by the 'host of improvements across the Black Country and Staffordshire' in London Midland's latest [timetable](#): extra carriages on the Snow Hill lines, and more calls at local stations on the Euston-Crewe route, and at Bescot Stadium.

Despite the Transport Secretary's decision not to devolve South Eastern and Southern to Transport for London (TfL), the consensus is that Railfuture should support devolution in principle provided it was properly funded, and through services were maintained with adequate resources, eg rolling stock.

Hertfordshire County Council's Transport Vision (*but not its Rail Strategy!* – Ed.) proposes to convert the Watford - St Albans Abbey line to a busway, as each of the terminal stations is some distance from the town centre. However, a previous plan came to nothing, and other such conversions have involved disused railways, never an operational line. A passing loop would enable a better service and stimulate demand.

There are also proposals for 50mph tram-trains between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central, but these would conflict with other traffic between Glasgow and Paisley, and create capacity problems both on the line and in Glasgow Central station. Converting some Cardiff Valley lines would also be controversial.

The European Passengers' Federation (EPF) is conducting a passenger [survey](#): ten simple questions about any cross-border rail journey over 200km, eg UK to Paris or to Germany via the Hook of Holland ferry; Belfast to Cork. The feedback will provide evidence to put to service providers. Meanwhile, Railfuture has agreed to accept an increase in its EPF membership fee from €50 to €100/year (about £45).

Jerry Alderson suggests that Railfuture pushes for USB sockets as a requirement and 13A as a nice to have. Most people who want to charge a device can cope with USB, and 13A plugs are inconvenient.

Railfuture Media item: [what are passengers getting for their money?](#)

Two more consultations:

- DfT's proposed [Closure of Norton Bridge station](#) closes Friday 3 February
- NIC's National Infrastructure Assessment - Call for Evidence closes Friday 10 February

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

At its October meeting, the Yorkshire CC Rail Officer outlined the county's network, which carries nearly 8 million passengers/year. Whilst he covers the quieter lines, his priority is the Harrogate line, with its strong case for electrification and double tracking. Members also attended a Harrogate Chamber Transport Update, where the Aviation Development Director at Leeds Bradford Airport confirmed that his favoured option was for a Parkway station on that line, with a connecting shuttle bus.

Less good news is that the DfT has rejected electrification from Temple Hirst Junction on the ECML to Hull via Selby, which would have complemented Manchester - Selby electrification under the TransPennine Upgrade. A meeting to gauge public interest in a new RUG for the Pontefract Area was well attended. The Civic Society host reported two improvements: an hourly service between Knottingly and Wakefield Kirkgate, and the extension to Castleford of the Huddersfield – Wakefield service, with a Sunday service on both lines. It now wants to see an hourly Leeds – Goole service via Pontefract Monkhill, and the new Scarborough – York service extended to Sheffield via Pontefract Baghill.

TRANSPENNINE TOC LIAISON

Continued overcrowding in the short term, the legacy of an inadequately funded railway, is being addressed. TPE has a new customer contact centre in Warrington, and a First Class Lounge at Huddersfield. It sees itself as a long distance express operator, but also serves many commuter journeys. Various stakeholders attended an event in Leeds that started with an excellent promotional video, possibly inspired by Night Mail. TPE reported the following successes in the first six months of the franchise:

- £500m invested in three new train fleets for delivery in 2018-19: 19 Class 802 five-car bi-modes, for the ECML services to Newcastle and Edinburgh; 12 CAF Class 397 five-car Civity EMUs for WCML services; and 13 sets of five-car CAF Mark 5 carriages hauled by Class 68 locos
- Starting next year, a major refurbishment of its Class 185 fleet, with wi-fi, and power sockets
- A direct service from Newcastle to Manchester Airport
- “Drastically improved” catering in both First and Standard Class, available seven days a week.

TPE is determined to have met its franchise commitments by 2020. From 2019, there will be a seven-day timetable across the franchise, reflecting the massive growth in weekend travel. It is also looking for new routes in the early 2020s, and is exploring the demand for Boxing Day working. Railfuture suggests that the TPE timetable include bus services from Malton to Whitby via Pickering, and from Penrith to Keswick.

THAMES VALLEY BRANCH

In its September meeting, the Strategic Transport Group Director of Heartland Strategic Alliance confirmed that East West Rail was classed as an economic infrastructure project, not just an improved transport link. The Oxford-Cambridge expressway did not have funding priority. Railfuture should campaign to increase line capacity between Didcot and Oxford, and for an upgrade to the Ruislip line with a new terminus at Old Oak Common, as an alternative to Marylebone. However, reopening High Wycombe – Bourne End would need a strong case. Other schemes include light rail from Oxford to the outskirts of Witney; reopening the Cowley branch to passenger traffic; a blockade from 22-31 July to renew the up carriage sidings at Oxford, and another in 2018 to separate the northern and Chiltern Line approaches into Oxford; quadrupling Didcot – Swindon, strengthening the case for a Wantage Grove Parkway station; Cotswold line platform extensions to accommodate 10-car IET stock, and a new station at Reading Green Park. NR would also like to see Oxford station rebuilt with a new down platform on the west side.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

The December issue referred to TF as a campaigning organisation. In fact it is a publicly funded body sponsored by the DfT. To get the best deal for transport users, it seeks to ensure that operators, funders and regulators of transport systems put users first, so it welcomed the free week's travel for monthly and annual season ticket holders to thank them for their patience during recent disruption of rail services.

The ScotRail Performance Improvement Plan includes sensible, practical ideas in both the short and long term, and ensures that ongoing electrification projects are delivered. The Transport Minister has discussed with stakeholders the possibility of public sector bids for future rail franchises, given the new rail powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament. TF tabled its research in Scotland regarding passengers' priorities for improvement, which any future bid should seek to deliver regardless of the sector in which it originated.

A Bill in the Scottish Parliament lays the ground for the transfer of railway policing powers in Scotland from British Transport Police to the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland. Chief Constables will be obliged to engage regularly with TOCs on railway policing, and obtain the views of rail passengers. TF will seek to ensure the dedicated and specialist nature of railway policing is retained within Police Scotland.

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

To avoid needless expense when a new operator takes over, DfT has ruled that a TOC brand may no longer identify the owning group. Thus TransPennine Express's new branding omits reference to First, and Abellio Greater Anglia has reverted to Greater Anglia. In Scotland it will always be ScotRail and have the same logo. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) has taken over from the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) in coordinating train operators, freight companies and NR, to drive forward solutions that benefit passengers, freight users and taxpayers.

The DfT, the RDG, Transport Focus and Which? magazine have worked closely with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the rail regulator, to improve ticketing information for passengers, and make it easier to get the best value fare for their journey. Passenger groups, technology firms, ticket retailers and train operators have also provided input. A set of clearly defined steps over the next year will include:

- enabling passengers to make an informed choice of ticket, advising when changing the time or service would be a cheaper option
- encouraging innovative ticket products so that customers understand their chosen ticket
- increasing the scope of where and how tickets can be bought, and simplifying the process.
- ending jargon like 'any permitted route', and a new online look-up tool to explain the restrictions
- warning when stocks of the best value advance tickets are running low
- making advance tickets from longer distance operators available on the day of travel
- allowing railcard holders to reclaim any additional expense the first time they forget it at the time of travel.

As at 1 January 2016, NR had 6300 level crossings. The [list](#) includes a picture of each, with its location and a risk assessment. NR has closed over 1000 crossings in the last 5 years with another 250 planned for closure.

The penalty fare appeals process is changing to safeguard passengers, and give ministers clearer oversight of the system. Penalty fares deter those seeking a free ride, but mistakes do happen and, where a passenger feels they have been unfairly treated, they need to be confident that there is a robust and independent process in place to deal with their appeal. The main changes are:

- simpler rules on deadlines for payment and appeals
- appeals bodies independent of train operators and their owners
- a new, third-stage independent appeals panel
- an annual audit of penalty fares data to give DfT stronger oversight of the appeals process.

During the 6 month Wirral Loop Line Track Renewal, there are no cross-river rail services for the first 6 weeks of the year, so the Mersey Tunnels and surrounding routes expected to be much busier than usual. Unfortunately, during a test run on 30 December, a fire started in a detachable engine module on one of the Vivarail Class 230 power cars. The Railway Accident Investigation Bureau is investigating the cause, but meanwhile the planned trial on the Coventry to Nuneaton line has had to be postponed.

NR has been fined £800,000 following a serious incident in June 2014. A rail maintenance worker sustained life-changing injuries near Redhill on the London - Brighton main line. The narrow and steep embankment materially compromised the ability of track workers to retreat to a 'position of safety' as fast, frequent trains continued to run. The work could have been carried out at night, when other scheduled works would have ensured that no trains were running.

ORR has reaffirmed that, with suitable equipment, proper procedures and competent staff in place, Driver Only Operation is a safe method of working. GTR is in the process of implementing its recommendations for further improvement, including ensuring that CCTV image quality is consistently high. The Transport Secretary has welcomed the report, and invited the ORR to involve the unions in developing principles for continuous improvement of train dispatch across the country.

As part of its 2018 Periodic Review (PR18), the ORR is consulting on the future structure of the charges levied by NR on train operators, and the contractual incentives to encourage them to work together. Its proposals target those areas where there is a strong case for reform, or where there are opportunities to simplify the current system. The online [consultation](#) ends on 9 March.

The [Watford Observer](#) reports that the Mayor has asked TfL to re-zone Watford's stations: Epping in Zone 6 is the same journey length, but Watford Junction is outside Zone 9. However, when the zone system was created, councils outside the GLC area were invited to "buy in" to the LTE fares system. Watford declined, but Epping Forest District Council / Essex County Council agreed to subsidise the zonal fare structure. For Watford to be included, the Borough council would have to pay TfL a precept.

Testing of Crossrail trains has moved from Derby and Melton to East London. Further test runs will be on the Shenfield to Liverpool Street line; trains will be introduced on this section of the route from May 2017.

...and finally

Fancy a day out with a difference? The FLAG Secretary suggests Barrow to London, with 12 changes, 10 different classes of DMU/EMU belonging to 7 different operators! Leave Barrow on the 0806, change at Lancaster, Preston, Wigan, Manchester Oxford Road and Piccadilly, Stockport, Stafford, Wolverhampton, Birmingham New Street, Coventry, Milton Keynes and Watford, and you'll arrive in Euston at 1649, having sampled Classes 150, 156, 158, 220, 221, 313, 319, 321, 350 and 390. Incredibly, the 13 single fares almost exactly total the £103.40 walk-on fare for the whole journey!

With the outbreak of Bird Flu in Lincolnshire, a restriction zone was placed on Brigg Station due to the Thursday Market. It isn't something you'll find at Leeds or Manchester, but does show how Lincolnshire is unique. Luckily, passengers didn't have to be doused in disinfectant as part of their day return ticket!

From a Matt cartoon, republished by kind permission of the Telegraph: station staff to passenger under a sign warning that trains were delayed: "We thought if you've paid so much for a ticket you wouldn't want the journey to be over too quickly".

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming in, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains the [List of Events](#) on the Railfuture website. A Calendar of Events in a pdf document can get lost, and this is a problem if the location changes from month to month, as I don't include that in future events. A copy of your Calendar as a separate document in Word format would therefore be much appreciated.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

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

January 2017

- Saturday 14. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association, **Aberystwyth**, 1145 (Also 7 Feb, Caersws, 1830; 11 March, Shrewsbury Station, 1430; 4 April, Newtown, 1855).
- Saturday 14. Copeland Rail Users Group, Methodist Church Hall, **Seascale**, 1900 (Also, 11 Feb, 23 March 1830 for 1900 (AGM with Christian Wolmar and Nigel Harris), 8 Apr).
- Monday 16. Campaign for Better Transport, Grove Inn, **Leeds**, LS11 5PL, 1930. (Also 27 February, and 14 March at Oxford Place Methodist Mission, next to Leeds Town Hall).
- Wednesday 18. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900. (Also 15 Mar at the Sloop, Barton, 1800 for 2000 and 17 May, 19 July (AGM), 20 Sep and 15 Nov).
- Monday 30. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Methil** Fire Station, Methilhaven Road, KY8 3HP, 1830 (**NB**: Change of date and venue).

February

- Thursday 2. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh**, EH1 2JL, 1930 (also 2 March, 6 April, 4 May (AGM)).
- Thursday 9. TravelWatch NorthWest Conference, Winmarleigh House, Winmarleigh Street, **Warrington**, WA1 1NB, 1000 for 1030.
- Saturday 11. Railfuture Yorkshire AGM, Town Hall, St Georges St, **Hebden Bridge**, HX7 7BY, 1300, with Chris Page.
- Thursday 16 (**NB** was 24 January). Railfuture North East, with Christian Wolmar and Nigel Harris, Castle Gate, **Newcastle**, 1900.
- Saturday 18. East Suffolk Travellers' Association, **Beccles** station, 1400.
- Monday 21. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, **Chesham** Town Hall, 1930 (Also 4 April, 16 May, 20 June, 8 August, 19 September, 24 October and 12 December.)
- Saturday 25. Railfuture East Anglia AGM, **Bury St Edmunds**.
- Saturday 25. Railfuture Herts and Beds, St Paul's Church, Blandford Road **St Albans**, 1045 (Also 29 June, 25 Nov).

Further Ahead

- 18 March. English Regional Transport Association, The Tavistock, Tavistock St, **Bedford**, MK40 2SB, 1300 for 1400
- 29 March. East Hampshire CRP, District Council offices, Penns Place, **Petersfield**, 1500.
- 22 April. Railfuture Thames Valley AGM, The Hub, Easton Street, **High Wycombe**, HP11 1NJ, 1030.
- 25 April. Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users' Association AGM, Methodist Church, **Woburn Sands**.
- 17/18 May. European Passengers' Federation AGM. Rotterdam. See www.epf.eu for details and a booking form.
- 20 May. Railfuture AGM, **Peterborough** Central Library, PE1 1EX, 1000. Booking essential.
- 17 June. Railfuture Summer Meeting, The Carriageworks Theatre, Millenium Square, **Leeds**, LS2 3AD, 1045. Booking essential.

This bulletin has been sent by...

Roger Smith, Railfuture Rail User Group Liaison Officer, e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, phone: 01462 815992

Follow us on Twitter @Railfuture

The Railway Development Society Limited is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 5011634. Registered Office: 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk, IP9 2ND.