

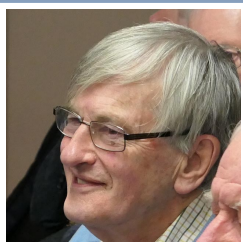
Branch Bulletin –November 2018

Railfuture is a national, independent body that advocates a modern and effective passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.

The North East is one of twelve branches in England along with Railfuture Scotland and Railfuture Wales that make up the national organisation.

Web site: www.railfuture.co.uk Twitter: @Railfuture and @RailfutureNEast

From the Editor's Chair



As previously, the Bulletin contains rail related news snippets from across the country. But this time there is more focus on our NE Branch of Railfuture. In particular we report the decision to

increase our emphasis on campaigning for specific projects designed to improve the railway in our region. And we are also intending to update the Branch website so as to improve our image as well as keep more people informed about our organisation and what we do.

The past few months have witnessed the railway industry receive a sustained onslaught from the media. “Train punctuality sinks to 12 year low despite fares soaring by 56%” - *Independent* (18 September) was one headline that caught the Editor's eye. “Row as £15bn Crossrail line is delayed until 2019” - *Guardian* (1st September). “The great timetable fiasco: what has gone wrong with the railway?” *Observer* (10 June) and many others besides.

Across the North of England passengers, and intending passengers, have continued to endure a series of strikes, now primarily on Saturdays, by guards belonging to RMT union and working for the Northern TOC. It is more difficult for Northern to maintain the same level of skeleton services on Saturdays than mid-week.

Another item of “bad” news concerns the new Hitachi Inter-City Express Trains (IET's) which, as the *Durham Times* (21 September) succinctly headlined “do not work in the NE”. Test exercises on the ECML north of Doncaster when trains were in electric mode, had apparently identified an incompatibility between some of the on board electronic systems and items of lineside signalling equipment. The first IET's for LNER (known as Azumas) were due to enter

passenger service in December, but now the journal *“Railnews”*, in the November edition, reports that the launch has been postponed *“indefinitely”*.

The twenty fourth of June saw the official *“death”* of Virgin Trains East Coast as responsibility for its franchise passed to London North Eastern Railway (LNER), a rather mysterious consortium which seems to comprise three different firms of consultants. David Horne, previously Managing Director with Virgin East Coast, continues in that role with the new operator.

Incidentally, a report to the Minister of State, commissioned to find out why the Virgin franchise had gone *“belly-up”* claimed that the problem arose because Virgin- Stagecoach had *“overbid”* for the contract in the first instance. There’s a surprise! Any *“ordinary”* observer of rail affairs who had been aware of the basic financial details of the contract (including this Editor) could have told Chris Grayling exactly the same. It was very much a repeat of the sort of overbid mounted by National Express in 2007 which led that company to walk away from its franchise deal two years later. Will they never learn?

A strong theme that emerges from media coverage of rail these past six months is the need for the industry to be placed under strategic direction, such direction to come preferably from experienced rail professionals rather than politicians. Perhaps the Williams Rail Review Panel Enquiry will endorse this suggestion? And whither the future of the franchise system is another matter urgently requiring wisdom from Williams. But don’t hold your breath!

The Chair of the Rail Review Panel, Keith Williams, former Chief Executive of British Airways, will receive no remuneration for his work, nor will the other six panel members, none of whom actually runs a rail passenger or freight company. Apparently two members are from Network Rail, another is the Chair of the new East Coast Partnership venture.

The Editor hopes you enjoy reading this Bulletin. And remember, don’t become disheartened by all the bad news of late: keep repeating the mantra *“rail really IS best”*.

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NE Branch News

The previously vacant Vice-Chair slot has been filled by Trevor Watson who was, of course, our Chair until last March. Trevor volunteered his services at the June Committee meeting.

There have been no ordinary **Branch meetings** since Ray Brewis met with us on 25 April and told us about the new station at Horden which is expected to open in spring 2020.

The **Branch Committee** met on 26 June and 18 September. It had a further meeting arranged for 20 November, but too late to meet this Bulletin's publishing deadline. Details next time!

We've discussed: The **DfT Cross Country consultation** which was mounted ahead of the award of a fresh franchise. Our Chair, Keith Simpson, and Media Officer, Dennis Fancett, prepared detailed responses on behalf of Railfuture and South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group (SENUG) respectively. The Railfuture response was later incorporated into a combined one involving Railfuture branches Scotland and Yorkshire as well as ourselves.

The consultation document comprised no fewer than 28 questions: among the issues raised were over-crowding, service patterns, fares and ticketing, access, information, making connections, on-board experience, community rail partnerships and stakeholder engagement.

Keith and Dennis concentrated on Cross Country (XC) services in the North East. They mooted the possibility of re-routing one of the twice hourly trains between York and Newcastle through Eaglescliffe to Middlesbrough or Stockton, and then via the Coast Line to Newcastle rather than terminating it at York as suggested by DfT. They also addressed the recurring, and vexed, issue of station calling patterns between Newcastle and Berwick.

The breadth of their knowledge, not to mention the work involved in compiling the response material, was remarkable. They also received some helpful comments from Committee colleagues along the way. Putting together the various XC responses is a good example of how we try and exert influence on the future development of the railway. Incidentally, no surprise here, our

submission emphasised the need for new, more comfortable and longer XC trains - soon!

But there is a sting in the tail! Shortly after the consultation had closed the DfT announced that the new XC franchise process was to be frozen pending outcomes from the Williams enquiry! Our response material, however, will be held on record by DfT and considered when, and if, the next franchise details are drawn up.

The Railfuture national “summer” conference. Saturday 22 June 2019 at the Dolphin Centre, Darlington will be organised by North East branch on the theme of “Rebirth of the Railways”. Our four-person planning team has been hard at work securing guest speakers and dealing with the one hundred and one other tasks entailed in mounting an event such as this. So far Hitachi Rail Europe, Esk Valley Rail Partnership, NEXUS and Port of Sunderland have accepted invitations to participate and confirmation is awaited from at least one other. Ben Houchen, the elected Mayor of Tees Valley, will both welcome attendees as well as delivering a key note address.

Our Chair, Keith Simpson, is not empowered to issue three line whips. But if he were, he would for sure command that all Branch members put the date into their diaries, and better still, actually come to the Conference. The Dolphin Centre venue is modern and very comfortable: refreshments and lunch will be available. So why not get yourselves there and have an enjoyable (and informative) time as well as meet compatriots from other parts of the country.

By the way, non-members of Railfuture are very welcome. Watch out for details of how to book etc in future editions of *Railwatch*, our national journal.

Committee members believe it is time the **Railfuture web-site** was refreshed. We cannot redesign the main part of the site, that is the responsibility of the Board. But we have advised the web-master of improvements we think could be made. We are able, and willing, however, to restructure and update our own Branch section of the site. Committee member Dave Shaw and Branch Chair Keith Simpson are currently working on this. Their intention is to set up a short branch news section, but with the major part focussing on a set of eight agreed “campaign” projects which the Branch wants to pursue.

Inevitably the Committee have discussed **timetable changes and strikes on Northern**. Cancellations in the NE following the 20th May timetable alterations were not so severe as in the NW. But one infuriating connection glitch had been noted at Newcastle whereby passengers trying to get from Morpeth to Carlisle miss their onward train by two minutes and are thereby obliged to wait 58 minutes for the next departure.

The guards' strikes continue and are scheduled to go on into December and beyond. Inevitably there are differing views within the Branch Committee about the best way forward. Some point to the large number of trains in the SE which now operate without guards: others emphasise the long distances between some of Northern's stations (on the Tyne Valley line for instance) which means that passenger safety and security considerations are different from those in busy commuter belts.

But we are agreed that Northern and RMT must get to a speedy accommodation since passenger frustration is visibly rising. Not only that, the strikes are bringing the railway into disrepute as well as negatively affecting the regional economy. So, we welcome the news as we go to press, that Transport for the North (TfN) are calling on Northern and RMT to resume negotiations immediately and avoid service disruption in the run-up to Christmas. Significantly TfN have indicated that the Northern trains **should** carry a second person pointing out that many of the stations served have no staff and so no help is available for disabled passengers. Incidentally, the relevant statement from TfN is dated 26 November and can be read at:

<https://transportforthenorth.com/christmas-bid-to-curb-rail-disruption/>

Let us hope that the needs of passengers will be put at the centre of any negotiations and that both parties to the dispute understand that to function effectively railways require that management and operational staff work closely together. At page 98 of *Modern Railways* (November 2018) Alan Williams, one of our key-note speakers at the Summer Conference on 22 June next, provides useful background facts about train guards, driver only operation etc. He also has some tough talk for both Northern and RMT Union about ending the present dispute.

We have agreed that henceforward our press officer, Dennis Fancett, will consider whether any appropriate parts of **Branch Bulletins** might be forwarded to the media albeit accompanied by suitable press releases. If some material was subsequently published, then this could help to raise Railfuture's public profile.

The Committee has decided to target a number of specific rail **"projects" in the NE** with the aim of helping move these forward. We believe that, if implemented, the projects would improve services. Besides this, Committee members reckoned that if the Branch focussed more strongly on campaigning, Railfuture might attract new people.

We had previously identified five infrastructure projects which we recommended to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) in 2017. But we are now adding three new measures to our campaigns list (two are non-infrastructure) making 8 altogether. They are:-

- Stillington (freight only) line Stockton – Ferryhill – upgrade to passenger capability.
- New station at Ferryhill.
- Leamside line - TurSDale/Ferryhill to Pelaw reinstatement.
- New station (on ECML) at Team Valley.
- New station at Gilsland on Tyne Valley Line.
- Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line – upgrade to passenger capability.
- A north of Morpeth local service.
- New rolling stock for all local (Northern) services.

Each of these will feature as separate items on our refreshed Branch web-site with easy to follow relevant information accompanying each one. To make them more comprehensible to a wider audience some projects might be "marketed" under additional headings. For example: the Stillington Line up-grade could come in as "faster services from Teesside to Tyneside": or Leamside reinstatement as "transforming connectivity across Durham and Tyneside".

Information updates on individual projects will be posted on the web-site. Each project has been assigned a link person together with their contact details.

Project	Contact
Stillington	Peter Walker - p.j.walker@zen.co.uk :
New station at Ferryhill	Trevor Watson - trevor.watson3510@hotmail.com :
Leamside reinstatement	Tony Walker - anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk :tel: 0191 3864534: mob: 07758 632353
New station at Team Valley:	Damian Bell – llebnaimadwerdna@yahoo.co.uk :
New station at Gilsland	Julie Gibbons – info@gilsland-station.org.uk
Ashington, Blyth & Tyne	Dennis Fancett: email – chair@senrug.co.uk :tel: 01670 825500: mob: 07810 353651
North of Morpeth local service	Dennis Fancett - see above
New rolling stock for local services	Malcolm Chainey – malcom@chainey.org.uk

We hope members approve of our proposals. Do let our Chair Keith Simpson, or the Bulletin Editor Tony Walker know what you think.

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National News

The **2018 national “Summer” conference** was held at Carlisle and was devoted to discussing the North West’s crucial role in rail activities. The first key-note input by Douglas Hodgson of Friends of the Settle

and Carlisle line was the dramatic story of the major landslip at Eden Brow on 5 February 2016 which caused closure of the route between Carlisle and Appleby until March 2017. Douglas provided a fascinating description of the huge engineering operation required to restore the line. The audience was left in no doubt about the importance of the S & C for the communities it serves. He also

outlined the sort of tasks that the Friends undertake in order to help ensure “their” line continues to prosper.

The next presentation came from Simon Walton of Borders Rail. He emphasised the economic impact that the reopened Edinburgh to Tweedbank section of the Waverley route had had on the line’s catchment area, particularly in and around Galashiels. Simon rehearsed the case for now extending southwards to Carlisle. He said “it’s all about connecting communities”. He urged his audience to become good “ambassadors” for rail by flagging up what railways could achieve in terms of economic regeneration in and around the communities they serve.

After lunch came an input on behalf of a new group only formed on 24 May last. Comprising six organisations (including Yorkshire and NW branches of Railfuture) it is focussed on the Calder Valley line linking Leeds to both Manchester and Preston via Bradford and Brighouse. The Group’s mission is to remind people that the “Northern Sparks” task force report of March 2015 recommended 12 different routes in the North for electrification to be completed over a 5 year period. The Calder Valley line was given top ranking with Northallerton to Middlesbrough ranked at number 5.

Its initial publicity pamphlets are entitled “The Electric Railway Charter” in which all the key evidence confirming the superiority of pure electric trains over diesels or bi-modes is gathered together. Many Railfuture members will be familiar with that evidence, but it is helpful to have it recorded in one place. The Group’s web-site is at: www.electriccharter.wordpress.com

The final presentation was by retired senior rail manager Stuart Palmer who provided an excellent run down on how groups like ours should conduct themselves in order to galvanise more support for their campaigns. His advice included “understanding” the mind-set of TOCs, the need to have long term strategies for a particular route, that we should be “data” driven, enlist support of local MP’s, produce regular news bulletins and be realistic. He asked that we remember two key words, “co-benefit” and “trust”, and to keep them in the front of our minds in all our Railfuture endeavours. What Stuart said made enormous sense and it was good to have it spelt out so competently.

This was a helpful, informative and very friendly conference. True, there were some administrative issues and problems with the sound system. But overall the five members from NE Branch who attended felt well rewarded. The bar has been set high for when we host next year's "summer" event at Darlington on 22 June!

Keith Simpson and Dennis Fancett represented our Branch at this year's **Branches and Groups Day** annual national Railfuture away-day held in Birmingham on 6 October.

As part of the pre-preparation for the event and in response to a request from the organiser, Keith and Dennis identified five specific rail "successes" achieved in the NE over the recent past. These were shared at the away-day. They are:

- the new station to be built at Horden on the Durham Coast Line
- Sunday services on the Whitby line now all year round
- more calls by long distance trains at Morpeth
- hourly service Darlington to Bishop Auckland
- later trains on the Durham Coast Line

We know for sure that RFNE and Coastliners Rail User Group (RUG) helped to promote the case for Horden Station: that colleagues in SENRUG were instrumental in securing more long distance train calls at Morpeth: we believe members of the Bishop Auckland Heritage Line Community Rail Partnership, along with RFNE, were key in getting provision of an hourly service between Darlington and Bishop Auckland included as a franchise stipulation: and our colleague members in Coastliners' RUG have long been strong advocates of later evening services on the Durham Coast Line .

As for the away-day itself, Keith Simpson reports that it was mostly about future recruitment and raising Railfuture's public profile.

Around the TOCs

London and North East Railway



At 7 45am on Sunday 24th June last, the first LNER service departed from Newcastle – destination Kings Cross.

The new state sponsored operator was created after VTEC, 90% owned

by Stagecoach, ended its involvement due to heavy financial losses whilst running the franchise. VTEC was the third operator to walk away after hopelessly optimistic revenue forecasts failed to materialise.

Following the failure of National Express in 2009, the operation was placed into public hands with the creation of Directly Operated Railways which traded using the name “East Coast” under whose six-year tenure passenger satisfaction and profits both improved.

In March 2015 VTEC took over a brand new franchise on the understanding that there would be infrastructure enhancements to eliminate bottlenecks and allow more services. Passenger numbers grew with a record 21.8 million journeys in 2017-18 some 6.3% higher than when VTEC first inherited the route, but actually well short of growth forecasts.

Virgin blamed ending the contract on a slowdown in long distance rail travel as well as delays by Network Rail in delivering infrastructure enhancements. Both factors led to Virgin and Stagecoach having to pay the government over £200m of shareholders’ money to make good the premium payments.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: “Three private companies (GNER, National Express and Virgin/Stagecoach) have failed on East Coast with bids promising £1.3b, £1.46b and £3.3b respectively. Privatisation has been a total failure”. Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said: “When it is fully formed the new LNER operation will be a partnership between the public and private sectors”.

So far, we have little news about how LNER is performing and, maybe more importantly, how any proposed partnership structure will work.

**TransPennine
Express**



A Guardian report (1 June 2018) indicated that TPE were forecasting a loss of over £100m on their franchise. TPE is actually contracted to pay DfT a premium of £313m over

the 7 years of the contract. The company's July/August stakeholder newsletter provided details of additional compensation for passengers affected by the summer timetable disruption. Also details about a new range of "Rover" tickets, new information screens for the trains, an improvement to assisted travel arrangements and news that cycle facilities would be created at 8 stations including Northallerton. Importantly the newsletter advised that most of the existing timetable would be maintained unaltered through until May 2019.

Some other bad news for this franchise, however, is that the new much vaunted Nova 3 trains comprising rakes of five CAF built Mk 5A coaches hauled by Class 68 locos will have a delayed entry into service. Originally the first Nova 3 's were due to commence running on the Liverpool - Scarborough and Manchester Airport to Middlesbrough routes in December. But technical issues have emerged resulting in the trains not now commencing commercial running 'until the Spring'. This means that chronic overcrowding will continue on parts of the TPE network and some of their existing stock will remain unavailable to be cascaded to other routes and operators.

**Northern
by Arriva**



Where to begin? Presumably Northern's boss David Brown would prefer to forget the last 6 months! In a bulletin to stakeholders dated 8 June, Brown revealed that ASLEF

(the Drivers' union) had agreed to resume rest day working so making more drivers available over the network.

He explained that the bulk of the difficulties arising from the May timetable changes were in the NW. Both Yorkshire and the NE had been relatively unaffected. A temporary (interim) time table had commenced on 4 June. He reported that by 8 June only 3% of trains had been cancelled as against 11% two

weeks earlier. Altogether 168 services were removed with total suspension of those on the Lakes Line to Windermere over several weeks.

In a further bulletin on 27 June Brown assured stakeholders that performance had “stabilised”. He explained that delays to the Manchester to Blackpool via Bolton electrification programme, congestion at Leeds and Manchester together with a reduction from 40 weeks to 16 weeks in the timetable planning “window” were pertinent factors in causing the serious operational difficulties encountered through the summer.

But there was some good news as well! The first of 98 new trains, a DMU built in Spain, had arrived at Edge Hill Depot in Liverpool for finishing work. It did its first main line test run on 20 September and was formally unveiled on 4 October. And by the end of October Northern were able to announce that its 100th refurbished train had entered service on the York to Harrogate route. The company’s engineering director Ben Ackroyd told *Railnews* (November 2018): “Our 100th refurbished train going into service is another great milestone in our modernisation programme”.

The refurbishment project is an ongoing programme and means that more trains will become available not only cosmetically better, but which will also feature free Wifi, at-seat power, high definition CCTV and customer information media screens. There have also been some station improvements – 35 waiting rooms have been enhanced and improved CCTV installed.

David Brown’s bulletin of 20 July advised that 75% of the 168 services withdrawn post 4 June would be restored by 30 July. A phased reintroduction thereafter of the remaining 25% was promised.

In an interview on BBC Radio 4’s “Today” programme on 30 July, Andy Burnham, the (elected) Mayor of Manchester, accused the government of ignoring the rail chaos on Northern’s network and claimed that the Transport Secretary Chris Grayling had “fallen asleep at the wheel”. Burnham’s suggested solution was that the Northern (and TPE) services should be organised and controlled by Transport for the North (TfN). But so far, he said the government had not devolved the necessary powers to TfN for this to happen.

Still with “Today” – this time on 20 September. Chairman of the ORR (Office of Road & Rail Regulator) Stephen Glaister, told listeners that DfT, Network Rail and Northern were all to blame for the May timetable hiatus. “No one person was in charge” he claimed. But ORR itself seemingly was not immune from criticism in that it had not picked up that there was a problem looming: alleged that there was not one meeting attended by ORR pre-20 May at which their people had raised the matter.

Chris Grayling was interviewed as well. Having previously lambasted the rail industry in general and Network Rail in particular in a letter to Conservative MP’s at the end of May, his line (!) now was that he had been told by rail professionals that the new timetable would work, and he believed them. With “hindsight” he admitted he should have asked more questions. His job now was to drive forward the changes required to ensure that this “never happened again”. Noticeable the Minister refused to accept any blame himself. Conversely, on the very same day, Northern’s MD David Brown, writing in his regular bulletin, said: “Northern is deeply sorry for the unacceptable disruption caused to our customers.....we apologise unreservedly”.

OK, so we (in the NE) seem to have been spared the sort of travel mayhem endured by many passengers in the NW. But what about the coming months? Bruised and battered by the fallout from the timetable debacle will Northern be in a fit state to deliver, for instance, the new Middlesbrough to Carlisle “Connect” service promised for 2020? Will the NE region benefit from new trains, or at least reconditioned trains that are better than the current ones? Is there a realistic hope for a through “local” service between Darlington and Berwick via Newcastle and calling at intermediate stations in Northumberland? And looking slightly further afield, is Northern going to deal with those chronic overcrowding “hotspots” on its network where passengers are packed into carriages like sardines, or worse, are left on the platform because there is simply no room on the train. For instance, there are recent reports of these sort of happenings on the York-Harrogate- Leeds route.

And what about co-operation with bus companies? Somewhere either in Doxford Park or in Germany there must be a mechanism available whereby Arriva buses could actually go to railway stations and meet up with Arriva trains

and so assist the lot of the travelling public. The old philosophy that the bus and the train are competitors really has to be chucked out of the window. This is 2018 for goodness sake! The true competitor for both is the car. If bus and train chose to co-ordinate their services properly then both would benefit – and so would passengers of course! It isn't just Arriva that we need to influence. We should be able to look forward to all of the rail companies working with all of the bus companies to provide co-ordination at the likes of Hartlepool, Morpeth, Alnmouth, Durham and Hexham.

And finally, is Northern truly willing to reach an agreement with RMT union to end the misery now being experienced almost weekly as a result of the guards' dispute? Yes, we know that the franchise was let on condition that Northern introduced driver only operation. But it has become apparent that (i) passenger opinion mostly supports the need for a second person (with a safety remit) to be on each Northern train when actually in passenger service and (ii) RMT, whilst by no means an angelic organisation, is made up of front line rail staff who do know something about the realities of on-board passenger care and safety and so should be listened to and (iii) the dispute must be impacting on Northern finances which has worrying implications about future viability.

RFNE badly wants Northern to succeed in bringing an effective (and improving) rail service to the NE. Our support will be all the greater when we see Northern delivering good value and reliable services across its network. Much needs to happen if Northern's reputation is to be restored. Let us hope David Brown, his management colleagues and all the operational and administrative staff at Northern can rise to the many challenges that presently confront them.

Tyne and Wear Metro



The number of passengers using Metro fell last year (2017) by 3.5% although there was a rise in revenue to £50.9m, up by 0.7%. Number of journeys for the year were 36.4m.

A new signalling panel has been installed at Gosforth Control Centre at a cost of £12m reports the *Evening Chronicle* (19 July). What this has done to improve Metro operations is not yet clear, but the old system was certainly time expired. The North East Joint Transport Committee (Tyne and Wear Sub-Committee)

were told, at their November meeting, that “21% of all delays this year are related to operational issues, primarily related to the installation of new systems related to train control”. This appears to be is the third largest source of delays. 35% of delays are related to performance of the Metro cars and their maintenance and 25% of delays come from infrastructure issues. The new software also drives the public information system. The public view on this part of the modernisation programme is undoubtedly that Metro “could have done better”. Much of the information about the time when the next train should arrive is simply wrong, sometimes by more than 60 minutes, and this, coupled with cancellations for a variety of reasons set out above, is impacting on satisfaction levels that seem to be sinking month by month.

Maintenance investment: It is reported in *bDaily* (23 October) that Nexus had set aside £900,000 towards overhauling and maintaining Metro’s ageing fleet now over 40 years old. Aim is to reduce train failures and delays by focussing on work to prevent power faults. The money is to be spent between now and March 2020 and will also be used to refurbish train cabs and recruit extra depot staff.

Metro depot to be built at Howden: The *Newcastle Chronicle* (27 November) reports that plans to build a temporary Metro depot on a former landfill site at Howden have been approved. It will first be used for overnight maintenance work on up to 10 Metro trains during the redevelopment of the existing Gosforth depot. It will also play a role in the phased delivery of the new Metro fleet which is expected to start at the end of 2021. £13.3m has been set aside for the project and, once the Gosforth redevelopment is complete it is anticipated the Howden site will be restored as open parkland.

Expansion westwards? The *Newcastle Chronicle* (4 October) reported that Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council, had told council members that hopes of opening a new rail link to Newcastle’s West End should not be abandoned in favour of a less ambitious plan. He rejected suggestions, from Councillor Rob Higgins, that the idea of Metro services heading from Central Station on a re-opened route along Scotswood Road was unrealistic. Co Forbes wants the plan, which would involve some use of the original Newcastle to Carlisle line to remain in place and for the route out of Central to be protected from further

development projects. Effectively this would be the only route by which Metro could access the West End since building development in Gallowgate has greatly reduced any chance of extending Metro west from St James Park.

New transport interchange: Work on the new transport interchange station at South Shields has been under way for over 6 months. The £21m building will bring together a modern bus station and a relocated Metro station.

More cycle provision: From 9 November Metro increased the number of stations where cyclists could get on and off trains with their bikes. There had previously been a limited trial which had proved successful. Apparently, according to the *Chronicle*, two cycles will be permitted on every off-peak train, but the busiest stations at Gateshead and in Newcastle city centre are still out of bounds. Nexus has installed 300 cycle lockers and storage pods across the 60 stations to make it easier for people to hop on and off. Each Metro car is now fitted with a sign explaining where bikes must be kept. And cyclists are warned that should a wheel-chair user or customer with a pram get on, they will be expected to get off to make way. Cyclists will not be allowed on at the busiest times. Nexus Customer Services Director Huw Lewis said: “Everyday cycling for work, education and a trip to the shops is starting to take off in the NE. Good, secure, smart lockers expand the reach of Metro by making it easier to get to the nearest station and travel on by Metro to town and city centres”.

Grand Central



Railnews (November 2018) reports that the recent trend in falling passenger numbers on National Rail was reversed in the first quarter of 2018-19. Our “local” open access

operator Grand Central recorded 400,000 journeys in the quarter, a rise of 12.2% compared with the same quarter last year. The other East Coast open access company, Hull Trains, recorded 300,000 journeys, a rise of only 0.1%.

Freight Operations



The Princess Royal has officially opened the new **iPort Rail freight terminal in Doncaster**. It is a state-of-the-art multi-model installation designed to open up the Yorkshire area with both national and international connections.

Located on a 30 acre site within the iPort Logistics Hub, the terminal is able to accommodate the UK's longest freight trains up to six times a day, six days a week with 24 hour operation during those times. It connects to the ECML and is located next to the M18, is close to Doncaster-Sheffield airport and is within 2 hours of the East Coast's deep water ports.

Network Rail is contributing £750,000, and the Tees Valley Combined Area £250,000, to fund a study into increasing clearances to enable larger containers to be carried to and from the **Tees Valley** on the line between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe. Low bridges and tunnels currently restrict the size of cargo containers that can be used resulting in, at present, a time-consuming and costly detour via Darlington. If services are to grow to meet expected demand from the port these improvements are a critical requirement. Teesport now handles 500,000 containers a year and is one of the major shipping and logistics hubs in the North of the UK. Mayor Ben Houchen is known to be a strong advocate for the upgrade believing it important that the region's rail freight infrastructure is fit for purpose.

In further good news PD Ports at Teesport have announced a second rail link connecting Teesport direct with Scotland. The new service operated by DB Cargo will run 5 days a week from the quayside at Teesport to the PD Stirling terminal at Mossend in Glasgow. The timings of the service operate in direct connection with the P & O Ferries service calling daily at Teesport from Zeebrugge and Rotterdam.

The first Teesport to Scotland regular service started in 2015; together with the new second service Teesport now offers more daily connections to and from

Scotland than any other port in the north of England, running 10 trains a week and carrying 30+ containers per journey.

In November **Rail Freight Group (RFG)** held their 2018 AGM in Sunderland. The port there has been busy reinstating and upgrading the rail connection that now runs down to the quayside.

RFG report continuing consternation among train operators that public commitments made some 10 years ago by Scotland's then First Minister, Alex Salmond, to upgrade **the Highland main Line** from Perth to Inverness have still not been honoured. This leaves the largely single track line struggling to compete with the £3b upgrade to the parallel A9 trunk road.

It is understood that RFG are also wanting to input into the **Keith Williams enquiry** about the future of the railway to ensure that the voice of freight operators is clearly heard. The rail freight sector is, for example, emphasising the importance of its needs being considered when new passenger timetables are being designed by train companies and Network Rail. Time sensitive freight has to be delivered to schedules agreed in advance with customers. It is unreasonable to think that these contracts, often spanning several years, can be unstitched at short notice to accommodate passenger services.

Trevor Watson and Peter Walker attended the October meeting of the **North East Rail Freight Partnership** meeting on behalf of RFNE. It was held in Lynemouth and included a tour of Lynefield Park, a 254 acre site on which previously there had been a coal mine, a coal-fired power station and (nearby) the Alcan aluminium smelter which had closed in 2012. The site has a (somewhat moribund) rail access.

It is owned by Harworth Estates who are planning to develop the site which will include 200 residential plots, an Anaerobic Digester energy plant, a holiday park, and small enterprises making sustainable re-use of existing buildings. Provision for cricket and football is to be made, as well as a cycle centre and café. There may also be solar projects and other energy enterprises.

The railway track would become part and parcel of a revived Ashington, Blyth and Tyne network. Peter Walker reports that Harworth Estates seem very optimistic about the future revival of Lynefield Park. He is not so sure!

High spot of the meeting itself was a presentation by Jeff Screeton of “InterCity Rail Freight”, a company that started up 7 years ago. It is, in effect, a revived version of Red Star parcels but makes use of high speed passenger services and provides greater speed and reliability than anything offered by road.

The system in place, notably in Nottingham and London, gives centre to centre service. Thus, customers put goods on at an outward station and their recipients meet the consignment often making use of electric conveyances at the destination station. GWR are now offering the service as well with Transpennine considering doing likewise. Jeff was enthusiastic about its international possibilities as well, particularly into Spain. Those cities interested in decarbonising their central areas (such as Bristol, Glasgow and Birmingham) (Newcastle? –Ed) may well be attracted to promote the service so as to help reduce the number of (diesel) delivery vans clogging city centre streets. Jeff also asked his audience to think about the possibility of offering light freight as well as passenger facilities on local lines.

Interestingly *Rail Magazine* (Issue 865 – November 7, 2018) carries a feature by Philip Haigh which reveals that GB Freight is looking at using surplus HST’s filled with lightweight freight to run at night into city centre stations. Essentially, like Jeff Screeton’s “InterCity Rail Freight” company, the GB proposal is designed to provide a sustainable alternative to the invasion of town and city centres by masses of delivery vans: and also, by making some key stations designated collection points for parcels, to get a toe-hold in the on-line home delivery services.

Not so long ago, in our own back yard as it were, some students attached to the New Rail department at Newcastle University undertook studies exploring the possibility of using specially adapted Metro trains to move light freight in and out of Newcastle at night as well as delivering to and from the Airport. Again, part of the rationale for the idea was to get rid of at least some delivery vehicles from the streets.

**News from
HMG**

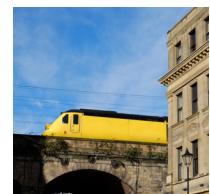
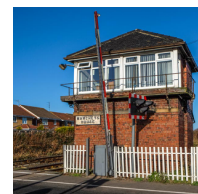
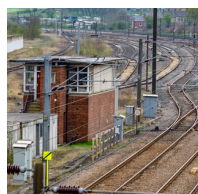
On 12 November Andrew Jones MP replaced Jo Johnson (who resigned) at DfT. He picks up the rail freight portfolio. He has worked at DfT before where he had responsibility for rail freight grants (a role that presently sits with roads Minister Jesse Norman MP!).

TransportXtra (20 July) reported on that Chris Grayling had told the rail industry that most of the **cross-Pennine route from Manchester to York** was going to be re-laid with some sections straightened to increase line speeds.

Network Rail subsequently provided more details. Costing an estimated £2.9b the enhancements proposed would cut times between Manchester and Leeds drastically. Plans included electrification of Huddersfield to Leeds and Manchester Victoria to Stalybridge: four tracking of the section between Ravensthorpe and Huddersfield: digital signalling between Stalybridge and Cottingly: line speed improvements between Manchester and Stalybridge: renewal of unreliable equipment: increased capacity at Leeds and upgrades at Stalybridge and Huddersfield stations. However, Network Rail warned that the plan would “entail significant disruption”. (Never in this world! – Ed).

At a special Cabinet meeting held at the Sage, Gateshead at the end of July last, the PM said that £780m was being set aside to improve tracks, signals and junctions on the **ECML** from 2019 through to the “early 2020’s”. No further details were given.

**Mainline
Infrastructure**



RFNE responded to a **Network Rail consultation document** issued in December 2017 about “choices” for development projects for the ECML. A summary of our response comments is contained in the May 2018 Branch Bulletin. *Focus*, the official journal of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), set out, in the June 2018 edition, details of their response to the same consultation. Suggestions included reopening of Leamside route which “would provide access to Nissan for components inbound and cars outbound”. They also advocated

longer loops with fast entry/exit lines between Northallerton and Berwick so that more freight trains could be accommodated on the route.

Where the *Focus* writer strayed into passenger matters, he advocated the upgrading of the Stillington line to passenger standard (plus Leamside of course) and even mooted a Teesside –Durham-Leamside-Newcastle-Northumberland regional metro!

Another piece of specific ECML news. Following granting of planning permission Network Rail is about to commence work on a three year project to create a new dive-under at Werrington, north of Peterborough. Aim is to reduce delays and conflicting movements on the main line caused by services joining and leaving the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint line to Lincoln via Spalding.

And still with the ECML – the *Northern Echo* (4 November) reported that people living in the Redhills area of Durham City had expressed concern at the felling of trees from the sides of the steep cutting immediately south of Durham station. Network Rail explained that the work was necessary to avoid trees actually falling on to the track (and damaging the overhead lines) and to help curtail leaf droppings during the Autumn.

HS2

Here are a few of the HS2 news items that have caught the editor's eye since May. **David Higgins**, outgoing Chair of HS2, declared on Radio 4's "*Today*" programme (19 July) that "HS2 is all about creating wealth around the country". **Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen** has urged the Transport Secretary to award a £2.8b train manufacturing contract to Hitachi's Aycliffe factory saying it would demonstrate the benefits of HS2 to the region. According to *Insider News* (18 July), in a letter to Chris Grayling, Houchen said awarding the contract to Hitachi would be a "monumental vote of confidence in Tees Valley's work force, its world class supply chain and the wider Northern Powerhouse".

The journal *TransportXtra* (21 July) reports that Lord Berkeley, former chair of the RFG, and Michael Byng, a surveyor, had presented a report to MP's in which they claimed that the London – Birmingham (Phase 1) section of HS2 would take at least 4 years longer to build and cost twice as much as the Government claims. A spokesman for HS2 said: "HS2 remains on track and within budget".

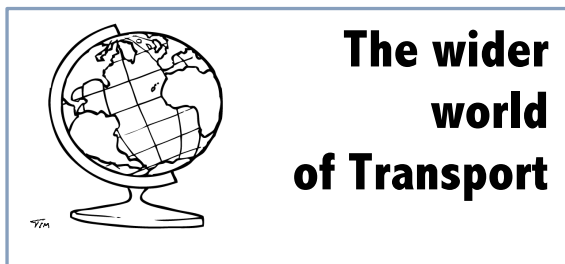
Berkley and Byng want HS2 scrapping and the money saved ploughed into a series of infrastructure upgrades on the classic network.

In spite of the above reassurance about HS2 being “on track”, official reports circulating in September suggested that Phase 1 would, in fact, be delayed by a year due to land acquisition processes taking longer than anticipated.

The *Observer* (28 October) reported that some northern **Labour MP’s** were intending to press their party to abandon support for HS2. Their contention is that it does little to improve the economy of the areas they represent. Instead of another fast connection to London, what the north requires more urgently they claim, is a fast link-up between the major North of England cities. They are now urging Labour to campaign for the HS2 money to fund their proposal.

The *Mirror* (4 November) claimed that Chris Grayling had told a rail industry conference **that rising costs might force the Government to cancel the Northern extensions of the project**. He assured his listeners that HS2 would be “fantastic” but that the case for extending beyond Birmingham to Leeds and Manchester “still had to be made”.

Striking a more optimistic note **HS2’s Chairman, Sir Terry Morgan**, is quoted by *Insider* as telling the HS2 Economic Growth Conference held on 7 November that “already incredible opportunities have opened up where HS2 has been embraced by local authorities and businesses around the country and a compelling vision created.” He said that he had seen transformative plans coming forward and that his experience told him that “we’ll see more of these: this is only the beginning of the spread of the wealth HS2 can bring by joining up Britain”.



A long term plan for Britain’s railways has been published by Greengauge 21, the think tank-cum-lobby group that helped put high speed rail, in the form of HS2, on the political map.

The purpose of the Greengauge report entitled “**Beyond HS2**”, is to fill a perceived vacuum in thinking about the rail network’s purpose and long term development post HS2. The authors hope their ideas will be fostered by the

National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and that it will encourage the rail industry to take them forward. Amongst the Greengauge recommendations are:

- 101 miles of new high speed railway and 127 miles of new fast railway
- 97 miles of other new lines including Oakhampton-Tavistock re-opening in Devon and Bedford-Cambridge (East West Rail)
- 838 miles of route upgrades of which West Coast, East Coast and Great Western comprise 66%
- six enhanced city-region rail networks including one at Newcastle and new port access route to Liverpool
- new services on West Coast and East Coast Main lines using capacity released by HS2

The time horizon envisaged is 2040, but Greengauge say much could be implemented in the 20's. "Beyond HS2" is available at <http://tinyurl.com/y9znbbrg>

Free travel was available on Manchester's Metrolink light rail services on **Clean Air Day** (21 June) for commuters travelling before 7am or after 7pm. The move was part of a drive by Metrolink to encourage people to think about changing travel habits to improve air quality.

Local Authorities in Tees Valley are reviewing **concessionary fare reimbursement** to bus operators amid concerns they are paying too much. The five councils paid operators £18m in 2017/18. Though the number of concessionary passengers is in decline payments to the bus companies are rising. Tees Valley's Head of Transport, Mark Wilson, has ordered an investigation to ensure that "Tees Valley is getting a fair deal"

Websites dedicated to reducing the cost of travel by offering split-ticket options have caused the practice to become steadily more popular. But there are concerns that **split ticketing** gives an artificial boost to rail patronage data. *TransportXtra* (21 August)

Edinburgh Council is to prepare a programme of regular **vehicle free** days in the city centre. The open street programme will be held on the first Sunday of every month with restrictions running from 10am to 5pm. Road Traffic Orders will be

used to close streets. Officers say the restrictions will mirror a policy that Paris has operated since 2016.

Transport spending in London and the NE. The IPPR (think tank) bulletin for June 2018 claims that annual transport expenditure in London is currently £4155 per capita as against just £844 per person in the NE. i.e London's funding allocation is 5 times that of the NE!

And finally.....

We hope you enjoyed reading this Branch Bulletin. If you have anything to say about the content or have suggestions to make about future editions please contact the Editor, Tony Walker anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk

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