



May 2019

Welcome to the Rail User Express.

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Rf is seeking to raise its profile and attract new members, particularly those able to take on one of the myriad of voluntary roles at local or branch level, or who have inside knowledge of the rail industry and can help Rf identify achievable projects that would make a real difference to the experience of rail travel. If you are already a member, thank you, but do please reach out to spread the word. There is plenty of literature available to distribute (with permission) on a stall at your local station. Does your RUG have a web site? If so, why not include a link to the Rf Welcome Page at the link above?

RAILFUTURE needs YOU!

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

Although no specific Far North Line projects in Control Period 6 (2019-24) were announced at the Rail: North of the Border conference in March, the signs are good, and the vibes are positive. The relevant wording was "Improved connectivity north of Inverness". It is hard to see how a new service pattern could be developed without adding a passing loop on the southern section of the line, eg at Lentran, where there used to be a six mile section of double track.

FoFNL has expressed its hope to Transport Scotland that a trial Thurso - Wick shuttle service could be set up using a Vivarail battery operated train, as demonstrated at Bo'ness last October. Minimal infrastructure would be required at one terminus to charge it between turns. The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan, published in March 2018, announced a £60m Innovation Fund, part of which is to be directed at rail - an ideal source of funding to provide a battery-operated shuttle!

FoFNL's 2019 AGM & Conference in Brora on 21 June (see Events below) is open to the public. Speakers will include Bill Reeve, Director of Rail, Transport Scotland; Sir Peter Hendy, NR Chief Executive; Scott Prentice, Head of Business Development, ScotRail and David Shirres, Editor of Rail Engineer.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Across a range of indicators, the Leven area still lags in terms of economic growth and prosperity when compared to other parts of Scotland, so the bland statement in the draft Local Community Plan that its transport infrastructure “does not fully meet local needs” will be beefed up in the final version.

The latest report from the Scottish Govt on its Infrastructure Budget boasts of a £5 billion commitment in 2019-20: “We have a proven track record of successfully delivering major infrastructure projects, including major road improvements” - but Levenmouth is again overlooked. Reopening its rail link would require just 1% of this annual budget. The continued stress on major roads exposes the hollowness of much-vaunted commitments to inclusive economic growth and equality (ie areas of deprivation) and decarbonising.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

For the delivery of Staveley’s ticket vending machine (TVM) in February, two elements had to come together: Northern’s ability to hire a TPE Class 185 train, and being allowed to occupy the line during the unloading. Fortunately, it was arranged for what turned out to be the last Saturday of the strike timetable, so the public train service finished early. A Class 185 train was needed as the doors on the Class 158 units were too narrow for the TVM; also, the usual access ramps can only take a 300kg load, but the machine weighs around 500kg. At present, the TVMs at Staveley, Burneside and Kendal can only sell tickets from their own station, but you can collect tickets bought online. However, upgraded software is on its way, when you will be able to buy a ticket from anywhere to anywhere.

Class 195 trains will be phased in on the Lakes Line, as they and trained crews become available, and the stop-gap Class 158 units are phased out. The Group has urged Northern to use 3-car units, but it may have to be a mix of 2- and 3-car. A drawback of the Class 158 is its top speed of just 90 mph, whereas the 195 can manage 100 mph. Northern has timed the airport trains for 90 mph, to ensure the 158s don’t hold up faster trains on the main line, but this sometimes involves a delay: the third train from Manchester Airport will wait outside Oxenholme station for 13mins to allow a London – Edinburgh train to overtake, and the 1627 from Windermere to leave the branch. But at least the line will have its four through services to and from the Airport.

Thanks to the efforts of LLRUG and other organisations, Transport for the North’s Strategic Transport Plan does now acknowledge tourism as a planning factor. Given the variety of attractions in the North – National Parks, leading seaside resorts and cultural and sporting venues – how could it be ignored? On the West Coast Main Line (WCML) north of Lancaster, leisure use outstrips other passenger traffic in the ratio of 4:1. So it was good to see representatives of the County Council, Cumbria LEP and Cumbria Tourism in attendance at the Cumbria launch event at Carlisle Airport.

When Pat Marshall, MD of West Coast Railways saw that Northern trains between Oxenholme and Windermere were to be replaced by buses during strike action in June 2018, she offered to run a service if local MP Tim Farron could get it authorised. This he did, resulting in two weeks of five weekday trains, during which 17,000 passengers were carried. LLRUG supported every train with volunteer stewards. As a mark of appreciation, at Carnforth Station on 18 January, Railfuture Director Roger Blake presented Pat Marshall with the Rail User Group Judges’ Special Award in recognition of WCRC’s success in running ‘The Lakelander’ service. And WCRC came up trumps again during engineering work on the WCML this Easter. NR schedules major work over bank holidays – when National Parks are at their busiest!

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

Under Harrogate Council’s draft Local Plan, thousands of homes would be built around Green Hammerton rather than at Flaxby Park, where Goldsborough station would reopen as a new park and ride called Flaxby Parkway. However, Planning Inspector Richard Schofield, who is examining the Local Plan, has called for the choice of location to be reviewed. Chris Musgrave, from Flaxby Park Ltd, said: “We have consistently argued that the Council favouring Green Hammerton as the location for a new settlement at the expense of Flaxby Park is based on flawed and inaccurate information.”

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines (STORM)

[The Bolton News](#) reports that testing of Northern's fleet of new trains has uncovered a fault. Regional director Chris Jackson told a meeting of the Bolton RUG that the couplers were "essentially too large", and could catch on the body of the train as it went around tight corners. So UK testing has been halted while Northern individually fixes each train. It is still unclear whether this will affect plans to introduce the new stock across the network.

However, the first of TransPennine Express's (TPE) Nova 3 fleet of carriages that will be hauled by Class 68 locomotives has been officially accepted after completing testing with CAF. Also delayed by technical issues, the new fleet was due to roll out before the end of 2018, but is now expected to enter service "in the coming months" between Liverpool Lime Street and Scarborough, and then on the Manchester Airport to Middlesbrough service. TPE said the acceptance of the first Nova 3 train allows it to begin training for drivers and conductors, and called it a key milestone for the project.

Four-car Class 465s are to be made fully compliant with Person of Reduced Mobility (PRM) regulations. However, the similar two-car 466s do not have a PRM toilet, so from 2020 cannot run independently, as they do now on the Sheerness branch; they must run with at least one 465 attached. But these units are not connected, so how is a wheelchair user who is not a rail enthusiast expected to identify the compliant part of the train it approaches?

Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association

Platforms on the Penistone Line were cut back long since to reduce maintenance. Now, the promise of longer trains is being compromised by the lack of space at West Yorkshire stations. The last of the Pacers at the end of this year signals the arrival of refurbished, two-car Class 150 Sprinters. The 3-car sets originally promised would need longer platforms, in particular at Huddersfield, where there is no sign of any extension to Platform 2. The record on completing infrastructure works is not good, so will the Penistone Line lose out again?

TransPennine Express has begun to test its Nova 3 trains on the Huddersfield route. They feature 106 more seats than existing trains: 257 standard, 30 first class; real-time passenger information; storage for up to four bicycles, and four toilets, three standard and one PRM. The electronic seat reservations system - Green (seat free), yellow (seat partially reserved) and red (seat fully reserved) - will make it easier to find your seat, and there are Wi-Fi and media servers with power sockets at every pair of seats.

The zenith for rail investment in Sheffield was Woodhead electrification in 1954, only to be abandoned in 1970. For 65 years the city has been given scraps. Should the £75m investment ever materialize, it must be targeted on maximising Swinton - Dore & Totley quadrupling: Holmes Chord double tracking - a spine vital to all services - was identified in 1998 as a major bottleneck. Current NR thinking for this section is a third bi-directional track, very much a second best solution. Would this ever be proposed for Leeds or Manchester?

However, the Strategic Transport Plan dumps the Sheffield to Manchester 30-minute connectivity target, so end-to-end timings of 40mins will prevail. This is where Hope means despair, as the Hope Valley route is incapable of delivering the 30min target. So what has become of the new line? Reinstating just four miles of track from Deepcar to Oxspring in the Upper Don valley would create a second Sheffield – Huddersfield rail link that would serve different markets, transform commuting through reduced journey times, and change the whole complexion of the Penistone Line.

Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association

The announcement of a new service linking Wrexham General with Liverpool Lime Street from May via the reopened Halton Curve was unexpected. The initial timetable shows two daily departures from Wrexham General at 0635 Monday-Fridays to Liverpool Lime Street (0759) via Liverpool South Parkway (0741) and also calling at Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn. The return is at 1737 from Lime Street arriving Wrexham 1850. A second service departs Wrexham at 1909, arriving at Lime Street at 2014. On Saturdays there are departures at 0619 and 1910, with a return from Lime Street at 1748 that arrives in Wrexham at 1839. There is no direct Sunday service to or from Wrexham via this route, but an hourly service between Chester and Lime Street.

Friends of the Barton Line

Following severe inconvenience caused by incorrect bus information in Timetable 31, Northern Rail agreed to fully refund one member's rail fare.

FBL Chairman Tom Irvin wrote to TPE in support of its proposal to have all its trains call at Habrough. However, TPE has had to restrict access to WCs and waiting rooms at its stations because of increased issues with drug addicts, vandals and vagrants; at Hull Paragon loiterers are deterred with classical music.

Felixstowe Travel Watch

Greater Anglia (GA) drivers are currently undergoing training on the new Class 755 bi-mode trains, which should enter service within the next few months, although the new timetables designed to exploit the capabilities of both the local trains and their new InterCity counterparts will be phased in over the next two years, with December 2020 the most likely date for the enhanced schedules across the GA network.

From 20 May, two trains each way will operate the "Norwich in Ninety" schedule, although they will be outside peak hours: 0900 and 1700 from Norwich (0933 and 1733 from Ipswich), returning from Liverpool Street at 1100 and 1900, and taking just 55 minutes to Ipswich. The 0854 from Felixstowe will connect with the 0933 at Ipswich, giving an overall journey time to London of an unprecedented 95min, but if the 1958 from Ipswich could be held for a minute to connect out of the 1900, this would create an even better journey time of just 85min!

Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users Group

In announcing the award of the next East Midlands franchise to Abellio, the Franchising Director confirmed his decision to withdraw all the Norwich expresses from Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield "early in the franchise period." Instead, they will run between Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham, while replacement trains will run between Derby, Nottingham and Norwich. It remains to be seen whether Crewe to Nottingham, and Derby to Norwich, turn out to be the same trains.

Few of the 5000 houses planned for Kingsfleet, north of Thetford, will be within a ten-minute walk of the station. There is plenty of cycle parking, but supply must keep up with demand. The Thetford Area Action Plan suggested a frequent bus service from Kingsfleet into town, and there are bus stops in Mundford Road reasonably convenient for the station, but it is unclear when, or even whether, these buses will arrive. Taxis would be the backstop for people using the bus service too. A 50-space car park on the allotments behind Platform 1 has been mooted, and PENRUG can see the advantages for rail passengers of an affordable, convenient and responsibly managed council car park within easy reach of the station.

English Regional Transport Association

Media coverage of the Rebellion Extinction Lobby set out its activity and concerns, but ERTA would remind everyone that re-railing larger communities and addressing glaring gaps in the rail network would foster modal shift back to rail, which has greener credentials than all the juggernauts, cars and vans ploughing the motorways, exhausting into the atmosphere, and creating congestion on a grand scale.

ERTA gets calls from disgruntled people that their voice is not listened to. The professionals talk to their own circles and lay people can feel expendable - except that they know the history of a line, and that many a 'professional act' began with amateurs campaigning and raising an issue like East West Rail. Some people think just because they have a good idea, the world will flock to them whereas, in reality, adults relate and negotiate for what they want, and that can involve giving something in exchange.

Chesham Transport Users' Group

The Evening Standard of 20 March stated that, despite tube passengers generating a surplus of £823m, thanks to the annual increase in Travelcard fares, TfL as a whole would make an overall loss of £742m in 2019/20, due largely to the record £722m subsidy needed to run the bus network. Also, TfL has put the Camden Town Station and Piccadilly Line signalling upgrades on hold.

The steam train run on the District Line on 22/23 June to commemorate 150 years of operation could be the last. The signalling upgrade on all sub-surface lines would preclude future steam train operations, and probably also future excursions by the electric loco Sarah Siddons, due to the lack of equipment needed to operate the new signals. [Would the introduction of ERTMS on main lines on the national network have the same effect? – Ed.]

Tonbridge Line Commuters

At a meeting with rail minister Andrew Jones MP, TLC Secretary John Morton, and local MP Tom Tugendhat discussed two issues: rush hour stops at Orpington from 2022 in the new South Eastern franchise, and the future of the Tonbridge–Redhill line. The additional stops would make it difficult if not impossible for Tonbridge commuters to find a seat in the evening services, and whilst Andrew Jones did not promise anything, he did appear sympathetic. Following GTR's woeful performance (on 30 December only a third of the scheduled services ran), TLC proposed that Tonbridge–Redhill be returned to the South Eastern franchise, with an Ashford-Gatwick service. Unfortunately, the minister seemed sceptical about the merits of this idea, believing that the line was geographically better connected to GTR's Southern services.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

GWR MD Mark Hopwood shares CLPG's ambitions to modernise the North Cotswold Line, but is proud of what has already been achieved. CLPG was formed to save the line from closure, but it is now a success story with partial doubling, new trains and the prospect of more frequent services, and with a Task Force that GWR has helped financially to make the case to complete the final sections of doubling. Thriving economic centres in the North Cotswolds are being promoted, alongside an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with strong transport links to London.

Plans to develop Worcester Foregate Street station would see the end of its hugely successful Travel Centre in its present form. Just 5 years ago, the County Council spent almost £1 million on a revamp of the station frontage, which was ceremonially opened by Robin Walker MP. With its prominent High Street location, the Travel Centre forms a valuable shop window for rail travel and associated products. CLPG President Lord Faulkner of Worcester, Chair of the North Cotswold Line Task Force, later promoted plans that would see it expand as a tourist information centre. So it is difficult to see how a couple of ticket booths can begin to replicate its invaluable service or the amount of revenue that it continues to generate. Whilst there is every reason to reduce the amount of fraudulent travel with some form of barrier, any development should build on the success of the Travel Centre to improve the customer experience.

Subject to NR approval, the new hourly timetable will start in December. Some CLPG Committee members met with GWR train planners with suggested improvements that they hope will be taken up. Many journey times are cut, but there are still some gaps in the hourly frequency at Honeybourne, Pershore and Worcester Parkway. Also, some trains turn round at Worcester Shrub Hill, thus preventing access to the city centre, and opportunities for connections further west, although this will be mitigated by the restoration of half a mile of track between Foregate Street station and Henwick signal box. Services south of Worcester have failed to improve, and those to Paddington via Cheltenham and Swindon will be lost altogether. More trains are also needed between Worcester and Bristol, as well as a mid-morning service from Shipton and Ascott with a return in the early afternoon.

The Task Force is making the case for 2 trains/hour between Worcester, Oxford and London, alternately serving intermediate Worcestershire stations and Oxfordshire stations. This would require redoubling between Wolvercot Junction and Hanborough, and Norton Junction and Worcestershire Parkway. It also seeks more frequent services to and from Herefordshire and Great Malvern, direct connectivity from Kidderminster and Droitwich Spa, and a Hanborough metro service into Oxford.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Following corrections to the cameras for driver only operation, the new IEP trains will start to operate out of the siding at Bedwyn from 20 May, replacing most of the old Turbo trains, although some will be retained to form the half hourly connecting service. The Group continues to work with GWR on the December timetable, which will exploit the performance of the new trains, and the company has been listening to our concerns.

Planning permission for the upper car park at Hungerford is a disappointment. The loss of spaces will likely cause some rail users to make use of Bedwyn, which will increase its parking problem. The Group been working with GWR to identify further parking areas in the village, but without the car park generating revenue, GWR would only be able to partially fund it.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

It is good to welcome a real improvement. For some years we have been grumbling about a quirk on ticket vending machines (TVMs) that, at some stations, presented a confusing screen showing lists of days for part-week season tickets, but no indication of how to get to the ticket you want. However, they now have upgraded software with new screen layouts, so no more confusion. The GWR phone app has seen a lot of changes and frustration since the first version appeared. At one time it took two hours to put the ticket on the phone, but they now appear within seconds. However, for one short journey it took more than 30 taps of the screen to buy a ticket. Excessive?

Meanwhile a TVM at Lympstone Village is long overdue. Conductors rarely come through the train between Lympstone and Exmouth; the barrier there is usually not staffed; its TVMs cannot sell tickets from any other station, and when the ticket office is open there is often a significant queue. The result is regular inconvenience to passengers – and, ALRUG believes, considerable loss of revenue. GWR journey figures, based on ticket sales, show for 2012 (the latest to hand) 10,224 journeys from Lympstone Village to Exmouth, but 15,377 in the opposite direction. As most passengers make a return journey, this suggests that a third of passengers to Exmouth travel without a ticket, even assuming everyone buys a ticket for the return leg. When drawn to its attention, GWR's response has often been to mount a revenue protection block outside Exmouth station. Then passengers from Lympstone Village, unable to buy a ticket anywhere, have been intimidated into paying an £80 penalty, whereas those joining at Exmouth, who walk past two ticket machines and, when it is open, a ticket office, only pay a penalty fare of £20!

RAILFUTURE

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

Rf Chairman Chris Page attended a briefing by the Williams team on the objectives and criteria of the Rail Review. Keith Williams emphasised that they were seeking immediate change. Rail was not innovating for the customer as fast as other industries because the supply chain insists on bespoke solutions. Dick Fearn reported a lack of strategic direction and leadership, and an asphyxiating decision making process: a balance was needed between guiding mind and managers able to manage and innovate locally. Tony Poulter for the DfT said that it was difficult to factor in wider benefits to franchise and investment decisions – it needed a model that allowed franchise objectives and challenges to change over time.

Rf agrees with the [Electric Charter](#) on a rolling programme of electrification, with the TransPennine route via Stalybridge the priority candidate, and broadly on battery and hydrogen alternatives. But whereas the Charter's view is purely Northern, Rf has a national perspective: it defines the key criteria for a candidate route by the intensity of its traffic and the proportion of a journey under the wires, rather than creating hostages to fortune by identifying other specific lines. The Charter has the Calder Valley line as its second priority. This may be the best candidate in the North, but it is unlikely to be the best fit to Rf national criteria. Also, an RSSB report makes it clear that, for the next twenty years, the advanced diesel hybrid (not bi-mode) will produce less emissions than hydrogen, and be cheaper to operate.

Rf, Portishead Railway Group and Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways have long campaigned to restore passenger services on the Bristol-Portishead line, which ended in 1964, but which is still used by freight trains serving Portbury Dock. The plans to reopen it form part of Phase 1 of MetroWest, which aims to expand the rail network in the Greater Bristol area. On 8 April, HMG [announced](#) that it would commit £31.9m to cover the remaining shortfall for the scheme.

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS

The West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) has submitted a planning application for a third access to Birmingham's Snow Hill station. Constructed in a vacant railway arch, part of the Victorian viaduct that carries trains and trams into the city centre, the new entrance will create a direct link between rail and metro services and St Chad's metro stop. Currently, metro passengers access the station via the Bull Street stop and the Lionel Street archway, or along the busy Great Charles Street Queensway.

West Midlands Branch has been very active since the final designs to facilitate the Curzon Street HS2 interchange with Moor Street and New Street stations were revealed. Early WMRE concepts – developed in collaboration with Transport for West Midlands, Midlands Connect, Network Rail, HS2, Chiltern Railways, West Midlands Railway and Birmingham City Council - include doubling the size of the concourse, a transfer deck with access to every platform, and links to a new footbridge taking passengers directly to the HS2 station via a public square. There are also several options to improve pedestrian access between Moor Street and New Street, including a direct route via St Martin's Queensway, and steps and a ramp at Swan Passage adjacent to the new Primark.

Meanwhile, a 20-man team spent 12 weekends strengthening Snow Hill Tunnel, which links the southern end of Moor Street station with the northern end of Snow Hill – where contractors found evidence of the key role rail has long played in keeping the city moving: sidings once used for transporting milk and post, and an underground entrance to the then Birmingham branch of the Bank of England.

On Sunday 7 April, West Midland Trains ran a Class 323 unit along the Chase line, calling at all stations north of Walsall, to check the gap between the train and the platforms ready for the start of electric trains.

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNITY RAIL LANCASHIRE

'On Track to Train' is CRL's employment project specifically tailored to young people who belong to underrepresented groups in rail, including young women, those with special and additional needs and disabilities, and those from BAME communities. A series of holistic and comprehensive experiences provide opportunities for in-depth learning and dialogue across a wide range of roles in rail and community rail, and the programme is flexible to reflect group-learning needs. This is delivered in partnership with the Mid-Cheshire CRP, Women in Community Rail, Merseyrail, Merseytravel, Northern, TransPennine Express, Virgin and NR.

'Railway Confidence Programmes' and school engagement projects continue to be extremely popular. Development of education programmes has continued, with new ideas and contacts being generated through attendance and participation at the Naidex show in Birmingham, dedicated to enhancing the lifestyles of people with disabilities and additional needs; the Autism Show in London, and ACoRP's volunteering and social inclusion training day.

EAST HAMPSHIRE CRP

EHCRP treated a group of 20 parents and toddlers from Home-Start Butser in Petersfield to a free return trip to Portsmouth and Southsea station. Ably assisted by staff from South Western Railways, the group was advised how to seek help and information, buy tickets, get on and off trains safely with buggies and little ones, and what to expect on a trip. It proved a great success, with some of the group saying that they would not have had the confidence to do that on their own, and "it's good to know where to find help before and during a train ride". If you know of a group in the EHCRP area who would like to follow in Home-Start Butser's footsteps, please let Mark Miller know on 07900 103296.

It has recently revamped its website and would really appreciate any feedback - good or bad! Is there anything not working, left out or needing amendment?

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF stands up for transport users around Great Britain, to champion their cause when things go wrong, and to get services improved. Reliable journeys remain the key factor determining user satisfaction. TF will work to ensure planned and unplanned disruption is better handled, and seek to ensure the user voice is at the heart of investment and planning decisions. It will also monitor over 180,000 transport users through 'tracker' surveys; the comparative, benchmarked results will drive change.

Commenting on the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) proposals to the Williams Rail Review, TF Chief Executive Anthony Smith said: "Passengers tell Transport Focus they want a railway that is more accountable and simple to use, both locally and nationally, especially for commuter services. It will be passengers who will ultimately judge whether any changes deliver train services that are more reliable, provide more space to stand or sit, offer a real customer focus, and represent better value for money. Transport Focus will examine these proposals closely."

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

The DfT has ruled that bids by Stagecoach and Arriva in the latest round of franchises were "non-compliant" as they did not meet pension requirements; bidders were asked to bear full long-term funding risk on relevant sections of the Railways Pension Scheme. The Pensions Regulator has estimated the UK rail industry needs an additional £5-6bn to plug the pensions shortfall, and Stagecoach said it was being asked to take on risks it "cannot control and manage". Meanwhile, Abellio, owned by the Dutch national railway, has been awarded the East Midlands franchise, and the West Coast line winner will be announced in June. However, South Eastern has been put on hold, with an extension of the existing contract to 10 November, and an option to extend it further to April 2020.

Following the meltdown on Thameslink in 2018, DfT announced that GTR would contribute £15m towards a [Passenger Benefit Fund](#). Each GTR station is grouped into one of three tiers, and will receive £80,000, £50,000 or £30,000 respectively. Passenger groups and other stakeholders can propose improvements either at their local station or having a wider passenger benefit.

A key role for the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is holding NR to account for the performance and value for money that it delivers for passengers, the freight industry and taxpayers. In November, ORR took enforcement action against NR requiring improvements in its capability to deliver better railway performance. It has now approved a performance action plan, which sets out how NR will address its concerns, and will monitor its progress against this. Additionally, at the start of Control Period 6 on 1 April, ORR's new regulatory policy on holding NR to account came into force. Its approach will be to target the areas that have the most serious impact on rail users, and allow it to act earlier to resolve issues, whilst retaining strong sanctions to address serious and long-term failures.

Whatever the merits and demerits of the franchising system, it is finally delivering whole fleets of new trains. And despite Brexit (or not), some of the biggest investors in the UK have been EU companies. Siemens of Germany has put £200m into its new rail factory in Goole; Spanish company CAF has opened a £30m factory in Newport, and another, Talgo, is committed to opening a new £40m factory at Kincardine in Fife, and an innovation hub in Chesterfield.

The RDG says that more rail passengers will have the option to use smart tickets that can be stored on smartphones or smartcards. Major stations are having the necessary infrastructure installed, and 9 in 10 journeys will be available in this format "soon". The rollout of new technology has seen upgrades at Waterloo, Edinburgh Waverley and Gatwick Airport, to be followed by new readers and computer software at Blackfriars, Watford Junction, City Thameslink, London Bridge, East Croydon and Shenfield.

On 15 April, Hertfordshire County Council's cabinet agreed to bring a shortlist of just 10 schemes, outlined in [LTP4](#), to 'deliverable' status. The shortlisted rail projects include the Watford Junction development transport infrastructure package, and the West Watford Sustainable corridor, as well as a passing loop on the Abbey Line between Watford and St Albans, and eastern access to Hitchin Station.

The 43rd edition of Barry Doe's [rail franchise map](#) shows a second Northern route from Chester to Manchester; a revised TransPennine route between Manchester and Preston; improved mapping accuracy in the South Wales and Bristol areas (including adding Llanelli and Bristol Parkway) and at Ilkley, Skipton and Buxton; and the addition of stations at some junctions to aid clarity (such as Sleaford and Redhill). Copies may be downloaded free of charge for private or commercial use, including printing any size.

Unfortunately, there has been a further delay in bringing the two Swanage Railway diesel multiple units – a one-carriage Class 121 'Bubble Car' and a three-carriage Class 117 – up to main line standard, so that they can run into Wareham station. As well as new wheel-sets, they require NR compliant TPWS (train protection and warning system), OTMR (on-train monitoring recorder), a GSM-R wireless communications system and central door locking. The work is proving very challenging because of the heritage nature of the trains.

Helium balloons cause hundreds of train delays across the UK each year. Many incidents involve them getting caught in overhead wires, causing delays while the electricity is switched off and the lines made safe. "If you're on a railway station platform with a foil balloon filled with helium on a string and it comes in contact with the overhead wires carrying 25kV, that could cause huge injury or death," said James Dean, Chief Operating Officer for NR's London North Western route. "Ideally, we'd ask people not to bring balloons into stations at all. Or carry them in bags, so the risk of them floating upwards is minimised."

...and finally

As the Flying Scotsman crossed the East Midlands on 5 May, a number of people illegally accessed tracks with a line speed of 125mph near Burton on Trent and Tamworth, causing significant disruption. No fewer than 56 trains accrued almost 1,000 minutes of delays. British Transport Police is stepping up its patrols ahead of Flying Scotsman. Anyone caught trespassing or obstructing trains can expect to be prosecuted. Don't make the shot of a lifetime your last!

Independent candidate and Pilning Station Campaign leader Olga Taylor came a highly creditable second in the local council election. Her 23% of votes cast beat the Labour, Lib Dem and Green candidates, and demonstrates the level of anger and concern regarding the pitiful rail and bus services. The railway authorities claim that it's not worth reinstating the footbridge to restore a service in both directions, as so few people want to use the station. This result proves how wrong they are!

CONSULTATIONS

- Bristol City Council: [Local Plan Review](#), closes Friday 24 May.
- DfT: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/williams-rail-review>, closes 31 May.
- Infrastructure & Projects Authority: [Infrastructure Finance Review](#), closes 5 June.
- ORR: [Market Review into rail compensation claims companies](#), NO published closing date!

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

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains a [List of Events](#) and a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a Calendar of Events embedded in a document may be discarded, and that is a problem if the venue changes from month to month, a stand-alone copy in Word format would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

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

May

- Saturday 18. Rf National Annual General Meeting, Bute Suite, Sophia Gardens, **Cardiff**, CF11 9SW, 1100.
- Saturday 18. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Commodore Hotel, West Clyde Street, **Helensburgh**, G84 8ES, 1130.
- Saturday 18. East Suffolk Travellers Association AGM, Gannon Rooms, Station Approach, **Saxmundham**, Suffolk, 1400 (also 5 October, Lowestoft Station).
- Saturday 18. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association, Wharf Station, Talyllyn Railway, **Tywyn**, 1145. (also 8 June, 2 July, 6 August, 7 September, 5 October, 12 November, 7 December - various locations and times).
- Saturday 18. Friends of Settle-Carlisle Line AGM, Victoria Hall, Kirkgate, **Settle**, North Yorkshire, BD24 9DZ, 1200.
- Saturday 18. English Regional Transport Association, The Red Well, 16 Silver Street, **Wellingborough**, NN8 1BD, 1500 (Also 8, 22 June, 16, 23 July, 3,17 August, 2, 21 September, 5, 19 October – [various locations](#)).
- Tuesday 21. Campaign for Better Transport, St. George's Conference Centre, **Leeds** LS1 3DL, 1930.
- Thursday 23. Tarka Rail Association AGM, Village Hall, **Umberleigh**, 1915.
- Saturday 25. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, Bat and Ball Station (Luggage Hall), 1400.
- Thursday 30. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife College, Levenmouth Campus, **Buckhaven**, 1830 (also the final Thursday of each month).
- Thursday 30. Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association AGM, Railway Station, **Oswestry**, 1915.

June

- Monday 3. Campaign for Better Transport West and North Yorkshire Rail Group, "Veritas", 43-47 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3BB, 1930
- Tuesday 4. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (also 2 July).
- Thursday 6. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, Christ Church Hall, Silchester Road, **St. Leonards-on-Sea**, East Sussex, TN38 0JB, 1800.
- Saturday 8. Rf North West, Merebrook pub, Greenfields Avenue, Bromborough, **Birkenhead**, CH62 6DD, 1300.
- 14-16 June. Rf East Midlands stall (provisional) at Great Central Railway's annual Model Event: volunteers welcome!
- Saturday 15. Rf Thames Valley stall at Oxford-Didcot 175, Grandpont recreation ground and pavilion, **Oxford**, OX1 4NA, 1200-1800.

- Saturday 15. Rf East Anglia, St Mary Stoke Church Hall, **Ipswich**, 1400.
- Tuesday 18. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 6 August, 17 September, 22 October, 10 December).
- Friday 21. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Royal Marine Hotel, Brora, 1115.
- Saturday 22. Rf Summer Conference, Dolphin Centre, Central Hall, Horsemarket, **Darlington**, DL1 5RP.

Further Ahead

- 6 July. Rf London & South East stall at Uckfield Festival, Luxford Field, **Uckfield**, East Sussex, TN22 1AL, 1000-1600.
- 8 July. Skipton – East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, Community Centre, **Earby**, 1900.
- 10 July. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, St. John's Church, Stratford Broadway, **London**, E15 1NG, 1830. (and every second Wednesday of alternate months.)
- 15 July. Campaign for Better Transport West and North Yorkshire Rail Group, "Veritas", 43-47 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3BB, 1930
- 17 July. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, the Sloop, **Barton**, 2000.
- 18 July. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, Perrymount Methodist Hall, Pinewood Gate, 28 Perrymount Road, **Haywards Heath**, West Sussex, RH16 3DN, 1800.
- 21 September. Rf Autumn Conference, St. Michael's Church Centre, The Green, **Stoke Gifford**, (by Bristol Parkway station), BS34 8PD.
- 28 September. Rf East Anglia open meeting, **Norwich**, 1400.
- 5 October. East Suffolk Travellers Association , **Lowestoft** Station, 1400.
- 15 October. Felixstowe Travel Watch, Salvation Army Church, **Felixstowe**, 1430.
- 21 October. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Globe Hotel. **Topsham**, 1930.
- 26 October. Rf Branches and Groups Day, **Birmingham**, venue and timing TBN.

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