



December 2020

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The Chancellor's Spending Review and the accompanying National Infrastructure Strategy are distinctly underwhelming. Funding for 15 more feasibility studies will raise peoples' hopes, but where is the money to come from to realise any cost benefit? The bottom line is £27.5 billion for roads against only £17.5 billion for rail – and even this figure was subsequently cut by a billion. The NIS section on Decarbonisation makes no mention of rail electrification, or its environmental advantage over road transport. If not an own goal, then surely it is a lost opportunity.

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.

Furness Line Action Group

Chris Jackson, Northern's Regional Director, confirmed to FLAG that, despite reports to the contrary, "in mid-December we plan to introduce new timetables to build upon the modest enhancements seen in the autumn. This will see the return of hourly trains between Barrow and Lancaster, with 11 trains per day between Barrow and Manchester Airport."

NR's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy published in July recommended electrification of the Cumbrian Coast Line on the basis that its passenger services cater for the many communities along West Cumbria, whilst freight services move commodities of national significance to/from the Low-Level Waste Repository at Drigg and Sellafield, and the new offshore coalmine plans to use the Line to take out the coking coal. Freight also operates in and out of the ports at Barrow and Workington. FLAG welcomes the long-term prospect, but is sceptical whether the finances and commitment will be forthcoming in the next few years, given the works needed on structures, especially tunnels in Furness and at Whitehaven.

That was followed in September by NR's Cumbrian Coast Study: Railway Investment Choices, which "provides a clear and compelling way forward for the Cumbrian Coast for the next ten years, and sets the tone for a much more intensively used route." In 2022, signalling improvements from Wigton - Maryport, and Workington – Whitehaven will increase train frequency by reducing the headway. It suggests replacing the Electronic Token Block (ETB) signalling between Whitehaven and St Bees, and extending the St. Bees loop to support West Cumbria Mining operations.

In 2026, further headway reductions between Sellafield and Maryport would support both the forecast peak demand for freight, and a clockface hourly passenger service between Carlisle and Barrow-in-Furness. However, the timetable as proposed could result in a long wait for an Airport connection at Barrow.

Friends of the Settle - Carlisle Line

FoSCL has supported its iconic line since 1981 (40th anniversary next year!) The current service is a patchy 75% of normal. At FoSCL's behest, two rail replacement bus services were implemented to cater for school children returning from Skipton to Ribbleshead, and to fill a 3-4 hour gap in essential midweek services. However, the railway totally fails to connect with rural buses, so a small group of Committee members has formed a timetable and service quality group in order to identify those services crucial to integrated transport in the rural area, as well as to through traffic and tourist services.

Such involvement deserves formal recognition. FoSCL's door is always open, so it sought to hold constructive talks with both Northern, and the Settle - Carlisle Railway Development Co, the designated CRP for the line. Due recognition should not depend on being a CRP, but if that is what it takes, FoSCL is prepared to go for it. Sadly, these talks have so far had a very disappointing and disheartening result.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

The Calder Valley route has once again been disrupted due to a failure of the signalling system in the area around the Littleborough Ground frame - STORM has been pressing for its power operation for years. Had it been available, Littleborough and Smithy Bridge wouldn't have been so affected by the Gauxholme viaduct work and the flooding east of Summit Tunnel. When you ignore the impact of delays caused by such incidents, and rely on dubious footfall figures that miss up to 20% of ticketed passengers, it is harder to justify the necessary investment.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

A £9.8million project to replace the token signalling between Knaresborough and Poppleton has raised the speed limit from 20 to 40mph, and enables trains to pass at Cattal station, so the Knaresborough – York service should double to half-hourly from next year.

East Norfolk Transport Users Association

In its response to the consultation on upgrading Ely Junction, ENTUA proposed through services from Great Yarmouth to Peterborough, Cambridge and possibly Stansted Airport. Once the Norwich to Ely line is electrified (a long-term NR aspiration), it would serve as an alternative route to London should the Great Eastern Main Line be disrupted, and enhance connections to Eurostar. However, Norfolk County Council claims that it has raised the aspiration for through services to Yarmouth with train operators, but none was willing. There is little evidence of any demand, and Infrastructure constraints at Ely and Trowse Swing Bridge (at least) would preclude the necessary additional paths.

East Suffolk Travel Association

The consultation document on Greater Anglia's December 2021 timetable proposes East Suffolk Line trains at the same frequency as at present. In a discussion group in late October, 3 weeks before the consultation started, Greater Anglia promised some off-peak Lowestoft – London through services when the new trains were bedded in, but there is now no mention of any going through to London. The Lowestoft – Norwich frequency would also stay the same, while the Great Eastern Main Line would have a 30-min frequency with an average 6-min reduction in journey times. There are also some general hints about some shorter journey times on regional routes, and some later evening services.

Welland Valley Rail Partnership

Kettering and Corby are only 24 and 20 miles from Peterborough, but the bus takes 105 and 70mins respectively. And Corby to Stamford entails a bus to Peterborough, and then back to Stamford, so what should be a short journey to a tourist destination turns into a day trip that discourages the casual visitor. [WVRP](#) wants to fix this with a 4-mile long rail chord between Seaton and Luffenham, loosely along part of the old Rugby and Stamford Railway. It would save about 6mins over a chord at Manton junction – and the car is the real competition!

However, rather than hog a Peterborough platform with a terminating service, there is a compelling case to head on to Wisbech via March. This would make the best of an investment that looks close to reconnecting Wisbech with the rail network, with a direct link to its nearest major centre, as well as to Cambridge.

English Regional Transport Association

The Government talks up 'things environmental', but the action tinkers at the edges. Thus the £500 million Reversing Beeching agenda was eclipsed by the £27 billion for new roads. But however clean and green, cars cause congestion and delays, adding to costs. The current rail network cannot cope with modal shift, but forget greening unless at least some local rail links are reinstated - more than some dare to tout. We need more and better rail choices.

Harry Burr may only be 13 years old, but his [campaign](#) for a Weedon Parkway station on the West Coast Main Line deserves to be taken seriously: it would serve Daventry, now one of the largest towns without a station. ERTA would also like to see the Northampton – Market Harborough line reinstated, as well as the Great Central line from Calvert through Rugby to the Nuneaton – Leicester line at Narborough.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

Longer term timetable aspirations may currently be on hold, but in the interim CLPG has suggested hourly off-peak daytime services in both directions from Pershore and Worcs Parkway, and upgrading connectivity at Parkway between Cotswold Line and north/south departures. Additional peak hour calls at Reading, and extending the 1620 Paddington – Oxford service to form the 1723 Oxford – Moreton stopper could improve reliability and offer a half hourly London service between 1450 and 1750. Also, the 0500 Birmingham - Cardiff and the 2145 return service that are routed via Worcester Shrub Hill for route familiarity purposes should make it a timetabled call. It would provide earlier and later Worcester – Birmingham services, and offer useful connections with the Cotswold line.

Rather than a “Super” Off-Peak Return to London, splitting the fare from many Cotswold stations with a Day Return to Oxford and another from there to London could save you up to £10.

Following constructive suggestions from NR and taking account of a substantial growth in housing numbers, the North Cotswold Line Task Force will update its Strategic Outline Business Case before, hopefully, moving to the Develop stage of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline in 2021, subject to funding.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

The Association has about 120 members, a fall of 30% in the last 5 years. The Committee has declined from 12 members to just 3, one of whom is over 80 and another approaching that figure, and recent appeals for others to join have been unsuccessful. The bank balance is a healthy £1,563, although this too has shrunk over recent years. It is therefore proposed to abolish the annual subscription from 1 March 2021, and live off the reserves for 5 years before funds run out. The Committee may then wish to call it a day, with an EGM to close the Association.

In the new timetable from December, the hourly Victoria - Portsmouth Harbour service will terminate and start instead from Portsmouth & Southsea. It currently has a 6min turn round time at the Harbour, and delays on the outward journey often result in turn round at Fratton or Havant, and delays to the return services to Victoria. However, London Bridge services will improve, being replaced by two trains from Portsmouth or Southampton and Bognor joining and splitting at Horsham.

Pilning Station Group

The Group's submission to the DfT's Ideas Fund - to reinstate the Pilning station footbridge, controversially demolished in November 2016 to make way for overhead wires - was accepted and is being considered. Although now one-way only and with just two eastbound trains a week on Saturdays only, the station's annual footfall has risen by 900%! Many more would use it if it had a proper daily service in both directions, as it is well placed to serve the developing Severnside industrial area, and The Wave inland surfing centre, the new location for Bristol Zoo, as well as the local community and surrounding villages.

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](#).

Rail campaigners have described the Government's spending review as "Lacking in ideas as much as lacking in content". Rf Chair Chris Page said: "We responded to the government's plans back in September, so we were hoping to see positive outcomes in three areas that we identified, but we're a little disappointed". Firstly, it fails to protect the railway for when things recover. Then, there is no mention of electrification, but without a rolling programme, skills will be lost and lessons will have to be relearnt. Finally, support for economic recovery, social mobility, levelling up, carbon reductions etc is lacking – most of the rail investment mentioned is not new. Existing proposals such as the TransPennine route upgrade, reliability improvements around Manchester and Midland Main Line electrification need to be accelerated.

In the first of two papers on HS2, Policy Director Ian Brown explains its background, and Rf's stance on the current Phases 1 and 2a and the ongoing consultation on integration with Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) between Manchester and Leeds. Rf's policy position on HS2 remains to support the project whilst being heard to campaign for better connectivity. HS2 must be commercial, but its regional economic and classic railway potential must be maximised.

Rf therefore welcomes Transport for the North's plan to invest in a credible rail network for the North. It will continue to work with stakeholders on getting this right, with cost effective integration between HS2 and NPR bringing wider benefits to the region. TfN wants the Government to commit to:

- New lines from Liverpool to Warrington and Manchester, and from there via Bradford to Leeds
- Upgrades to the Hope Valley route between Manchester and Sheffield
- Connecting Sheffield to HS2 and on to Leeds
- Upgrades and electrification of the lines from Leeds and Sheffield to Hull
- Upgrades of the ECML from Leeds to Newcastle via York, and restoration of the Leamside line.

At NPR's online annual conference on 14 December, Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotherham will lead the discussion on why HS2 and NPR are essential to rebuild and transform the North's economy. He will be joined by Doug Oakervee, who led the HS2 review earlier this year.

PASSENGER GROUP

The Rf Board sees the need for a strategy to attract passengers back to rail, as the current usage levels are extremely concerning. The West Midlands branch suggests that the DfT offer promotional fares and other money saving offers. Communications with TOCs, MPs, Regional and sub-National bodies should promote the safety of rail, and prod DfT into action. Rf strategy should target both the decision makers and the potential travelling public; national officers and branches could make use of it as soon as virus constraints allow, and over the next 6-12 months. Without a significant return to rail travel, we could be in danger of losing many services that make rail travel convenient, or even entire lines.

It was reported that East Midlands Railway (EMR) was experiencing delays to the delivery of Class 170s cascaded from other operators, and also serious staff shortages in the Nottingham area. Following the freight train derailment at Sheffield station, train operators had failed to cooperate, as the ORR Network Code requires them to. Many of Northern's trains were trapped, but EMR was unwilling or unable to add stops to its Liverpool to Norwich service, so Dronfield, Langley Mill and Ilkeston were left without any service at all.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

RfEA responded to the new Cambridge South Station consultation. The footfall predicted by the NR formula may prove totally inadequate. Building in the necessary capacity from the start would have a minimal cost, whereas trying to add it once the station is open will be expensive and very disruptive.

The current plan is for outer platforms on either side of a single island platform. But two island platforms would be more convenient, so last minute changes to the northbound or southbound running line would simply entail crossing the platform rather than a scramble up and down staircases [*and departing passengers would not have to choose which staircase to head for – Ed.*] Then, under the current rules, Cambridge South planning may not take any account of the future arrival of East West Rail, when the track will be need to quadrupled all the way from Shepreth Branch Junction to Cambridge Station. Surely, the time consuming and costly effort to obtain the necessary powers and possessions, and to complete both aspects of the work, should be done as one? It is a false economy, and the rules need to change.

RfEA has produced a report on a possible new station at Long Stratton, south of Norwich. And with the support of local MPs Matt Hancock and Anthony Browne, it is preparing a bid to restore the railway from Haverhill (Suffolk) to Shelford and Cambridge, with stations at Granta Park and Sawston. A long running campaign in and around Haverhill gathered several thousand signatures. A recent high-level study had a neutral BCR, so RfEA wants further studies to complete the work, and establish a more detailed and accurate feasibility and business case. When complete, the bid document will be posted on the Rf website.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT is celebrating two successes this month. First the Government announced £175 million for cycling and walking routes. Then the Prime Minister committed to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, ten years earlier than previously planned, which will have a really positive impact on air quality and climate. The Government's green plan also promised other things for which CBT has campaigned, including the reopening of closed rail lines.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Following its webinar on the topic, and discussions with government and supporters, CRN produced [Community Rail's Role In Recovery](#). Members and partners should draw on it, and share their examples.

The 2021 CRN Community Rail Conference, run with the DfT to foster good practice among CRPs, will be held online, with presentations, workshops and networking spread over 8, 9, 15 and 16 March.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

Ms B received an Excess Fares Notice when travelling with Avanti West Coast last December. She could not present her replacement Senior Railcard due to the problems that Railcards was having around that time. Despite the matter being appealed and chased numerous times, the matter was unresolved. However, Ms B had only contacted Railcard, so TF contacted Avanti West Coast directly on her behalf. An email from Railcard confirming their logistics problems at the time was sent to Avanti, which promptly issued a refund for £132.50.

Ms D was entitled to a refund for a taxi she had taken in place of a late night cancelled train service. She came to TF in March, but the case had been closed with no further action taken. When Ms D contacted the casework team again, they appealed on her behalf, and sent copies of taxi receipts and an explanation of why this request was made so late. As a result, our caseworker was able to persuade South Western Railway to offer a refund.

LEONARD CHESHIRE

Accessible rail is not just a means of getting from A to B, but a journey to equality, opportunity, and independence. With the radical changes to the rail system, ensuring equal access to public transport would be profoundly transformative in this regard. As part of its Get on Board campaign, Leonard Cheshire is launching a new report '*Get on Board 2020: Making the economic case for "levelling up" inclusive transport*' with an expert panel discussion by Zoom on 14 December from 1430-1530. Secure a free place at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/get-on-board-the-value-of-trains-for-all-tickets-130393824439>.

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

Following an investigation by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), NR has been fined £10,000 after pleading guilty to a health and safety offence. Several trains had crossed Lamington Viaduct in South Lanarkshire before NR realised it had been severely damaged in a storm, when a driver noticed large track movements. The line was eventually closed for seven weeks for major repair work.

A High Speed Rail Group report, [HS2 Midlands Voices](#), argues that the full HS2 network is needed to fulfil the long-promised 'levelling up' of the regional and national economy: the Eastern Leg is essential to ensure that the benefits of HS2 are evenly spread. The East Midlands currently has the lowest transport spend per head of any UK region (£245), about half the UK average.

The East West Railway Company has launched an environmental survey on its [Community Hub](#), with a set of interactive maps. It will inform the design of the line prior to a non-statutory public consultation early in 2021, and the Environmental Impact Assessment to be published with the planning application, expected to be in 2022.

More electrification is seen as essential to decarbonising the UK rail network if the Government is to meet its Net Zero target. Two PhDs at the University of Sheffield focused on making it more cost efficient and reliable: by reducing the need for bridge reconstruction, and by anticipating the need to maintain overhead line equipment before it fails, and trialing innovative conductor materials.

The first of a new generation of trains has arrived on the Isle of Wight prior to entering service in March. The Vivarail Class 484s will replace the old London Underground stock that dates from 1938, and has served the Island Line since the late 1980s. The new trains will have free WiFi, better passenger information, charging sockets and wheelchair spaces. On the line itself, a new passing loop at Brading will allow a regular 30-minute service interval, while other track work will improve ride quality, and platform height adjustment will improve accessibility.

A new build at Coventry station will add five retail units, a new passenger waiting room and toilets, and a 633-space multi-storey car park. An access tunnel under Warwick Road will connect it to a transport interchange, with a traffic-free boulevard from the front of the station to the city centre.

Stoke-on-Trent is set to benefit from £29 million from the government's Transforming Cities Fund. Plans for the funding include a brand-new transport hub at Stoke-on-Trent station that will offer local commuters and visitors to the city better access to taxis, buses and cycling, while also improving walking routes to and from the station. Also, at Longton station, new lifts, passenger shelters and cycle facilities will improve its accessibility and its links into the city.

A new website, [Routes into Rail](#), showcases role models working in the sector to shape perceptions of a career in the industry. It then has a jobs portal with over a 1,000 vacancies from across the sector, alongside the latest news and opportunities.

Don Payne has pointed out that the frequently struck bridge described last month as being in Broadford Rd, Dudley, is in fact in Oldbury, adjacent to Sandwell and Dudley station.

The Middlewich freight line has reopened following a £4.5m project to replace the bridges over the Trent and Mersey canal and Whatcroft Hall Lane in Northwich. Restoring a full axle-weight will ensure that the HS2 aggregate flows from the Peak District quarries can take even more freight movements off the road.

,,,and finally

On 27 November, the last Pacer in Northern passenger service from Kirkby to Manchester Victoria marked just over 35 years of continuous service, clocking 3 million miles in the process. [*However, Pacers have had more swansongs than Frank Sinatra, so is this its final retirement?* – Ed.]

Swan Sanctuary, a charity based in Shepperton, Surrey, is training new NR Wessex recruits on the safe way to remove swans from harms way on the lines out of London Waterloo.

An archive of art deco railway posters from the golden age of steam, found in a disused attic, is up for sale. David Bownes, from Twentieth Century Posters, described the collection as "sensational". A 1955 piece by renowned artist David Shepherd entitled Service By Night has already sold for £2,100. Other items include Charles Mayo's 1939 work Speed to the West, and a 1947 poster for Jersey via Weymouth.

An exhibition at Victoria station marking the centenary of the return of the Unknown Warrior ended on 16 November, whilst the National Army Museum in Chelsea had to close from 5 November, and thus over the Armistice period. However, its [Buried Among Kings](#) event is scheduled to run until 14 February.

CONSULTATIONS

- Northumberland County Council: [Northumberland Line](#), closes 14 December
- EDF Energy: [Sizewell C](#), closes 18 December
- Portsmouth City Council: [Draft Transport Strategy](#), closes 21 December
- DfT: [Union Connectivity Review, Call for Evidence](#), closes 30 December
- ORR: [Stakeholder survey about the impact and effectiveness of the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems \(Safety\) Regulations 2006 \(ROGS\)](#), closes 18 January.
- Welsh Government: [New Wales Transport Strategy](#), closes 25 January
- Greater Anglia: [December 2021 Timetable](#), closes 12 February.

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, a stand-alone list 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.

NB. Because of Covid-19, events are being cancelled, postponed or conducted online. Webmasters, please update your websites with any changes as soon as they are made.

December

- Wednesday 16. Rf London & South East Herts & Beds Division, **Online**. 1930 (Also 27 February, 1030).

January

- Tuesday 5. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Thursday 7. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).
- Saturday 9?. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association, TBN, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**.
- Tuesday 12. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Wednesday 13. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- Tuesday 19?. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, 14 High Street, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP. 1930.
- Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line Rail User Group, No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes, 1900 (or Online) (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at No 1 Inn and the Sloop at Barton, 2000).
- Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, but all meetings currently **cancelled**).
- Saturday 30. Rf London & South East Herts & Beds Division, **Online**. 1030 (Also 27 February).
- Saturday 30. Rf Yorkshire and North West joint webinar, **Online**.

Further Ahead

- 5 February. English Regional Transport Association, Guildford meeting.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributing organization, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

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