

News and Views about Railways in the North East of England

A message from the Branch Chair



Greetings to all our members. I hope that you are all managing to stay safe and well during these strange times. As I write this, the whole of NE England has just transitioned from a 4 week period of total lockdown to “Tier 3” of the government’s strategy for dealing with the Covid-19 emergency, which feels to me

to be only marginally less restrictive. It has now been over 8 months since the Prime Minister first told us all to “Stay at home” and during that period we have been unable to hold any meetings, either for the membership generally or of the branch committee in person. With the wonders(?) of modern technology, most of the committee have been able to meet and discuss items of relevance to Railfuture on a bi-monthly basis and I am very happy that we have been able to produce this bulletin to keep you up to date. Needless to say, much has changed in the last few months. The government started it all by declaring that public transport was for essential journeys only and maintained this for some 3 months. Since then, that has not been the message, but patronage of our trains is down to around 30-40% of pre-covid levels. There has been some reduction in trains run, however since July, services have gradually increased, but some, even now, are only receiving at best half of their normal service levels. One advantage of this reduction in services – and of the lower number of people travelling is that timekeeping has been excellent.

Part of the current problem is a shortage of drivers. This has been experienced by the train operating companies on the national system and by the Tyne and Wear Metro and until new protocols were agreed very recently, social distancing has made it impossible for driver training to take place to replace staff lost through natural wastage. A train cab does not permit occupants to be 2 metres apart, so it has been impossible for new drivers to get practical handling experience or for existing drivers to learn either new types of traction or new routes that they are required to drive over. We are in contact with the operating companies and have expressed our concerns at this diminution of service

The “essential journeys only” message from HM Government has, if anything, been too successful. Trains are very safe places to be, even in the “Covid” times and, provided they’re not overcrowded, the risk of disease transmission is low. The operating companies have enhanced cleaning and disinfecting regimes in place and it is now time to be encouraging the public once again to use the railway for journeys permitted under the tier restrictions. There will obviously be some permanent loss of commuter traffic as it is obvious that working from home, for at least part of the week, is here to stay. The train operating companies are going to have to develop products to replace the traditional season ticket for such people that no longer commute 5 days per week.

Railfuture nationally, and our own branch here in the North East, continue to be involved in seeking service development and even the return of some long-lost services. Air quality, climate change and the resulting push for decarbonisation of our way of life all have relevance to transport and to our desire to see rail services improved, both locally and nationally. Railfreight can reduce carbon emissions compared with road haulage by around 76%, even more if it can be hauled electrically using power generated by nuclear or renewable sources. Some of our cities, including Newcastle, are so concerned about air quality that they are considering congestion charging. A modal shift to rail will ease things here as well. Electric trains, as well as those being developed using batteries or hydrogen don’t produce any pollutants as they travel, and steel wheels on steel rails don’t produce the particulates that emanate from road vehicle tyres while dynamic braking, also found on hybrid road vehicles reduces the brake dust that can also affect our streets.

North East branch is joining with both Yorkshire and North West branches for a meeting on 30 January, probably at 1:30 p.m. This will have Tony Baxter, Regional Director East for Northern as its speaker. The meeting will take place on Zoom and the secretary will forward joining instructions to those for whom we have an email address when they are received.

We are also looking forward to our own Annual General Meeting, early in 2021. We are working on the assumption that such meetings in person will still be restricted and that will, again, use the Zoom computer platform. The committee have some ideas for speakers which the secretary is currently following up. More information will be published when available.

Keith Simpson
Branch chairman

North East Plan



The North East Transport Plan is something we should all read and be prepared to submit our comments. The Railfuture North East Committee will be considering a formal response, but many individual members will want to express their own views either online or in writing. The draft plan is at www.transportnortheast.gov.uk and from there you can link to a questionnaire that allows you to express an opinion on the issues raised. You can also respond

by email if you find the questionnaire too limiting. Comments close on 14th January and the final version of the plan will be available in March. The plan, the first of its kind, covers Northumberland,

Tyne and Wear, and County Durham. It includes plans for road, rail, metro, and ferries over the next 15 years. For this article we are concentrating on the Rail and Metro proposals. The plan shines a light on many of the changes we can expect to see implemented over the period and is built around a series of ambitions that include:

- making travel greener and healthier.
- improving active travel and moving towards net carbon zero.
- improving bus metro and rail travel.
- making roads flow better for goods and essential car journeys.
- strengthening connections to destinations outside the region both within the UK and abroad.
- integrating different modes of transport.

The Rail and Metro “Call to Action” section includes a number of strategic interventions that will be required over the next 15 years if we are to meet these aspirations. These interventions include new local rail fleets, re-opened lines, enhancements to timetables, station refurbishments and new stations

The plan offers a long list of the headline ‘schemes’ that will be required to achieve these ‘strategic interventions’. These include:



The Metro plans include upgraded or refurbished stations at Regent Centre, Airport, Monument, Monskeaton, Whitley Bay, Cullercoats and Tynemouth – with a number of other small upgrades planned. New stations will be built at Murton Gap and Killingworth Moor, Ouseburn, Mill Lane and Boldon. Park and Ride would be introduced at Tyne Dock, East Boldon, Jarrow and Hebburn. We should also see improved safety and security on Metro and a ‘refresh’ of the Metro and Local Rail Strategy. In terms of new services there are plans for a through service from the Coast to the Airport. Extensions to cover Cobalt and Silverlink, West Newcastle and Gateshead will allow for other new services including those to Team Valley and the Metro Centre. Finally, a Leamside and Wearside loop will open up new links around South Tyneside and Sunderland.



The Rail plans include Improved facilities and information at NE stations and small-scale local rail reliability measures networkwide. We should see earlier and later local rail services systemwide with an improved calling pattern for local rail services with a particular of plans to improve local rail frequency in County Durham. There will be line of route audits and freight gauge clearance. We should see new stations at Gilsland, Ferryhill and East Gateshead together with improvements at Cramlington. Line re-openings would include the Northumberland line to Ashington, the Leamside line and the Derwent Valley line between Consett and Newcastle. A spur from the ECML to Newcastle Airport is also planned. North East Connect will be delivered and there will be more ‘community’ stations. Finally, local diesel multiple units will be replaced.

A North East Rail Concession is planned to help deliver these local rail enhancements and extensions,

More generally we should see ticketing, fares and zone restructuring to meet post COVID needs together with upgrades to bus infrastructure - Shelters, bus rapid transit, priority schemes and other measures. We should see a North East Bus Strategy. These measures will be an important enabler of proper integration between the various types of public transport.

The big issue as always will be funding. The North East Joint Transport Committee were told that the total cost of the plan was estimated at £6.1 bn.

Rail in Weardale

The Weardale Heritage Railway line stretches from Bishop Auckland to Eastgate, a total of 19 miles although the most recent use of the line is only 16 miles from Bishop Auckland to Stanhope. The line connects a number of towns and villages and has stations at Witton le Wear, Wolsingham, Frosterley and Stanhope. The Auckland Project has now concluded the purchase of the Heritage Railway and is seeking to secure the required certificates and authorisation from the Department of Transport to allow trains to run on the line.



Trains to Bishop Auckland terminate here but only a few metres away is the somewhat sparser platform used by the Weardale Railway for onward journeys to Stanhope. Moving between the two platforms isn't easy. It involves crossing a carpark, a walk along a footpath and then a walk down the bank to the platform. Can we hope that all passenger trains will be able to share the same station? The picture above shows one of the last Pacers to be used by Northern – but a Pacer could be back at Bishop Auckland. The Weardale Railway owns a Class 144.



The Project intends to develop the Weardale line as a vital heritage asset, provide sustainable employment and training opportunities, enhance the wider visitor experience in Durham, develop the volunteer base and eventually extend the passenger rail network to the west of Bishop Auckland. They estimate that an additional 160,000 visitors will be attracted to the area and that an extra £3.2 million will be spent in the area each year. Local people will also benefit from talks, lectures, and exhibitions relating to the railway and wider area. A range of information panels and literature relating to the heritage line and the natural environment will be produced and there will be work with local schools and voluntary sector organisations to build 'experience-based' education sessions relating to the railway.

Durham County Council have agreed to support the project and are making a loan of £2.1m to meet part of the costs of rebuilding the infrastructure – despite their having some concerns about the costings, the extent of the work required, and the lack of guarantees about the longevity of the project. In making the decision the Council noted that previous attempts to transform the heritage railway into a successful and sustainable business have failed, and that previous loans were not repaid and had to be written off. The project as it is now may well have been much more attractive to the County because the Auckland Project say they are investing £1.5 million. This investment will cover the purchase costs and the first two years of operation, as well as approximately £250,000 p.a. on track bed repairs. Unsurprisingly, given the issues set out above, the grant will come with conditions that

include the need for an enforceable agreement to secure grant repayment if the Railway were to cease to operate, not deliver against an agreed business plan, or fail to invest in line with the business plan.. The Weardale Railway will need to commit to completing the works in the event that costs for the works covered by the grant exceeds £2.1m, and to develop a long term future maintenance plan.

Durham County Council is also committed to ensuring local benefit through procurement practices, benefiting the local supply chain and this grant will be subject to those principles.

At least some of the local population have doubts. Durham County Councillor for Weardale, John Shuttleworth is quoted in the Northern Echo as saying “This council has bailed out the railway for over 20 years and local people feel it is a ‘white elephant’ that has created little more than a few part-time low-paid jobs. Many of the residents feel railroaded by the railway. We cannot continue to bail out a failing railway for the benefit of what I would call choo-choo enthusiasts, and it should be done with their own money.”

The Auckland Project will work in partnership with the National Railway Museum and others to extend the visitor experience to include events celebrating food and drink, literature, culture and heritage. They also want to promote sustainable use of the natural environment at the heart of commercial activity, and aim to run a sustainable and profitable business that is guided by wider social and charitable aims.

Finally, they want to become a public transport provider running rail services in Weardale that connect to the wider rail network. They want to turn Weardale into an area that people don’t just want to visit for the day but want to stay overnight – with all of the additional value that this can add.

In the immediate future they have plans to run an ‘Afternoon Tea Train’; and a ‘Sunday Lunch – Gin Train’. The next stage of the project would add a ‘Hogwarts Style’ train and a passenger service between Stanhope and Bishop Auckland.

The North East, like many areas of the UK, is the home of a number of heritage railways. The history of most of them have involved struggles for funding for a number of years before they can become a real part of the local transport and tourism networks. Weardale is different in that their ambitions are to deliver these benefits within a fairly short timescale. Will they succeed? One advantage that they have is that the Auckland Project is already a substantial business with a track record for attracting visitors. The Project is willing to make a substantial investment and seems to have the ability to attract other funders. They are also able to build on a large amount of work that has been done over the past few years to keep the line alive. They may even have history on their side on the basis that they are working in an area that played a key role in the very early development of railways and has, in the form of Locomotion and the heritage of the Stockton to Darlington railway, a great deal of local railway history that is close to the line and open to visitors. They also have the beauties and wonders of Weardale that will be opened up to rail passengers for the first time in many years.

The East Coast Mainline in County Durham – and hopes for Leamside

The likelihood of funding being found to build the infrastructure required to realise the objectives of any one of our campaigns depends on a number of factors. RFNE thinks that if we look at each individual campaign in a broader context, both regional and national, and link them together their

value is likely to be higher and so more likely to attract funding. For details of all the campaigns we support go to our webpage at www.railfuture.org.uk.

Our campaigns around County Durham include the need for faster services between Teesside and Tyneside, a re-opened Leamside Line that can accommodate both local services and Metro; and a new station at Ferryhill. Individually they are all important but joined together they offer even more value

Re-opening Stillington and Leamside could ease congestion on the East Coast Mainline – and if congestion is relieved, we have hopes

that the Northern Connect network will be able to include a direct service between Teesside and Tyneside using Stillington and the ECML north from Ferryhill. This was originally promised as part of the Northern Connect network, but in the end was rejected by Network Rail on the ground that there were no paths available. This service needs to be given a real priority especially as plans for additional LNER services to Newcastle and the new First Group service to Edinburgh will only make the ECML busier in the next 12 months. The viability of a station at Ferryhill will be improved if it can offer services to



A view from a footbridge at Pelaw looking east. We can see the remnants of the north end of the Leamside Line joining the Durham Coast on the right of the picture. Just to the west of the Metro bridge the freight line to Jarrow curves to the left to join a line that is soon to be shared with Metro.

places that are not currently on the ECML and in this context the Leamside and Stillington lines will be important in opening up new destinations and connections, including those with Metro on Wearside and south of the Tyne

We are also looking for improvements to both the infrastructure and services on the Durham Coast Line that could include both local and long-distance services.

There is growing support for these plans, see our article in this issue on the North East Transport Plan, but we can also see that other key players are taking an interest. In the longer term, Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 have each got plans for additional express services on this congested section of the East Coast Mainline. The facts that these key national and regional plans will require substantial improvements to the capacity of the ECML has resulted in Network rail publishing a study exploring how to increase capacity between York and Newcastle.

One of their proposals is to remove slow freight trains from the ECML between Northallerton and Ferryhill by making use of the Northallerton – Stockton line, which would also be cleared for containers, and then making more use of the freight only Stillington Line. The report is clear that the existing ECML can't accommodate the plans for more passenger services between York and Newcastle **and** the likely demand for freight services. Diverting freight via Stockton and Ferryhill provides part of the answer and might easily open the opportunity for passenger services to use the Stillington line, but the report also recommends that further work is done to look at the re-opening of the Leamside Line. A re-opened line would provide an alternative route for some freight services, a diversionary route for long distance passenger services, and "potential local connectivity benefits for passenger services".

One of the options is to fully re-open the line from Tursdale Junction to Pelaw where it would join the Durham Coast Line. This option would allow for use by both freight and passenger services including some developments to Metro services at the north end of line. The other option would see the south end of line re-opened between Tursdale Junction before re-joining the ECML just to the North of Durham City. In this option the Bensham Curve, connecting the Low Fell line with the Tyne Valley Line would also be required and might open up the possibility of a station serving Team Valley – another of our campaigns..

The report also says that, in addition to understanding the need for travel between major destinations, the demand for local services should be factored into plans

‘Restoring Your Railway Fund’ or ‘The Beeching Reversal Fund’

The Department for Transport announced the £500m Restoring Your Railway Fund in January 2020 with the aim of reinstating railway services and adding new stations to the network. The fund has been split into three funding pots each aimed at supporting proposals that are at different stages of development.

Part of the money, the Ideas Fund, will go to projects that are at an early stage of development and require support to develop an initial business case. The successful applicants need to have a proposal that aims to restore railway services to communities that are not connected on the railway network. Examples include restoring railway services on freight lines, disused formations or creating new alignments that run parallel to previous corridors. This part of the fund is designed to provide help in building the business case that could then be used as part of efforts to get substantive funding for the project. However, each application is assessed and only those that pass the assessment will qualify for a grant. The grant will be “75% of costs up to £50k” to “fund transport and economic studies and create a business case.” Applications have to be sponsored by local MPs but could be promoted by community groups, local government, local enterprise partnerships, or other interested parties. The study that the grant produces is seen as the first step to developing more detailed proposals and obtaining funding.

There will be at least three rounds of applications and Round 1 closed in March. The Department for Transport received 60 applications of which 10 applications were successful.

Round 2 closed in June and we know there were 50 applications. The North East applications included re-opening Ferryhill Station and introducing “a new fixed public transport system between Consett and Newcastle” which would involve rebuilding the Derwent Valley route to Consett. Both of these projects were awarded money towards development of a business plan.

Round 3 closed in November. Whilst we still haven’t seen the official list of projects that could go forward for assessment, we have seen newspaper reports that these include re-opening the Bensham Curve, establishing a stopping service between Newcastle and Berwick and re-establishing a passenger service between Saltburn and Easington. The first two of these would be re-submissions of applications that failed in the first round. The fund also has money to help “Accelerate Existing Proposals”. Applications to this part of the fund will have already completed existing business cases/supporting analysis and require further support to move to the next stage of the business case and/or design process.

Last but not least there is money to support proposals for new and restored railway stations. This appears to be a further tranche of the money that was used to part fund the new station at Horden. Network Rail are administering this money and successful projects could receive up to £20m to be used to re-open, or build brand new, stations by March 2024. However other funders, usually local authorities, will be needed as partners to complete the funding package. Given current state of local authority finances this may be difficult.

Hydrogen Trains

Late September brought headline news to the effect that an agreement had been reached to bring the UK's first Hydrogen Transport Centre to Teesside – a development that will bring hundreds of clean energy jobs to the area. A masterplan, currently being written by Mott MacDonald, will pave the way for exploring how green hydrogen could power buses, HGVs, rail vehicles, ships and aeroplanes and will, we presume, build on a range of previous developments.

The HydroFLEX project has produced the UK's first hydrogen powered rolling stock, due to begin mainline testing on 30th September. This project, based on partnership between the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCRRE) and the rolling stock firm Porterbrook, has added

Hydrogen Powered Trains in the North East.

The Network Rail decarbonisation plan makes only one reference to hydrogen as a replacement for diesel traction in the North East. They say that, with reference to regional passenger services that operate from Bishop Auckland to Teesside and North Yorkshire, without the electrification of wider Middlesbrough area the deployment of hydrogen on either an interim or permanent basis would be more appropriate. So maybe, just maybe, services to Whitby and Weardale might see diesels replaced by hydrogen power.



Hydrogen power won't impact on the North York Moors Railway but it could see DMUs being replaced.

a hydrogen fuel cell and battery pack to a Class 319 dual voltage train. On mainland Europe the Alstom Coradia iLint has already clocked up over 180,000 km on the German and Austrian rail networks and the Alstom/Eversholt Rail partnership has produced a train called the Breeze that is now being offered for immediate orders. Finally, Vivarail are offering a version of their standard modular power pack, used on the Class 320 units, that uses both hydrogen cells and batteries.

Hydrogen is seen as offering a path to an age of sustainable and carbon neutral mobility, say Siemens Gas and Power. They see it as the solution to the limited range and long recharging times that are inherent to current battery powered vehicles and point out that many of the components in these vehicles require the use of expensive and rare earth metals. Siemens suggest that hydrogen powered vehicles can be refuelled at the same speed as a diesel or petrol vehicle. They see the big obstacle as being the lack of the infrastructure required to supply hydrogen at local filling stations. The good news is that there are other uses for hydrogen that might bring real economies of scale to such an infrastructure. These include the possibility of using hydrogen,

possibly mixed with other gases, for cooking and heating. More hydrogen would need to be produced but a large scale distribution system might make it easier to establish filling stations for both road and rail.

In an article in “The Engineer” (October 2020) an expert panel discussed current UK developments. Stuart Hillmansen, Senior Lecturer at the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education, sees hydrogen powered vehicles as complimentary to rail electrification. He points out that the HydroFLEX train retains its AC equipment that it can use when under the wires **and** it also has a new propulsion system based on a hydrogen fuel cell and a traction battery. Mike Muldoon, Head of Business Development for Alstom, says that hydrogen can now offer long range performance by using hydrogen fuel cells supplemented by a battery to capture regenerative energy. He says that their tried and tested system could offer a like for like replacement of a DMU offering at least the same performance with a range of 600+miles. Alice Gillmand, from Vivarail, summarises their offering as a new way of charging traction batteries – replacing diesel generators with fuel cells.

The Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education envisage developing bespoke and dedicated refuelling systems for railway application. In essence they would use electricity from renewable sources to electrolyse water and produce high purity hydrogen - presumably at a range of sites used by the railways. Alstom point to the fact that there are already a number of possible suppliers who want to get involved and that the hydrogen infrastructure could support a wide range of road vehicles as well as rail.

The panel then looked at the potential for hydrogen on the UK rail network. They point to the statements in the Network Rail Traction Decarbonisation Strategy that support the use of hydrogen as a vital part of the railway system. Hydrogen technology could be in everyday use well before some of the proposed extensions to electrification can be realised – and may make some of these projects redundant.

Hu Li, Associate Professor of Energy Engineering at University of Leeds, has contributed to an article in The Conversation [dated 10 November.] The article looks at the possibility that hydrogen could be the answer to the problems posed by greenhouse gases. Hu Li says that, in 2016, diesel and petrol burning transport became the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. Looking at the alternatives to these fuels he argues that battery power is not the answer for heavy duty vehicles simply because of the fact that batteries weigh much more than the petrol or diesel that they replace. He then goes on to look at how hydrogen power might provide a ‘green’ answer to the emissions problem but comes up against a set of problems relating to how hydrogen is produced. He says that the cheapest method of producing hydrogen, used for most of UK production involves “reforming fossil fuels” but that this generates nine tonnes of CO₂ for every tonne of hydrogen. He argues that ‘green’ hydrogen won’t be cost competitive until 2030 but that government should start as soon as possible to ramp up the production of vehicles, both road and rail, that will use hydrogen and also build a storage/refuelling infrastructure. In short, his message seems to be that hydrogen will be a useful, and green, tool in our armoury soon – but only if we start on the journey now.

Rail Users Groups



Saltburn Line User Group

SLUG, as we are affectionately called, has, of course, had most of its activities curtailed by the Covid-19 emergency. We were just starting to consider whether it would be safe to restart our monthly meetings when numbers of cases started to rise again when cases started to rise and restrictions were, once again, imposed. We look forward to when we can again meet in person.

The group continues to keep an eye on what is happening on the Saltburn line where, unfortunately, trains have been reduced to hourly during the pandemic, although Northern have stated that the twice hourly service resumes on 14 December.

The group has a Facebook page packed with useful information and which has 410 followers and this, at the moment, is our main way of keeping in touch with our members.

We are anticipating interesting times locally, as the Tees Valley has been nominated as a hub for development of hydrogen as a transport fuel and we expect in the not too distant future to see a prototype hydrogen train running locally, though in the fullness of time, we'd like to see the line electrified along with the access to Teesport as part of the decarbonisation of transport.



Coastliners' Rail User Group

During 2020 and the lock-down periods we have been working on a response to the House of Commons Transport Committee's Inquiry on how to get people back on to trains and buses once the Covid crisis was over. At a 'live' committee meeting in August, courtesy of Hartlepool's

Athenaeum premises, we agreed the following as our main points:

- *Government's discouragement of public transport has already lowered train loadings dangerously. An immediate reversal of this bias is essential.*
- *Too many initial difficulties confront passengers, old as well as new, in getting details about*
- *catching (and paying the cheapest legitimate fares for) trains and buses. Simplification here will be key to regaining traffic generally.*
- *Too many journeys turn out to be (too) complicated by change(s) of train en route. Far more places need direct services to far more destinations than are offered now. In other words, rail routes and services must be spread more evenly across all rail routes - the exact opposite of current belief that one line (plus local connections) can best serve all.*

As an example of what we mean, we have cited Tees Valley Combined Authority's stated desire for hourly high-quality express trains along our Coast line - notably Cross-Country, to add to Grand Central's well-established, but Covid-19-interrupted, London - Sunderland services. We fully support TVCA's wishes.

Given current restrictions, our campaigning has to be at arms' length. In practice, this means asking around for comments to add to a 'Coastliners' response to consultations as we hear about them. In particular, we shall be formulating our reply to the North-East Joint Transport Committee's draft Transport Plan, involving many proposals on improvements in the next 15 years or more, with public

consultation open until mid-January. We need to make sure that the Coast line's train services better match the needs of the half million people who live along it.



Like many organisations SENUG has needed to change the way that we work as a result of COVID 19, but the work has gone on. The Northumberland County Council consultation on the re-opening of the Northumberland Line closed on 14th December. Many SENUG members contributed views and early reports have suggested that there are high levels of support for plans. Work has started on the extensive groundwork surveys that are required before the detailed designs of the new structures can be completed. All we need now is a firm commitment by Government to fund the remainder of the project.

We have welcomed the idea, currently being floated by the North East Joint Transport Committee, for a zonal fare system on the line that would allow integration with Metro and, hopefully, other transport providers.

We continue to lobby for an improved service to Cramlington and the provisional results of study into improving services 'North of Morpeth' show that an hourly local service between Newcastle and Berwick is both operationally and economically viable - provided that EMUs are used.

We have achieved our ambition to have ticket office at Morpeth Station opened in the afternoons from Monday to Saturday. The redeveloped station also has an improved waiting room with toilet and baby change facilities and a café. The problems with the public electronic information system continue - and we will continue our work to get this fixed, and to ensure that toilets and waiting room can be accessed when ticket office is closed.

We are working to produce comments on draft North East Transport Plan and these will be available on our website in mid-January. Our new website is now up and running and offers much clearer navigation around what has become a considerable amount of content. Our Facebook page is also becoming more popular with over 1,100 'likes' – showing that we are reaching an audience well beyond our paid up members. We also have 207 followers on Twitter.

We haven't been able to hold our usual public meetings but the committee is getting more expert at use of zoom, and our confidence has grown to the point where we are planning a virtual public meeting in early 2021.

"Shy bairns get nowt - we should be asking for this."

One of the projects that we haven't reported on is the bid to return passenger rail services to East Cleveland for the first time in 50 years. A study by global consultant firm Systra has found a "strong business case" for reviving the currently freight only route at an estimated cost of £46m. A new service could link isolated communities such as Easington and Loftus direct with Newcastle or Cumbria bringing massive economic and tourism benefits.

Potential stops could include Easington, Loftus, Carlin How, Brotton, Skelton and Saltburn West. The Local Councillors campaigning for this project are lobbying Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, and local MPs for support. Simon Clarke MP has already said he will support the bid. The bid has, we think, been submitted to the Department for Transport for consideration for the next round of the Beeching Reversal fund.

Sadly, we have to report that Kenneth (Ken) Holroyd, a long-time member of Railfuture North East, died on Thursday morning 10th December aged 84. Ken had been unwell for some months and was admitted to the University Hospital of North Durham during November. Ken was born in 1936 and was an ardent train and bus traveller, he would cheerfully refuse the offer of car lifts after Branch meetings preferring to get back to his Durham home from wherever via a combination of the ECML and Go NorthEast! He particularly enjoyed booking on to long-distance train excursions.

Outside of bus and train journeys his interests included local politics - he was a parish councillor for a number of years, walking and participation in various environmental projects near to where he lived. He also served on a local library committee.

He leaves a wife Moira, a son and two daughters.

USEFUL WEB LINKS

Railfuture North East: www.railfuture.org.uk/North+East+Branch

Railfuture Home Page: www.railfuture.org.uk

The Auckland Project: www.aucklandproject.org

SENUG: <http://www.senrug.co.uk>

Saltburn Line Users Group: www.facebook.com/saltburnlineusergroup/

Coastliners: <http://www.necoastliners.co.uk>

Tyne Valley Rail Users Group: www.tvrug.org.uk

Transport North East: www.transportnortheast.gov.uk

Tees Valley Combined Authority: www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk

North East Joint Transport Committee: www.northeastca.gov.uk/decision-making/the-north-east-joint-transport-committee

Our websites: www.railfuture.org.uk, www.railfuturescotland.org.uk,
www.railfuturewales.org.uk and www.railwatch.org.uk. Follow us on Twitter
@Railfuture @Railwatch

Railfuture Ltd is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No 05011634. Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS217N [For Legal Correspondence Only]

All other Correspondence to 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk, IP9 2ND

This bulletin is printed for Rail Future North East by Whites, Front Street, Ludworth, Durham DH6 1NE