



November 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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What a wizard idea: call a strike; then call it off when it's too late to change the plans, so you get all the disruption without the cost of strike pay. What did the RMT members who came into work do all day?

Roger Smith

We start with news from groups around Great Britain. All contributions are gratefully received.

Friends of the West Highland Lines

NR has completed a £1.8m project to improve the resilience of the Mallaig line at Lochailort, including the installation of a new culvert next to the bridge over the Allt na Criche burn.

Kathryn Darbandi, MD of Caledonian Sleeper, says that its Inverness service could be sold twice over on some nights. They are looking at increasing its frequency or adding more carriages, but that could involve reducing the number on other routes. A Saturday service is under consideration, as is a new service to Oban. This is an obvious course of action that would be an instant success both for the town, and for customers of the islands.

The Scottish Government is contributing £120m to boost the electricity supply into Scotland's railway network with six new feeder stations and a further nine upgraded. Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth said: "Upgrading the power supply network will enable the introduction of electric trains on services to East Kilbride and Barrhead, on the Borders line and across Fife, but will also support increased traffic on existing routes such as the East Coast Main Line".

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

The imminent announcement by Jeremy Hunt could be very bad news indeed for rail. The North in particular needs investment to provide essential infrastructure for economic development and also to provide jobs in the construction phases. HS2 will do little for the North in either sense.

The starting point for building a dynamic local and regional transport system...is having the right structures in place. The most sensible approach is to extend the existing 'combined authorities' beyond their current boundaries to create a system of English regional government with elected authorities in control (rather than just elected mayors).

Experience has shown that good things can happen even with existing relatively limited powers. Liverpool has bought its Merseyrail network a whole fleet of new trains that are one third cheaper than if the authority had relied on 'the market', ie the rolling stock leasing companies, and more passenger-friendly, the result of detailed consultation with passengers.

The next step is fairly obvious. Whereas Liverpool has only been able to contract with a private operator (Serco and Abellio), the devolved governments in both Wales and Scotland have taken their domestic passenger services in-house.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Rossendale Council and Lancashire CC have submitted a funding bid for a new Rawtenstall - Manchester Victoria service via Ramsbottom, Bury and Heywood. It would run in parallel with but maintain the ethos of the East Lancs Railway operation.

On 17 October, passengers on the 1318 from Leeds to Wigan must have had an exciting journey. Leaving 29mins late, it had made up 9mins by Mirfield, 14 by Hebden Bridge, and 18 by Rochdale. It arrived at Victoria only 7mins late, having made up 22mins on the 1hr 35m journey!

Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association

HPSRUA bids farewell to two stalwarts who have served their communities with distinction. Stakeholder Manager Pete Myers leaves Northern Rail in December after 30 years in the rail industry. He has always been a mine of information, and spoke at the HPSRUA AGM last May and again, for a final time, on 29 October. Secondly, Peter Marshall, who is stepping down after producing Track Record for HPSRUA three times a year for the last two decades, winning the newsletter many Rf awards, often Gold.

In August, as part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU), a 172-year-old footbridge near Deighton station was replaced with a taller one, to make room for overhead electric wires, and for doubling the tracks between Huddersfield and Dewsbury from two to four. However, Transport for the North argues that, as well as major projects such as NPR and HS2, the North also needs local and regional improvements to the existing congested rail network to unlock freight and passenger capacity.

Don Valley Railway

DVR is participating in the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority's Steering Group that is helping Arup develop the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Restoring Your Railways Bid to reopen the Stocksbridge line to passenger trains. Arup is initially considering four options at hourly and half-hourly service frequencies:

- Deepcar to Victoria via Oughtibridge, Wadsley Bridge and Neepsend
- Stocksbridge to Victoria or Nunnery Square, or on to Chesterfield, presumably as an extension to the proposed Barrow Hill Line service.

English Regional Transport Association

The Engineer has published '[Greener, Faster, Better](#)', the Railway Industry Association North's long-term vision for passenger and freight routes that should be prioritised for electrification and other low carbon technologies.

An article in [RailEngineer](#) sets out the background to East West Rail, and the challenges in extending it east of Bletchley to Bedford and on to Cambridge. ERTA continues to lobby for a triangular junction at Bedford St Johns, and a more southerly route into Cambridge.

Windsor Lines Passenger Association

Stations closer in than Staines should have a “turn up and go” timetable - at least four tph, preferably at 15min intervals - and further out a half-hour off-peak service and four tph at busy times. Prior to Covid, that target was nearly reached, but now only the major stations beyond Barnes (Richmond, Twickenham, Feltham, Staines) have more than two tph off peak.

On 9 September, the Reading train was packed and standing as it left Richmond at 1706, although home working is supposed to be high on a Friday. People will be put off using trains even as some are returning to the office as the cost of fuel deters them from working from home in the winter.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Success! As the last afternoon off-peak service from Paddington to Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn is now the 1507, BTPG asked if the 1636 could be made off-peak. GWR has responded with a new Advance Purchase single ticket for the 1636 to those stations, set at the off-peak rate. However, BTPG is disappointed that GWR continues to dispatch trains from Newbury while passengers off an inbound arrival are still making their way towards the connecting service.

To inform BTPG’s timetable suggestions to GWR, Steve Smith has written a [train-graphing product](#) that other RUGs may wish to use.

Tunbridge Wells & District Rail Travellers' Association

Transport for the South East’s forward-thinking Strategic Investment Plan is encouraging, although it could be a while before any of the proposals materialises. Reinstating Uckfield – Lewes and Tunbridge Wells (TW) – Eridge would be the most transformative, restoring through services from TW to Crowborough, Lewes and Brighton for a comparatively modest investment, while a Groombridge – Ashurst loop accommodating the Spa Valley Railway would give TW a through service to London via Oxted.

Tonbridge Line Commuters

Given the importance of Tonbridge in the Kent network, it is disappointing that the nearest service on RMT strike days runs from Sevenoaks to London Bridge (plus one to Victoria). Southeastern says it is focused on metro routes as they are cleared for Driver Only Operation (DOO), and drivers are typically members of ASLEF rather than the RMT. However, TLC has pointed out that DOO is permitted between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge provided there is no call at Hildenborough, so with a little imagination, services could be extended to Tonbridge.

TLC has pressed Southeastern to restore consultations ahead of timetable changes. This may be of little concern if a timetable has only a few changes, but from 11 December almost all train times will change, and some service patterns are very different. It is highly regrettable that most Medway Valley line services will no longer run through to Tonbridge, severing the link to the county town of Maidstone, although the off-peak service frequency between Paddock Wood and Maidstone West will increase from hourly to half hourly. A major win for TLC is the half-hourly service on the Ashford - Paddock Wood - Charing Cross route all day on Saturdays and for most of Sunday.

Southeastern has recently launched ‘eTickets’, but not for journeys that start from or finish at a station such as Tonbridge, where the barriers have yet to be upgraded. Nor can they be used on any journey across London, as TfL’s ticket barriers cannot read them. Moreover, many passengers lack access to or are unable to use the relevant technology. So eTickets do not render ticket offices or machines obsolete; if paper tickets are eventually phased out, they should be able to print eTickets instead – to do otherwise would significantly disadvantage a significant number of rail users.

Tarka Rail Association

Passenger numbers have rebounded, but the service since August has been terrible. Rolling stock failures have been high, with many cancellations, and trains leaving Barnstaple full and standing, so little hope of any passengers from stations down the line getting a seat. Initial corrective work between Barnstaple and Chapelton failed to lift the emergency speed restriction. More remedial work is planned for February, but only some of the track will be replaced in February 2024. This is no good whatsoever: undertake an emergency blockade, renew the track and lift the speed limit.

TRA has assimilated the ACE rail campaign that seeks to upgrade the Tarka line and extend it to Bideford. The Initial Business Case, part funded by TRA, Rf and a public transport operating company yet to go public, will be unveiled in March 2023.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its 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 on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).

NEWS

NR says it can no longer afford the rolling programme of electrification needed to deliver its Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy by 2050. The increase in electricity prices has removed the operating cost advantage of electric over diesel, and carbon emissions from rail transport are insignificant compared to road transport, so future rolling stock solutions will be based on bi-modes with alternative power sources, diesel hybrid, battery and hydrogen. Capital spending will be focused on delivering the Integrated Rail Plan.

To exploit the potential of railways to decarbonise transport, they must attract more passengers, and aim to double the amount of freight. And new projects to generate nuclear, renewable and biogas power could reduce our dependence on expensive and high-carbon natural gas.

The penalty fare for people who board their train without a valid ticket currently stands at £20, or twice the ticket price to the next station at which the train calls. But the DfT believes that this is not seen as enough of a deterrent. So from January, it is set to rise to £100, or £50 if paid within 21 days - on top of the price of a ticket for the journey. See [here](#) for the Rf view.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

A CRN webinar at 1000 on 15 November will show how CRPs and like-minded groups can overcome common challenges to spearhead the redevelopment of disused railway buildings and rooms for community benefit by engaging with the community and key partners.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

In FY 2023-24, TF will focus on boosting sustainable transport with choices that are reliable from day to day, and offer better value for money. Insights gained through talking and listening to transport users will seek to put them at the heart of transport reforms. Where necessary, TF will refer issues to authorities such as the DfT and ORR.

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

Cure your flight shame with open access operator Lumo, which is set to welcome its millionth passenger. Rail now has 57% of the rail-air market between Edinburgh and London, up from 35% before the Covid pandemic.

Reopening the second platform at Castleford in 2023 after over 20 years will give it the capacity to take York - Leeds trains diverted from the main line for Transpennine Route Upgrade work.

NR is extending electrification of the Midland Main Line by 12 miles from Market Harborough to Wigston. Steel columns driven up to seven metres into the ground will lay the foundations for the overhead line equipment.

South Gloucestershire Council and NR have submitted a [planning application](#) for a two-platform station in Charfield on the Bristol - Gloucester line.

NR will partner with Connected Places Catapult to turn Bristol Temple Meads into the UK's first 'Station Innovation Zone'. Selected start-ups will test ways to improve the passenger experience, with wayfinding apps to make it more accessible, AI to improve people flow, and human-centred design principles for better facilities. Further improvements in and around the station will include three new entrances, infrastructure works, and new public spaces.

WH Malcolm Ltd, who runs the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal near Rugby, has been fined £6.5m over the death of an 11-year-old boy in 2017. Having all too easily gained access to the depot to retrieve a football, Harrison Ballantyne climbed on top of a stationary freight wagon, where he received a fatal electric shock when the 25,000 V overhead line arced. The Terminal does have non-electrified sidings, but freight wagons were routinely parked under the live wires for extended periods.

,,,and finally

On the afternoon of 24 October, train services between Weymouth and Dorchester were delayed by a points failure at Upwey - caused by a trapped hedgehog.

Armed police were called to Milton Keynes Central station after a member of the public reported a man carrying a samurai sword on a train - only to find it was an umbrella with a sword-like handle.

On 7th Nov, *i*-newspaper reported somewhat oddly that "Nearly six months after opening, the Elizabeth Line is now running non-stop through central London." Well, if you've spent over £500m building each of those sparkling new underground stations, the last thing you want is passengers from leafy suburbs stepping out onto the platforms in their muddy shoes!

CONSULTATIONS

- West Oxfordshire District Council: [Revised Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\)](#), closes 14 November
- Fife Council: [Planning Application 22/03416/FULL for Leven Station](#), closes 21 November
- Fife Council: [Planning Application 22/03425/FULL for Cameron Bridge Station](#), closes 25 November
- Medway Council: [Hoo Development Framework](#), closes 25 November
- West Midlands Rail Executive: [Rail Investment Strategy](#), closes 28 November
- City of Stoke-on-Trent Council: [Transport Strategy](#), closes 30 November
- East Sussex County Council: [Local Transport Plan 4](#), closes 9 December.

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

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Stand-alone lists are helpful, as newsletters may be discarded. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Rail Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

November

- Monday 14. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 12 December).
- Wednesday 16. England's Economic Heartland, MK Dons Stadium, **Milton Keynes**, 1000.
- Wednesday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800 (**NB** change of time) (also 19 January at the No.1 inn, Cleethorpes station, 1900).
- Wednesday 16. Lakes Line Rail User Group AGM, Town Hall, **Kendal**, 1930.
- Wednesday 16. Rf London South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 13 December).
- Friday 18. MarshLink Action Group AGM, Rye Town Hall, Market Street, **Rye**, East Sussex, TN31 7LA, 1900.
- Saturday 19. Rf London South East, Kent Division, **Ashford?** 1400.
- Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every month).

December

- Thursday 1. Rf London & South East regional branch, Sussex & Coastway division, **Lewes**, 1800.
- Saturday 3. Rf East Anglia, The Signal Box Community Centre, Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB, 1400.
- Tuesday 6. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930
- Tuesday 13. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).

Further Ahead

30 March 2023. Rf Annual Conference, St Georges Centre, 60 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3DL

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

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