



December 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Warm words in the Government's Autumn Statement on the future of rail have been followed by a deathly hush regarding the detail. Hopefully, Sizewell C and now the new coalmine in Cumbria will regenerate those lines. However, the demise of Vivarail is a real setback to its green agenda.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line

The initial task towards the long-awaited new Delmore Loop on the western edge of Inverness was completed in November when Telent, the contractor responsible for the Far North and Kyle Line's Radio Electronic Token Block (RETB) signalling system, ran a simulation of the new radio mast needed to cover the extra requirements of the loop. An aerial was deployed on the top of a crane, and then a test train ran to measure the signal strength.

CKP Railways

In 2023, two new Unitary Authorities - Cumberland, and Westmorland and Furness - will replace Cumbria CC and the District Councils. This will bring strategic planning, including transport, under the same leadership as land use planning and the granting or refusing of planning permission. The simplified communication with "the powers that be" will help to protect the route of the Keswick - Penrith line and make the case for its re-opening. CKP has done the feasibility and design work, so now is the time to urge members of the new Authorities to support the scheme.

In early 2021, Barrnon Ltd sought permission to build a new HQ in the triangle formed by the A66, the WCML and the old trackbed. However, removing a long section of that would prevent a railway from Keswick from reaching Penrith, and the WCML via the existing bridge over the M6. Stopping short of Penrith would be pointless – no interchange and no through trains – but diverting around the site and building a new bridge would undermine the economics of the whole route. After discussions between Eden DC and a CKP supporter with a background in railway land and construction, Barrnon Ltd agreed to modified plans that would preserve the trackbed. CKP Railways thanks Eden DC and Barrnon Ltd for their understanding.

To strengthen the road decks over the railway alignment, Bridges 91 and 94 between Penruddock and Threlkeld have been partly in-filled. The Planning Inspectorate upheld the Lake District National Park Authority's refusal to completely infill those bridges, but revised applications for an oval arch and concrete lintel within the original rectangular space were approved, despite CKP evidence that this would not meet current or future standards for a main line railway. The LDNPA may have felt some pressure to support the revised proposals, as the custodians of the bridges are the Highways Agency Heritage Railway Estate.

Furness Line Action group

The last train into Barrow was to have left Manchester Airport at 2129 rather than 2210, making the 1910 the last connection from Euston rather than the 2030, but NR has now found a path for a later service. On weekdays, it will leave the Airport at 2159, and Piccadilly at 2220, to arrive in Barrow at 0034.

The idea of a tidal barrage across Morecombe Bay complete with a dual carriageway road has reared its head again. There may be very little chance of this happening, but its continual revival by the press and politicians diverts from efforts to find realistic, sustainable transport solutions. FLAG will challenge any major road-building proposals that would jeopardise the rail service.

Ribble Valley Rail

With a view to 4-car trains to increase capacity, NR received funding to extend the platforms at several stations between Bolton and Clitheroe. Hall i' th' Wood, Entwistle, Darwen, and Ramsgreave & Wilpshire had their platforms extended, but then the funding ran out, so those at Langho and Whalley remain too short for 4-car trains. With the 3-car trains in the process of being replaced by 4-car formations of 150, 156, and 158 units, or combinations of these, the rear two coaches of these have to be locked out-of-use between Clitheroe and Ramsgreave, and vice versa. Staff and commuters have to experience hassle and less capacity for part of the journey. RVR is pressing for the small amount of funding needed to finish the job to be found.

On a more positive note, Lancashire County Council has submitted an Access for All bid for improvements at several Lancashire stations, including some in the Ribble Valley. The success or otherwise of these bids should be known in April 2023.

Question: What weighs over a thousand tons, leaves Brazil and floats over the Atlantic Ocean and up the English Channel, comes ashore at Antwerp in Belgium, then tunnels under the Channel to emerge in Kent and, now over 500 feet long, travels through the Ribble Valley every few weeks?
Answer: kaolin, aka china clay, en route to the Finnish company UPM Kymmene that owns and operates the Caledonian paper mill at Irvine in Scotland.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Northern now has a [ban](#) on all e-scooters, hoverboards and e-skateboards across its trains and stations in the North of England, as the lithium batteries in these devices can overheat and catch fire. Electric wheelchairs and e-bikes are exempt, as are mobility scooters, as long as they are registered with the train operator's Mobility Scooter Permit Scheme.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Strikes, staff shortages, and infrastructure failures have sapped any confidence in the Mid Cheshire line. Services are routinely cancelled, often as late as 2200 the previous evening, so any Delay-Repay claims are not valid even though you may have planned your journey and booked your ticket. The 1839 from Piccadilly, a crucial late rush hour service, was cancelled on three consecutive nights during the Old Trafford Test Match, leaving many passengers off the tram at Altrincham waiting a further hour for a two-coach train.

Following a change in working practices, to allow the driver to alight onto the platform at the most westerly stations on the line, the rear coach of 4-coach trains - often with one of the toilets - is now locked 'out of use'. This seems odd as the driver can also exit the cab into the passenger area. MCRUA is in discussion with Northern about this practice.

For the first time in many years, Acton Bridge on the Crewe - Liverpool line has an all-day hourly service. MCRUA has long pressed for this improvement, and thanks London Northwestern Railway for listening. NR now needs to reposition its fence to extend the car park.

Rugby Rail Users Group

Rugby once had direct services to the North West, North Wales and Scotland. There is now an hourly service to Manchester, but it runs via Stoke. For travel to the wider North West via Crewe, the WMT stopping service costs some 25mins plus the interchange time. Going via Birmingham effectively doubles the journey time to Crewe compared with a direct express via the Trent valley. This is not progress. The root cause of the problem seems to lie with the TOCs' failure to consult, before finalising the new timetable, perhaps under the direction of the DfT.

East Suffolk Transport Association

On 6 December, ESTA launched "East Suffolk Line – A Railway For All Purposes", an 18-page discussion paper to mark the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of a passing loop at Beccles and introduction of an hourly Ipswich – Lowestoft service. It shows how the modern Stadler trains should be able to complete this journey in 75mins, and also examines the challenge of freight, and the differing needs of Felixstowe, Sizewell and Lowestoft. A link to the paper will be on ESTA's website and it is also available in print from its Chairman. ESTA looks forward to some lively debate, as well as to detailed research.

Cutting the Norwich – Liverpool service (via Peterborough, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester) in two has been mooted for a while. ESTA therefore welcome the news from the Peterborough & Norwich RUG that the through service will be retained until at least December 2023.

Fen Line Users Association

With passenger numbers rising, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) has increased some 8-car services between Kings Cross and both Cambridge and Peterborough to 12-cars in the Monday – Thursday peaks. The Class 387/3 units cannot yet connect to Great Northern's onboard Wi-Fi network. FLUA has asked that this be done as a matter of priority.

At the National Rail Awards, Greater Anglia was named Passenger Operator of the Year. Judges praised its new trains programme, good safety performance, ongoing station investment, customer-focused service and upgrades, and community rail and station adoption schemes.

English Regional Transport Association

To help meet emission reduction targets by 2030, ERTA has put some ideas for modal shift to England's Economic Heartlands (EEH). To switch investment in roads back to rail, professionals and organisations need to evaluate the potential of local rail-based schemes and connectivity. Every region should draw up a line-side plan; where tracks no longer exist, new ones need nurturing. Government has a pivotal role, but lacks a 'can do' approach, so how to turn the 'ship' around?

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

CLPG is encouraged that, despite a backlog of driver training and the Treasury/DfT controlling their finances, both GWR and West Midlands Trains have plans for performance improvements, modest but useful timetable enhancements, and the promotion of services.

When GWR chose not to print pocket timetables for May – December, CLPG stepped in and published 6000. It is now resupplying the many stations that have run low or even run out.

However, while CLPG was happy to help in this instance, the TOCs should really be meeting the demand that clearly still exists.

From Worcester stations, two day-returns via Oxford rather than a (less than!) super off-peak return will save you £10.30, get you into London an hour earlier, and give you a choice of return service. CLPG will continue to campaign for overhaul of the complex and broken fares system.

The major work at Oxford to improve capacity highlights the lack of it at Worcester Shrub Hill. Bay Platform 3 is no longer in use, and trains from London can only use Platform 1, which regularly causes delays at peak times. CLPG has long sought to see the Wylds Lane crossover in use, so inbound passenger trains could access either platform. In the longer term, Platform 3 could be upgraded for through running, but meanwhile CLPG has proposed a northbound bay on Platform 2 to serve Birmingham trains.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

On 29 November, BTPG discussed its concerns with five senior GWR managers. They conceded that the Paddington - Newbury service has been very poor. Following the death of a track worker in Wales, NR now has to await closure to do line maintenance, so some is not getting done, causing failures. A line closure from 18 February to 3 March will resolve a number of these issues, and remove a series of temporary speed restrictions.

Trains can only be held at Newbury for so long, which is a problem when the delay to an arrival is greater than the time allowed. Passengers at Newbury are not being informed when trains are being held (or not), which causes passengers anxiety and having to run. BTPG asked for more use of the PA, whether the CIS screens can say 'Held', and for on-board announcements advising passengers of what to do. Some longer gaps at Newbury should improve the connectivity, and all connections to Paddington are now one change only; some used to require a second at Reading.

GWR acknowledge that the shuttle service is not a good solution, and wants to restore Bedwyn's direct Paddington service. However, this won't be any time soon, as its IETs have all been redeployed to replace the costly Castle Class trains, and the Treasury/DfT is pulling the strings; GWR is effectively just a management team.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

The December timetable has mixed fortunes for Totton. Services to New Milton and Christchurch are about 25mins faster, as are arrivals from Netley and Manchester, whereas arrivals from Gatwick Airport, Brighton and Portsmouth are some 25mins slower. And its Saturday service is especially poor, with just one local train an hour from 0900 to 2100 – not very attractive for families returning from London who have to change at Southampton Central.

Thanks to GWR's new early services, it's possible to reach Exeter from Southampton at 0817 on weekdays, and 0943 on Saturdays, On Sundays though, the first sensible connection is from GWR's 0957 from Southampton to SWR's 1047 from Salisbury, so you can't get to Exeter before midday without paying over £100 single to travel via Reading. Who says operators are adjusting to the demand for weekend travel?

Tarka Rail Association

The ACE Rail campaign seeks to reconnect Bideford by rail, and upgrade the Tarka Line for an hourly semi-fast service to Exeter. TRA's campaign lead, Tim Steer, has recently presented it to the Devon Rail Forum, Barnstaple Town Council, Cornwall campaign group Connect Bude, the Taw U3A Railway Group, and North Cornwall MP Scott Mann, and will shortly speak to a group of Mid-Devon Parish Councils that have a common interest in the Tarka Line and Eggesford station in particular. Tim has also been on local radio station The Voice, and a Travel Blog on YouTube.

Meanwhile, GWR's Community Fund grant towards the Initial Business Case for The Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme, which is due to report before April, gained the 18-month old campaign widespread publicity. A BBC Radio Devon interview, a letter to Modern Railways, and articles in Devon Live, the Crediton Courier, Railway Ramblers, Rail UK and Railway Magazine, and online in Rail Advent, have all helped to get the ACE Rail message across.

And Barnstaple in Bloom's "Outstanding" Award at the South West in Bloom Awards 2022 for its restoration and planting work on the disused island platform at the former Barnstaple Junction station gave the Association another opportunity to declare "One day, we aspire to see the second platform reopened to serve passengers heading for Bideford."

The latest figures from the Tarka Line Forum, recently revived by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, for journey volumes on the Tarka Line show every sign of full recovery from the pandemic despite recent service disruptions, and are well on course to set a new annual record! The ORR's station usage estimates to March 2022 also suggest a resilient recovery along the line.

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

Just over a year after the Dartmoor Line reopened to regular passenger trains, its journey numbers exceeded 250,000. In a [formal celebration](#) at Okehampton on 28 November attended by GWR MD Mark Hopwood, Rail Minister Huw Merriman MP officially opened the renovated station building. The Judges' Special Award presented at the [Rf RUG Awards](#) in July went on public display in [OkeRail's trophy cabinet](#).

RAILFUTURE SCOTLAND

Transport Scotland has finally supplied feedback on the initial options appraisal to restore a rail link to St Andrews. StARLink has discussed the required amendments with Transport Scotland and consultants Stantec. The detailed options appraisal should be under way in the New Year. Scottish Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth accepts there is a strong case for a line to St Andrews before golfers return for the Open Championship in seven to eight years' time.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

DfT has signed off the Transport East (TE) draft strategy; it prioritises a number of key rail schemes including early delivery of East West Rail from Bedford to Cambridge, urgent upgrade of Ely North Junction, doubling the single-track from Soham to Ely Dock Junction and removing the single lead at Haughley Junction (just north of Stowmarket) to allow faster running across the flat junction. However, getting these schemes committed to construction remains a challenge.

TE has engaged the consultancy Arup to help model future travel demand across the region. Car usage is likely to rise because people see electric vehicles as guilt free whilst retaining flexibility and convenience, so decarbonisation alone will not drive the growth of rail travel. The focus needs to be on how road and rail can collaborate, making best use of rail for fast interurban and longer journeys, trunk haulage of freight, and with new mass transit metro systems for people travelling into city centres and around the expanding built up areas of city regions.

The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority transport meeting on 16 November agreed to continue looking at options for re-opening the rail line to Wisbech. But rather than heavy rail, Rf highlighted the benefits of tram-train given its possible use too on the Haverhill route.

The meeting also supported a new curve east of Newmarket to link Soham to Cambridge. However, the full potential of both schemes is dependent on Ely Area Capacity Enhancement, which is backed not only by East Anglian MPs, but also by those from the Midlands and the North, who see the importance of improving rail links across the country for both passengers and freight.

RAILFUTURE SEVERNSIDE

Rf supports the planning application to reopen Charfield station between Yate and Cam & Dursley on the Bristol - Birmingham line. Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire Councils would share the cost, as the nearby town of Wotton-under-Edge would be a principal beneficiary. A plan agreed by the West of England Combined Authority in December 2020 could lead to its reopening in 2024.

RAILFUTURE WESSEX

Since 2019, Rf has worked closely with both Fareham Borough Council and the developer of a new housing estate at Welborne, between Fareham and Eastleigh. It effectively wrote the bid document that won the Council a £65,000 grant from central government for a strategic outline business case (SOBC) for a new station, and is now helping the Council appoint a professional consultant with a view to having this published in the first quarter of 2023.

After spending many hours responding to SWR's December 2022 timetable consultations, it was disheartening to find out that the whole process had been abandoned - many stations on its network will have to put up with a much-reduced service for the foreseeable future. At a face-to-face meeting with the Chair of Rf Wessex, SWR's senior development manager had shown genuine interest in some of Rf's suggestions for incremental improvements. He said that gaps in the timetable such as the lack of evening trains serving stations between Winchester and Southampton would be plugged from December.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

Following a successful bid for up to £50,000 in round 3 of the Restoring Your Railway ideas fund, Devon CC is submitting an SOBC to the DfT for the restoration of services to Tavistock. Along with Bideford, it is said to be one of GWR's top three priorities in the South West. The Mid-Cornwall Metro connecting Newquay, Truro and Falmouth has also won Restoring Your Railway funding.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is seeking scenic winter photos featuring stations or trains across Britain, or people on them, for its Scenic Rail Britain winter campaign. Submit your contributions with a photo credit on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram using #ScenicRailWinter, or email news@communityrail.org.uk.

Following the series of audio travel guides launched by Window Seater together with CRPs on the GWR network, it's now your chance to get involved! If you're interested in developing an audio guide for your line, funding may be available through CRN's Community Rail Development Fund.

Traditionally, January is seen as a time for a 'fresh start', with many people making resolutions and deciding what they want to achieve in the year ahead. With that in mind, a CRN national campaign to launch on 1 January for three weeks – 'New Year New Journeys' aims to encourage people to pledge to take the train when they can through the year, and will highlight community rail lines.

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

The Autumn Statement included 'Transformative growth plans' for HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and East West Rail. EEH Chair Cllr Richard Wenham welcomed the commitment to EWR as the right thing to do for the UK economy.

ORR has approved a new Grand Union train service between London and South West Wales from the end of 2024. As well as a choice of operator and more price competition, it will offer new direct journey opportunities. Passengers travelling between London Paddington, Bristol Parkway, Severn Tunnel Junction, Newport, Cardiff, Gowerton, Llanelli and Carmarthen will benefit from five more return services each day. Grand Union proposes to build a new Parc Felindre station on the Swansea District line that would bypass the city itself.

As part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade, a brand-new, fully accessible station, 75m away from the existing one, is set to open next summer in Morley, Leeds. Moving the station means that the current one can largely remain open for passengers whilst the new one is built with altered platforms and track layout, and the overhead wiring is installed.

Founded in 2013, battery and hybrid train manufacturer Vivarail has gone into administration. Class 230 trains are no longer being maintained, so the Bletchley – Bedford service is suspended. These were also set to enter service next year on the West Ealing - Greenford branch, using Vivarail's Fast Charge system to re-charge their battery in just ten minutes.

London Waterloo is the UK's busiest railway station, though at 41.4 million, passenger numbers are still less than half of its pre-lockdown figures. Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 24 stations in Great Britain had more than 10 million entries and exits, compared to just five in the previous 12 months, but 43 in the 2019-20 tally. The least used station with just 40 passenger entrances was Elton and Orston in Nottinghamshire.

Gatwick Airport Platforms 5 and 6 are planned to reopen on 3 January, bringing all seven back into use for the first time in two years. Wider platforms will make it easier for passengers to board and alight, while a new track layout serving Platforms 4 - 7 will allow a faster approach and departure.

NR and the Bristol Sight Loss Council (BSLC) have launched a first-of-its-kind [audio guide](#) to help blind and partially sighted people navigate Bristol Temple Meads station. This has become more challenging since work started to renovate its historic train shed roof, as scaffolding towers have been erected, and some areas have become one way only or been temporarily closed off.

Under GTR's Assisted Dogs Travel scheme, customers can get an 'Assistance dog under seat' card free from NR Enquiries to inform other passengers that what looks like a spare seat is taken by an assistance dog that needs that space.

The DfT has awarded Echion Technologies based in Sawston near Cambridge a share of its £5m First of a Kind fund to create train batteries that can be charged from overhead wires.

Flights from Paris to Nantes, Bordeaux and Lyon are now banned, as the European Commission has ratified a 2021 law outlawing any domestic flight on a route with a regular train service of less than two and a half hours. However, none is currently served by any airline, as they were dropped by carriers during the Coronavirus lockdowns in return for government aid and never re-started.

...and finally

After Ukrainian forces liberated Kherson from Russian occupation, its rail link to the capital was re-established on 18 November. The first train from Kyiv was greeted with tears.

After NR Anglia pledged it to the WildEast movement, an area of reedbed near Haddiscoe station will be allowed to grow naturally as a site where many different animals, birds and insects can thrive. This will also help with drainage, reducing the risk of flooding on the railway line.

CONSULTATIONS

- Eastbourne Borough Council: [Draft Growth Strategy for Local Plan to 2039](#), closes 20 January 2023.
- Bristol City Council: [Local Plan Review](#), closes 20 January 2023.

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.

January 2023

- Thursday 5. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also the first Thursday of every month).
- Monday 9. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also the second Monday of every month).
- Tuesday 10. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Wednesday 11. Rf London South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (Also 8 March).
- Thursday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No.1 inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900).
- Saturday 21. Rf London South East, Herts & Beds Division, **London**, 1100.
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also the last Tuesday of every month).

February

- Saturday 18. Rf London South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ, 14.00 (Also 17 June, Ipswich).

Further Ahead

- 4 March. East Suffolk Transport Association, St Mary's Church, **Halesworth**, 1400 (Also May 20 (AGM), Oulton Broad).
- 11 March. English Regional Transport Association, Methodist Church, Northampton Road, **Market Harborough**, LE16 9HE, 1400.
- 13 March. SELRAP AGM, Municipal Hall, **Colne**, BB8 0BP, 1900.
- 27/28 March, Community Rail Conference, **Nottingham**.
- 30 March. 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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