



December 2023

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The best news in 2023 was surely that ticket offices are to be retained, although it took 750,000 signatures to tell the Government what the rail regulator already knew. And while new stations are opening and schemes like the East Coast Digital Programme and Transpennine Route Upgrade are forging ahead, most of HS2 was cancelled, and other vital schemes such as Ely North Junction seem to have fallen into abeyance. We can but hope for more positive news in 2024.

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

With the track laid, the focus of work is now on the station infrastructure and access. Driver training commences in the New Year; job vacancies for conductors have been advertised.

The Scottish Government's worthy commitment to reduce car mileage 20% by 2030 relies on the availability, frequency and affordability of public transport, and improved active travel (cycling, walking). Given favourable timetabling and fares, the return of trains to Levenmouth should help to achieve that broad objective, especially for mid and longer distance travel, although deteriorating bus services may have the opposite effect.

LMRC eagerly awaits Scotrail's review of the proposed rail timetable, and the effect of scrapping peak fares from October 23 to March 24. Were this trial to continue, then the current £13.50 off-peak return fares to and from Edinburgh (based on Markinch) might persuade Levenmouth drivers to take the train, and city dwellers prepared to commute move to where housing is about 60% cheaper.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Rochdale Borough Council has confirmed that early feasibility work is ongoing for a railway station at Slattocks, where the A664 (Rochdale Road) crosses the Calder Valley Line between Mills Hill and Castleton. As well as local housing, it would serve the Stakehill Industrial Estate and the Middleton campus of Hopwood Hall College.

The Railway pub next to Bromley Cross station has reopened with a new landlord.

Friends of the Barton Line

While most services run, leaves on the line have caused delays of up to fifteen minutes. Sometimes, the EMR conductors have not arrived from Lincoln in time to man a Barton service, so the Chairman will ask EMR if standby crew could be rostered in the evenings to ensure that services are available to bring passengers home.

FBL regrets that the Sunday service on the Barton line will not resume until 2 June, two weeks later than hitherto. The demand exists for one over the Easter holidays, and FBL has been pressing for its reinstatement since September 1999, when the local authorities declined to subsidise it. FBL appreciates that the issue is not only the cost of providing the services, but also in keeping open the signal boxes at New Holland, Oxmarsh and Goxhill.

On 2 November, Barton Cleethorpes CRP Chairman Mike Gathercole unveiled a plaque at Barton station commemorating the life of Bartonian the Rev Chad Varah on the 70th anniversary of his founding of the Samaritans. The event was featured on BBC TV Look North that evening.

Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line

The project to reopen the Ivanhoe line to passengers is making steady progress. It will initially link Coalville with Burton-on-Trent and Derby via Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Swadlincote and Castle Gresley. This option offers the best return on the Government investment, and is achievable within the RYR timescales and the available budget. The development stage should conclude this month, and the definitive benefits assessment in time to enable construction to be completed by 2025/6.

Reopening the Coalville to Leicester section would entail doubling the existing single track, and making a northbound connection to the Midland Main Line and Leicester station.

Bedford Commuters Association

The AGM in November was attended by Patrick Ladbury and Harsitt Chandak from Thameslink, Simon Preedy and Laura Etheridge from East Midlands Railway, and Jonathan Boot and Natasha Wilkinson from NR.

EMR Connect services from Corby had the best customer satisfaction scores; revenue was up 18% and passenger journeys by 12%. EMR was aware of BCA aspirations for the ongoing refurbishment of the Class 360s; it had three aspects: the scope, the cost, and the structure of the rolling stock leases. The December timetable change will see an additional Thameslink service from Bedford at 0715, as the 0711 will start from Luton. In the evening the 1736 service from St Pancras will be speeded up, with an additional train at 1741.

The main points of the NR update were:

- Upgrade of the OHLE south of Bedford to allow the new Auroras to run at 125mph is ongoing with completion in 2025
- MML electrification to South Wigston is ongoing
- £84m investment in control period 7 (from April 2024)
- Major engineering work next year – NR will keep BCA informed
- Access for All (AFA) at Luton from Spring 2024, completion in 2025
- AFA at Flitwick, planning and design work still ongoing with completion in 2024
- Wixams station going into detailed design, and governance issues.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

GWR has updated its policy for holding trains at Newbury, the only one on its network. At one level BTPG should be congratulated on attaining such a concession, but the fact that it is needed is indicative of the problems with the Newbury shuttle.

One issue with BTPG's suggestion to switch some IETs on the Paddington to Cardiff route with 387s on the Newbury route to restore Bedwyn's direct services to Paddington is said to be that, whereas the IETs can do 125mph, the 387s have a top speed of 110mph so could not meet the timings to Cardiff. Yet when the lack of IETs forced this on GWR, the 387s got there in the same time, the only difference being that the IETs could do Paddington to Reading one minute quicker. BTPG has made this point to GWR, and also raised it with MD Mark Hopwood in a Q&A session.

Tunbridge Wells Rail Travellers

TWRT Vice Chairman Martin Lewis attended Southeastern's Stakeholder Forum in Canterbury, along with around eighty others including representatives of local authorities and councils from across the SE region, as well as both mainline and metro commuter groups. MD Steve White spoke on 'Building a Sustainable Future'. His key points were:

- Off peak leisure travel was good, but peak hour commute still only around 70-80% of normal and focused on Tuesday to Thursday
- After earlier dips in performance, around 80% of trains now arrive within 5 minutes of their scheduled time, while cancellations are generally very low
- Sustainability plans are being developed for both trains and infrastructure
- Some teams were co-located with NR to provide a quicker response to problems
- Ticketless travel has been reduced to around 2.5% at key locations
- More staff were wearing body cameras for personal safety and to provide evidence
- Every station on the network now has a defibrillator
- The AFA programme is continuing, but not everything is currently funded.

The Q&A session centred on capacity as more commuters return, and the lack of toilet availability on main line rolling stock.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

The proposed loss of direct Southern (GTR) services between Portsmouth and Brighton, and between Southampton and Gatwick is extraordinary. The consultation had no indication of actual and latent demand for these services, yet many passengers are seen to board trains for Gatwick at Southampton with their luggage and families; they see it as an easier option than changing amid the bustle of Clapham Junction.

The GTR timetable restructuring has not been reflected in the December timetable. However, there are now no direct CrossCountry services between Hampshire and the North East, and given that 'connectivity' is a DfT buzzword, this is clearly a case of levelling down.

When the Waterloo - Salisbury line reopens on 10 December after engineering work, trains that were cut between Waterloo and Basingstoke during the pandemic will revert to their normal timetable, with two direct trains per hour between London, Andover and Salisbury. There will also be two additional Devon services direct to London on weekdays. So rural Overton, Whitchurch and Grateley will benefit from direct London services hourly all day except on Sundays, whilst the 30,000 residents of Totton have this benefit on Sundays only. And there is no improvement to late weekday evening services from Waterloo to stations between Southampton and Bournemouth.

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

The Rf position on HS2 was simple – stick to the plan. Build HS2 from Euston to Manchester and East Midlands Parkway to provide essential capacity and connectivity, both between major cities, and to decarbonise freight transport. Then add a link to Preston for Scottish services, and a through station in Manchester for services to Leeds. The replacement package will not deliver the same benefits. Chopping and changing is a waste of money.

RAILFUTURE NORTH WEST

DfT has told the Beeston and Tarporley Station Reopening Group that it has officially approved its reinstatement. Group Chair Michael Flynn said: “It has been a long haul to reach this point... The next step will be to re-engage with key stakeholders, including Transport for the North, Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Councils, NR, and Transport for Wales, the train operator that will serve the station. Together we will develop a delivery plan based on the proposals in the business case, which will include the detailed design and financing package.”

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

RUX congratulates RfEA on its [200th edition of Rail East](#). A 12-page feature “New Geography for East Anglia” sets out Rf Regional Rail Strategy up to 2050, based on the conclusions of Jonathan Roberts Consulting (JRC). Rail remains the cleanest, most space and energy efficient means of fast and frequent transport to, from and between towns and cities. The top five proposals are:

- Delivery of Ely Area Capacity Enhancement, Soham doubling, Haughley Junction and Trowse Swing Bridge
- Delivery of East West Rail, with a new layer of fast, limited-stop services to the east – Cambridge in 60 for both Norwich and Ipswich
- A case study for a line from Colchester to Stansted Airport via Braintree, and for remodelling the West Anglia Main Line via the Airport rather than Bishops Stortford
- A NR and Highways England case study for a Hethersett Parkway south of Norwich
- The potential for a Norwich metro service, with tram-trains into the city centre and to the University of East Anglia, Norfolk & Norwich Hospital and the Research Parks.

Greater Cambridge Partnership’s decision to abandon its sustainable travel zone and congestion charge proposals, and pause the project for a bus road linking the biomedical campus with a P&R off the M11 at Granta Park has raised hopes for restoration of a rail service to Haverhill, with a 20min railway journey replacing an hour on the bus. The DfT and NR have responded positively to Rf’s proposal, and a Transport East connectivity study is also examining it.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTH EAST

RfL&SE’s [response](#) to Medway Council’s consultation noted that almost 40% of its future housing capacity is on the Hoo Peninsula (14,736 homes), and re-iterated the case for reviving the railway project, which stalled when the Housing Infrastructure Fund allocation was abandoned. The Branch Vice-Chair has reminded Medway officers of the potential of Land Value Capture to make a significant contribution to the cost of the project, in addition to that from the developer.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The Draft Rail Reform Bill included in the King's Speech setting out the Government's legislative programme will see the creation of Great British Railways (GBR). A parliamentary committee will oversee pre-legislative scrutiny of its provisions by MPs and industry experts that will hasten the passage of the legislation through Parliament when it is brought forward.

CRN will work with the GBR Transition Team, Government and industry to ensure community rail is recognised and supported, its insights utilised through the transformation process, and opportunities to further empower the movement are seized.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF is challenging train operating companies and the rail industry to deliver on passenger expectations by making the railway more resilient and reliable; according to the ORR, punctuality and reliability between April and June 2023 were worse than the same quarter one year ago. Since then strikes, storms and further disruption have shown just how fragile services can be. And why are signalling systems so susceptible to developing faults? What can be done about it?

TF's latest [survey](#) of almost 5000 passengers found that the proportion of those eligible to claim compensation has increased from 37% in 2020 to 47% in 2023, but this is still less than half. More automation would make the process easier and quicker: paying the money directly into a passenger's account, or 'one-click' compensation where all the details are pre-populated and they are simply prompted to confirm their claim.

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

In November, ORR's Director of Strategy, Policy and Reform, Stephanie Tobyn addressed the Transport Select Committee on the issues people with mobility problems have with the transport system; Deputy Chief Inspector of non-mainline railways, Richard Hines, discussed its approach to driver fatigue with the London Assembly Transport Committee, and highlighted the ongoing work to refresh its guidance in this area. ORR also discussed with Government and industry how to support more 'Open Access' operation on the railway.

A formal ORR investigation led by Feras Alshaker, Director, Performance and Planning, into issues with train performance in the Wales & Western region will examine their root causes and consider wider contributing factors. The investigation will focus on NR, but ORR recognises that delivery of a reliable, punctual train service requires cross-industry collaboration.

Scotland's Transport Minister, Fiona Hyslop, joined railway colleagues to travel on a ScotRail Class 380 electric passenger service from Glasgow Central to Barrhead in a final test of the new infrastructure ahead of public services starting on 11 December.

NR has appointed Story Contracting Ltd to design a new station at Balgray on the Neilston line, located south of Barrhead off Balgraystone Road, close to Balgray Reservoir.

During a visit to Ravensthorpe, Rail Minister Huw Merriman announced a £3.9bn funding boost to the Transpennine Route Upgrade, taking the total funding of the project to £6.9bn. It will be used to double the number of tracks between Huddersfield and Ravensthorpe from two to four, so faster trains can overtake stopping services and additional freight.

A woman lost thousands of pounds in a train station QR code scam. Fraudsters are thought to have covered a genuine code in Thornaby station car park with one that sent her to a fake website which stole her card details. Following reports of similar scams across the country, TransPennine Express removed the QR codes from all of its station car parks.

As the largest owner of infrastructure-led brownfield land in the UK, NR is partnering developer Bloc Joint Venture and residential landlord Grainger plc to regenerate town and city sites that have good transport connections. They recently completed The Barnum, a 348-home build-to-rent property close to Nottingham station.

More than 1,300 jobs are in jeopardy at Alstom's rail assembly factory in Derby. Work on trains for HS2 is scheduled to start in late 2026, but the firm has a gap in orders from early next year, and no prospect of any for which it can compete.

The four-year programme of work to bring the 156-year-old, grade II* listed Barmouth Viaduct back to its former glory and protect it for future generations was completed on 8 December.

On 10 December, Brent Cross West between Cricklewood and Hendon opened with a regular Thameslink service of six trains per hour, and eight in the peaks. The four-platform station and its bridge over the railway will also allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross the line without needing to buy a ticket or use the stairs, saving them a 15-minute detour along the North Circular.

Some trains on the Northern City Line between Finsbury Park and Moorgate are now running under European Train Control System (ETCS) in-cab signalling, with more to follow as drivers are trained. This is a significant milestone for the East Coast Digital Programme. Digital signalling will be introduced on the ECML between Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin by the end of 2025. A new [ECDP website](#) highlights the long-term benefits to punctuality and reliability that ETCS will deliver to passengers and freight customers.

Last month the new Dawlish sea wall successfully repelled the 15 foot waves driven on at high tide by easterly winds topping 80mph brought by Storm Ciarán - identical weather conditions to those of the infamous storm of 2014 that left the only railway line to the South West dangling in mid-air.

The [55th edition of Barry Doe's National Rail Operators' map](#) shows TPE running between Manchester and York via Wakefield and Castleford (replacing Northern's Huddersfield - Castleford service); no Caledonian Sleeper between Perth and Dundee, nor WMT east from Wolverhampton.

...and finally

A three-year-old's toy monkey ended up taking a 600-mile railway journey that Paddington Bear would be proud of. Left on the train while changing at Birmingham New Street, he was not seen again until he reached Edinburgh. Customer service assistants Leon Allen and Vinny Murphy arranged his return to Birmingham, where a hand-knitted jumper with a NR logo made as a Christmas decoration was found to be a perfect fit. Back in Bristol, the little boy is smiling again. He loves the monkey's new jumper, and is fascinated by the adventure he's been on!

CONSULTATIONS

- Lewes District Council: [Re-imagining Lewes District - delivering the vision 2024-28](#). Closes 31 December
- Transport for Wales: [New Stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction](#). Closes 14 January
- Peninsula Transport: [Draft Transport Strategy - Strategic Transport Priorities to 2050](#). Closes 5 February
- Lewes District Council: [Local Plan, Spatial Strategy and Policy Directions](#). Closes 8 February
- East Sussex County Council: [Local Transport Plan 4 \(2024-2050\)](#). Closes 25 February

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. 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

- Monday 8. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second Monday of alternate months).
- Tuesday 9. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 13 February, 2 April).
- Wednesday 10. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900 (Also the first Thursday of every month).
- Thursday 11. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, John Harvey Tavern, Bear Yard, off Cliffe High Street, **Lewes**, East Sussex, BN7 2AN (**TBC**), 1800.
- Saturday 13. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, Kings Cross area, **London**, 1100.
- Wednesday 17. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, Farringdon, **London** EC1M 6EL. 1900.
- Thursday 18. Friends of the Barton Line, No. 1 inn at **Cleethorpes** station, 1900 (Also 20 March at the White Swan at Barton interchange , 1800).

February

- Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Tuesday 13. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).
- Saturday 17. Rf London & South East regional branch, Kent division, 14.00.
- Saturday 24. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ. 14.00.
- Tuesday 27. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830.

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

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