



May 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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With a general election looming, the rail industry is holding its breath. The uncertainty in the level of future funding may be why the DfT is not progressing several outstanding and well-argued cases for improvement. We can but hope that the start of services for the Leven and Northumberland Lines are the green shoots of recovery.

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

From 2 June, Leven and Cameron Bridge will see their first passenger trains since 1969 with an hourly service to Edinburgh via Kirkcaldy. Both stations will be fully accessible, with car parking, electric vehicle charging points, and links to local buses. Meanwhile, work continues along the six-mile corridor from the main line at Thornton Junction.

However, a new active-travel bridge over the River Leven at Duniface between Methilhill and Cameron Bridge station, the first of three along the branch to encourage walking and cycling, will not now be in place until the autumn as the company building it has gone into administration. In the interim, NR and Fife Council are seeking an alternative route.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

HLSG is concerned by the potential impact on users of Hornbeam Park station of plans to build on the Harrogate College car park with no alternative provision during construction for the many staff and students. There will also be up to 60 contractors on site, and the station car park is already at capacity on a daily basis, so where to park the additional 180 vehicles? It is a recipe for total chaos. HLSG suggests using a vacant plot on the corner of Hookstone Road and Hornbeam Park Avenue, which it believes still belongs to Harrogate College. A temporary car park could also be provided on vacant land adjacent to the site owned by Hull College and the Department for Education. See the objections lodged so far on the [N Yorks planning website](#).

Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

SELRAP sent this [power point presentation](#) to every local and mayoral election candidate in its area.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

To celebrate community rail week, STORM is holding a drop-in event at the Rochdale Station Community Area from 1100 until 1400 on 20 May. They will be showcasing the Calder Valley Line CRP, as well as STORM'S partnership work with the [New Pioneers](#) employment charity.

Friends of the Barton Line

Five hundred copies of Ben Andrew's Ale Trail guides are available for distribution. A reissue in the summer will include the new timetable.

On 1 March FBL, Barton Cleethorpes CRP and the Barton Heritage Project marked the 175th anniversary of the line to New Holland. Some 45 members and guests saw a panel listing key events installed at Barton station, and the Mayor cut a ribbon to see off the 1154 to Cleethorpes. At the White Swan inn, EMR Community Ambassador Nancy Roberts-Gordon cut a celebration cake provided by Lisa Robson. Bags filled with Ale Trail guides, a book by local author Ted Lewis and various notices and gifts were also handed out. The following day, further bags and portions of the cake were distributed to passengers and crew on the 0950 service from Barton to Cleethorpes and back. All in all, the event was a fitting success.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

A new BTPG [document](#), "Reinstating Two Class 800 bi-modes on the off-peak Paddington to Bedwyn Service" shows how using Class 387 EMUs for the 0818 and 1315 from Paddington to Cardiff and the returns at 1041 and 1554 – just 6.25% of the service - would free up two 5-car Class 800s to run off-peak between Paddington and Bedwyn on a two in every three-hour cycle. The shuttle would cater for the third hour, with some extended to Reading. BTPG has sent copies to GWR's senior management, and will ask MPs Laura Farris and Danny Kruger to press the DfT.

Tunbridge Wells & District Rail Travellers' Association

Speakers at the online Tunbridge Wells Public Transport Forum in March 2024 included NR, South Eastern, Kent CC and local bus operators. NR's preferred option for a Gatwick service is hourly from Tonbridge, but there is no start date. The High Brooms accessibility project is planned for Control Period 7 that has just started; a design incorporating two lift shafts and a new footbridge has been completed, but DfT sign-off on funding is still awaited.

South Eastern said that the level of commuting was similar to the pre-pandemic level, though focused on Tuesday - Thursday. Leisure travel is solid with both Saturday and Sunday very strong. Customer satisfaction levels have improved to 87 percent. The Flexi ticket trial will be extended, digital season tickets rolled out, and ticket machines upgraded to support more options.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

Over half of the Avocet Line trains to Exmouth have been short-formed, whereas just a third of its weekday services should be less than 3-car. And even those that can manage with just two cars may not do so on the Exeter – Paignton leg. Speculation continues that GWR will take Transport for Wales's Class 175 units, but that is all it is.

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](#).



Nominations for the various RUG Awards have closed. However, those for the totally separate Rf Member of the Year Award 2023-24, which will also be presented at the AGM in Edinburgh on 13 July, are now open until 1 July. All individual Rf members (not RUGs) are eligible. So do you know of one who has contributed to the success of Rf, raised its profile in their local area, or helped to run their local branch? Whoever they are, Rf would like to hear about them in a written statement of no more than 500 words explaining why they deserve to be recognised.

For further details of the Rf Award, or to submit a nomination, please email the Membership Director at wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk.

NEWS

DfT told the Public Accounts Committee that it could not 'give any date or range of dates for when the HS2 terminus at Euston might be delivered'. So when services start, Old Oak Common will be its southern terminus, and more passengers will use other rail services such as the Elizabeth Line.

The trains on that line were designed and built by Alstom in Derby, but with no more orders 3,000 jobs are at risk (plus 12-15,000 in the supply chain). An order for just 10 trains would be enough to keep the factory open. Rf Chair Chris Page [commented](#): "It's a one minute to midnight situation; the Government needs to act now by ordering 10 more trains from Alstom so that services from the east can be extended to Old Oak Common. Otherwise, [it] will be ripping the heart out of the UK's train design capability."

In mid-April, Transport Secretary Mark Harper said he had reached an "agreement in principle" with Alstom on the 10 trains for the Elizabeth line - subject to value for money for the taxpayer. If the order is confirmed, Alstom plans to restart three or four production lines pending work on 54 trains for HS2, which is due to start in a year or so.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

On 18 April, World Heritage Day, Tyne Valley CRP launched a [guide](#) to visiting World Heritage Sites in the UK by rail. The Hadrian's Wall Youth Ambassadors came up with the idea in a CRP workshop. The project received support from CRN, CrossCountry, TransPennine Express, and World Heritage UK. Representatives from individual sites spoke enthusiastically of the need for such a leaflet, which is also available in print from various outlets.

In a surprise visit to St Peter's School, Heysham, Brian Haworth and Gerald Townsend of the Bentham Line (Leeds-Morecambe CRP) presented the National Community Rail Awards trophy it won for the launch last summer of the "Rail to Sail" initiative at Heysham Port that emphasised the link between rail travel and the Isle of Man ferry.

The theme of this year's Community Rail Week (20-26 May), sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, is 'More Than a Railway'. It will showcase the value of rail to communities, and the inspiring work that CRPs and station groups deliver.

TRANSPORT AND HEALTH SCIENCE GROUP

The Rf affiliated THSG Railways Group wants money for roads used to create rolling motorways (high frequency vehicle-carrying trains), a high-speed rail network, a multimodal W12 or UIC-C gauge freight network, and narrow gauge lines into remote rural areas. In the shorter term, it is promoting specific schemes such as the Woodhead Rolling Motorway linking the M60 to the M1, and improving Manchester to South Yorkshire services. It would like to hear from:

- Health professionals, to articulate the public health case for rail to play a greater part in our transport system
- Cyclists, to promote the train/cycle combination as a distinct mode of transport, with cycle vans on trains and cycle railheads to compete with the private car
- Disabled rail users, to campaign for better facilities
- Individuals or user groups in rural areas who can see its rail greenway proposals as a way to reopen a rural network of 50mph miniature railways alongside cycle tracks. At least 1,000 miles of rail greenway would be needed to justify their development cost.
- People interested in campaigning for "sensible safety", focused on important risks. The Paddington rail crash happened because those who should have been addressing a badly sited signal repeatedly passed at danger were occupied writing safety cases about the risk of falling off railway platforms.

If you are interested, please apply to join on the THSG [website](#), putting "Railways Group" in the section on "interest in transport and health", so it gets half of your £10 subscription. Email thsgchair@gmail.com if you need more information before committing.

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

For the first time, ORR has published the [track access dashboard](#), an overview of how passenger and freight train operators are using the capacity available across the GB rail network, and how effectively the rail industry is meeting timetabling timescales. In the December 2023 timetable, industry planned to use 84% of the rail network capacity, based on the industry data provided. 24 new requests for access to the rail network were made, 13 of which were submitted after the industry deadline for publishing the timetable. Late submissions reduce the time to analyse impacts, and introduce the risk of the timetable performing poorly for passengers.

The gap between train and platform should not exceed 27.5cm (10.8in) horizontally or 23cm (9in) vertically, but the regulations apply only to new stations. Thus the Elizabeth line platforms at Ealing Broadway are exempt as they were formerly used by GWR. ORR says that: "for existing station platforms, a judgement has to be made as to whether it would be reasonably practicable to reduce the gaps, or whether the cost would be disproportionate to the level of risk."

[So why weren't the Elizabeth Line and its trains designed and built to the GWR standard? - Ed.]

NR's £4bn, 10-year Train Control Framework will use both traditional signalling and digital European Train Control System technology. It will also bring new ways of working with its signalling delivery partners. Projects to be delivered initially include the Midlands Rail Hub and digital signalling for the TransPennine Route Upgrade and the WCML TriLink Programme between Warrington and Carlisle.

West Coast Railways has reinstated the Jacobite service between Fort William and Mallaig using carriages with central locking doors. However, it will continue to lobby the ORR and DfT for dispensation to operate with traditional Mark I and II carriages, including an extra first-class carriage and its famous Harry Potter carriage, which are a major draw for many customers.

Following widespread protests, changes to the ECML timetable from December have been put off yet again as a third fast London - Newcastle/Edinburgh service per hour would entail fewer stops at Durham and in Northumberland, and the loss of a direct Morpeth – Carlisle service. However, the deferral poses two problems for GTR. As well as increased capacity, the recast allowed for calls at Cambridge South when it opens next year, and while demand is a matter of judgement, GTR simply has to be able to serve this costly new station.

From 12 June, trams will run between Squires Gate and the new terminus next to Blackpool North station.

Greater Anglia is offering third year university students in its area a [placement](#) to gain practical experience in their field of study across eight departments, from HR and marketing to IT and asset management. Successful candidates will be paid £20,075 for the year, and have free travel across the GA network.

Universal is contemplating an Orlando style theme park at Stewartby, south of Bedford. Its [information pack](#) states that if taken forward Universal would "help facilitate" the construction of Wixams station on the Thameslink line, and another on East West Rail. However, its President Page Thompson cautioned that the project was in its early stages, and there was "a lot of work to do before a final decision".

...and finally

Wansford Road station in Sutton, Cambridgeshire, that closed in 1929 lies in the path of a project to dual the A47, so with over £200,000 of funding from National Highways, it is being taken down brick-by-brick and rebuilt on the Nene Valley Railway near Peterborough.

The design of North Nanjing station in China has provoked a media storm. Its inspiration was the plum blossom for which the town is known. But online, others are pointing out its resemblance to something rather different – a sanitary pad.

CONSULTATIONS

- DfT: [Adapting the UK's Transport System to the Impacts of Climate Change](#). Closes 31 May.
- Transport for the South East: [Transport Strategy refresh](#), Closes 2 June.
- Central Bedfordshire: [Local Transport Plan](#), Closes 30 June.

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.

May

■ Monday 13. Friends of Littleborough Stations, History Centre, **Littleborough** Station, Stevenson Square, OL15 8AF, 1900.

■ Monday 13. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).

■ Tuesday 14. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group AGM, History Museum, (Also 11 June, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400).

- Tuesday 14. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 18 June and 6 August).
- Thursday 16. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, EC1M 6EL, 1900.
- Thursday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, No.1 inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900.
- Saturday 18. British Regional Transport Association, Railway Inn, Station Road, **Westbury**, BA13 4HW, 1400.
- Saturday 18. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, St Mary's Church, **Halesworth**, 1400.
- Saturday 18. Rf East Midlands AGM, Phoenix Arts Centre, 4 Midland Street, **Leicester**, LE1 1TG. 1300.
- Tuesday 28. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Wednesday 29. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 27 June and 30 July both Online).
- Friday 31. Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association AGM, Community Centre, Wakeman Road, **Bourne End**, SL8 5SX, 1945.

June

- Thursday 6. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Saturday 8. British Regional Transport Association, Montgomery Tower, Lower Claremont Bank, **Shrewsbury**, SY1 1RT, 1400.
- Saturday 8. Rf North West, venue tbc.
- 21-22. European Passengers' Federation, Ibis Hotel, **Warsaw**.
- Saturday 29. British Regional Transport Association, Benjamin Huntsman, 12-18 Cambridge Street, **Sheffield**, S1 4UD, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 8 July. Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association AGM, Golden Pheasant, Plumley Moor Road, **Plumley**, Cheshire, WA16 9RX, 1900.
- 10 July. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- 13 July. Rf National AGM and RUG Awards, Holyrood Hotel, 81 Holyrood Rd, **Edinburgh**, EH8 8AU, 1100.
- 13 July. British Regional Transport Association AGM, The Court House, Church Lane, **Berkhamsted**, HP4 2AX, 1400.

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

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