



September 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Government departments are being squeezed for cash, so any proposals for rail improvement must be self-financing. However, contributions from housing developers may be available where existing local transport would be inadequate, so keep your ears to the ground!

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Patronage of the new Leven service is encouraging, but is almost certainly underestimated since any concessionary fares are purchased onboard, and some passengers never see a conductor. Cameron Bridge seems less busy, but some links are not yet in place, eg the bridge to Methilhill. Remaining issues concern bus connections and signposting, with the sense that significant 'snagging' remains while the circus has moved on. LMRC will continue to flag these points, although NR has been unresponsive in recent months.

Ribble Valley Rail

On 24 August, the Yorkshire Dales Explorer from Rochdale - Ribblehead broke the 1000 mark. Of the 1045 or so passengers north of Clitheroe, 24% took part in a guided walk; 33% arranged their own walks, and 43% undertook other activities or simply rode the line. As winter approaches, reasons other than walking are needed to encourage continued use of the service, although engineering works will close the route on a number of Saturdays. A diary of events in towns along the S&C or RV corridor would help to promote these alternative activities.

The Northern Salvo – Paul Salvesson

After a rather pessimistic view of Labour's transport offering in the last Salvo, there are grounds for cautious optimism. The Transport Secretary, Louise Haigh, has said she is determined to make a difference. The appointment of former NR Chair, Lord (Peter) Hendy, was an inspired choice. Getting someone in the top rail job who is highly respected and knows the industry back to front, is very good news.

There's a pay deal with ASLEF on the table. Rightly, it is 'without strings'. However, some big issues around workplace practices have to change – top of the list should be bringing Sundays into the normal working week. In the post-Covid era, leisure travel has grown significantly, and many people want to travel at weekends. It's bizarre that Sunday working for train crew remains voluntary on most networks.

Another issue is the so-called 'manning' agreement: on most routes, every train must have a guard along with a driver. That's good for passengers and good for revenue. However, many trains that are 'cancelled' for lack of a guard do actually run - but without passengers to get back to depot. There needs to be a way of ensuring that in exceptional circumstances (eg staff sickness) trains can run as advertised 'driver only' without encouraging train operators to cut staffing levels.

The doomed attempt to close hundreds of station booking offices was a great win for effective campaigning, but what now? Why not re-invent smaller station booking offices as local hubs with a mix of ticket sales and travel information with retail services – the local station becomes a village shop? These ideas need to be revisited without the threat of closure hanging over them.

Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

SELRAP will need to forge links with new MPs in its bid to reopen the 12-mile Skipton - Colne link. Of the scheme's most vocal Conservative supporters, only Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) and Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) were re-elected. However, Shipley's new Labour MP Anna Dixon said: "I would be happy to do what I can to support the reopening of the line," while Pendle and Clitheroe's new Labour MP Jonathan Hinder pledged: "After years of talk, it is now time for action, and I would be an outspoken advocate for this project."

Friends of the Barton Line

With industrial unrest subsiding, the Barton line service is more reliable, and station footfall has generally increased by some 15-30% over the previous year. But with only a two-hourly service, FBL would rather have no cancellations at all; the rate of Class 170 failures is a source of concern.

Fen Line Users Association

Great Northern has accepted all thirty Class 379s units, and is now preparing them for service. They will start on the Peterborough line before replacing most Class 387s on the Fen Line. Together with a DB Cargo Class 66 loco, a Class 387 has successfully completed dynamic testing of the European Train Control System. The remaining Class 387s will be ETCS compliant by June 2025.

Both GTR and Greater Anglia use the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) to measure the social impact of organisations, projects and programmes across the rail industry and its supply chain. How it crunches the numbers is a mystery, but the value of Greater Anglia's contribution for the year was reckoned to be £134,721,524.87, so every penny counts! But the core social value is a reliable, frequent service with clean trains and a seat for everybody – and that's priceless!

British Regional Transport Association

The new Government seems to be pushing and pulling two steps forward and one back. On the one hand it cancelled the £500m Local Rail Reopening Fund, but not the £27bn new roads fund. BRTA is concerned that it is cavalier on matters pertaining to land use balance and environmental stewardship. People can't live on scenery or pretty photos, but equally, if we destroy the countryside or over egg brownfield land use, we choose a societal outcome that pleases no one!

New development beckons around Tempsford, where East-West Rail (Oxford-Cambridge) will cross the ECML, but it should be held back until the railway is sorted and built and proper facilities provided, including a new East Beds/West Cambs A&E Hospital, as Bedford and Stevenage are a long way away. Buses are fine, but useless for freight; railways are versatile, but expensive.

But if we don't do the 'rail thing', we lock in the historical pattern of ever more roads proliferation, which has a wider cost to us all. There has to be a balance.

Bristol Rail Campaign

The Full Business Case to reopen the Bristol – Portishead line, a key part of MetroWest, was about to be submitted when the General Election was called, putting all spending decisions on hold. Then the new Chancellor closed the Restoring Your Railway fund. However, most of the money for Portishead comes from elsewhere; RYR was just a convenient way for the DfT to budget for the final sums needed to complete the project. So BRC is [petitioning](#) for alternative funding to be found to ensure that the route is not lost.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members and groups to add weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#) by selecting the appropriate category from the "Membership Types" menu. Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).

NEWS

The UK's inflation rate in the year to July rose slightly from 2% to 2.2%. However, recent practice has been to announce the rail fare rate increase shortly before it takes effect. It will no doubt reflect the agreement with ASLEF of a 15% rise over three years, with no change in working practices - and now the RMT union wants the same deal. Rf Chair Chris Page [comments](#): "When the Government decides how much to bump up fares next year, we want to see a decision that is fair for passengers. The acid test will be how the increase compares with costs paid by other modes of travel, most noticeably coaches, air and, of course, the car."

Commissioned by the Labour Party in December 2023 while in opposition, the [Rail and Urban Transport Review](#) recommends that, instead of RYR, transport policy is directly linked to a long-term UK Industrial Strategy and the delivery of new homes. Rf policy and campaigning must evolve accordingly. There is no money, so branches need to draw on local knowledge to capitalise on opportunities where:

- Improving services would generate more revenue than the cost of achieving it
- Capital investment can leverage private investment, as priorities for rail expansion shift from connecting isolated communities to driving economic growth
- Land value capture of new towns (at least 10,000 homes) could help fund new rail links.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT wants the Government to reconsider its decision to cancel RYR, which it helped to foster. It would like to see a nationwide reopening programme, to bring the benefits of the railway network within reach of every community.

Domestic flights are bad news for the planet. Last year, the BBC found that Premier League clubs flew to eight out of ten of their domestic matches, with the shortest flight time just 27 minutes! CBT will award the 'Black Boot' for outstanding contributions to football's carbon footprint – a trophy no club will want to get its hands on!

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The CRN Board recently met at Bishopstone Station. After five years of fundraising, and with the support of CRN, Railway Heritage Trust, Lewes District Council and Sussex Community Foundation, the Friends of Bishopstone Station and Southeast CRP transformed its run-down parcels office into a thriving and fully accessible community hub that opened in November 2022.

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

After she was forced to "crawl off" a train at London King's Cross station when assistance failed to arrive for 20 minutes, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson said that train companies which fail to help disabled passengers should face "severe penalties". She called on the Government to "make a commitment to bring about real change", as her experience had "woken up a lot of people".

Up to 74,000 prosecutions for rail fare evasion in England and Wales using the single justice procedure are to be quashed after the UK's chief magistrate, Judge Goldspring, ruled it inappropriate for that type of offence. However, the process of refunding fines could take months.

NR will waive its track access charges in full for six months for to attract business. The offer is open to all train operators and types of service that meet the [qualifying criteria](#), but the driver behind it is the company's commitment to support the growth of rail freight. It is worth around £1,000 per train circulation (out and back) depending on the length and loading of the trains.

Dumfries, Uddingston and Walton-on Thames stations now have step-free access.

Driver training on the Northumberland Line will take place throughout the autumn, so the line is busier than at any time in the last 60 years. Passenger services will start in December.

The £140m project to transform Grade II listed Darlington station blends old and new. It includes an accessible footbridge that takes passengers through an opening in the historic roof, two new platforms, a brand new concourse and multi-storey car park.

Funded by the DfT through its First of a Kind 2023 competition and sponsored by Angel Trains, Spinks and its project partners Quantum Seating claim that the EcoSeat™ is the most comfortable, recyclable, durable and fireproof. They are currently inviting RUGs and industry professionals to a launch event in the rail vehicle motion simulator at Huddersfield University on 1-2 October.

A new [AVA accessible bridge](#) on display in Kent, built to full size and with fully operational lifts, gives constructors and clients the chance to "try before they buy"; a prototype at Stowmarket station, set to open next year, will illustrate its ease of installation.

Cambridge Connect wants the Government to fund a £5m feasibility study into a light rail network linking Trumpington to the University's housing estate at Eddington via the Biomedical Campus. It could eventually extend to new towns at Cambourne and Northstowe, and out to Haverhill.

The final deck segment of a 2.1-mile Colne Valley viaduct in Buckinghamshire completed what will be the UK's longest railway bridge. It will carry HS2 up to 10 metres above land and water between tunnels under Hillingdon and the Chilterns.

The National Autistic Society has granted London's Waterloo station its Autism Friendly Award for a [video guide](#) that helps to calm its users.

Last February, a series of circular tube maps appeared at several Circle line stations as part of a Samsung phone promo. Cartographer Max Roberts was prompted to rework his original 2013 design to create a circular [map](#) that he claims is easier to use than the current official map.

...and finally

When Avanti West Coast spotted a picture of five-year-old Daniel Rogerson's bespoke [Pendolino-shaped bed](#), it invited him to test drive his favourite train at its Driver Training Centre. He was also given a behind-the-scenes tour of Crewe station, including a visit to the announcer's office.

Volunteers from the Friends of March Railway Station in Cambridgeshire have moved a Victorian railway carriage from the garden of a house in Needingworth to a disused platform where will be reassembled, painted in its original burgundy red, and opened as a tea room.

Swindon Borough Council and Historic England are five years into a project to restore the former [GWR railway village](#) with museum-style signage to explain its history, and heritage trails marked by bronze medallions built into the pavement.

CONSULTATIONS

- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: [National Planning Policy Framework](#), closes 24 September.
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority: [West Yorkshire Mass Transit Phase One](#), closes 30 September.
- Kent County Council: [Striking the Balance - draft Local Transport Plan 5](#), closes 8 October.
- NR: [Transpennine Route Upgrade – Stalybridge to Diggle](#), closes 25 October.

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.

September

- Thursday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900 (Also 20 November at the White Swan in Barton).
- Thursday 19. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.
- Tuesday 24. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 28. Rf East Anglia, Octagon annex of St Peter Mancroft, Hay Hill, **Norwich**, NR2 1QQ, 1400 (Also 7 December in Cambridge)

October

- Tuesday 1. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP. 19.30 (Also 29 October and 3 December).
- Monday 7. Rf Thames Valley, West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX 2 0BT, 17.30.
- Tuesday 8. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Rail Lines Group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- Wednesday 9. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 11 November).
- Saturday 12. Joint Rf Yorkshire/East Midlands/Lincolnshire branches, Hallam University, **Sheffield**, 1300.
- Wednesday 16. Rf North East, Newcastle Arts Centre, 67 Westgate Road, **Newcastle**, 1900.
- Thursday 17. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Brighton** (Also 5 December Online).

Further Ahead

- 2 November 2024. Fen Line Users Association AGM, the Library, 6 The Cloisters, **Ely**, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4ZH, 1400.
- 11 November. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).

- 13 November. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- 16 November. Rf North West. Venue: tbc.
- 16 November. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.

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

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