



October 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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It would seem that nothing can be announced ahead of the budget at the end of the month. One glimmer of hope is the rumour that the Government will relax the rules on borrowing to invest in infrastructure projects. With a benefit/cost ratio (BCR) of 4.89, Ely must be top of the list (see p5).

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line

The [Inverness Courier](#) reports that superfast broadband could be coming to trains in the Far North. The Scottish Futures Trust is looking at a trial that would see trains on the Far North and Kyle lines upgraded to receive broadband via low-orbit satellite. These lines run through some of the least reliable mobile network areas in the UK, and also feature some of the longest journeys, so passengers can be cut off from a reliable digital connection for significant periods of time. With ScotRail and Highlands and Islands Enterprise also onside, the system could be fitted this autumn, commissioned in December, and trialled to the end of 2025. FoFNL thinks it would be “an absolute game-changer for many potential passengers”.

The process of procuring a replacement for the HST Inter7City (I7C) fleet has begun. However, it is doubtful if any of the new trains will be delivered before 2030. Though now rather unreliable, the I7Cs are Scotrail’s most comfortable trains by far, so the new stock needs to be at least as good.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Peter Hawkins from Edinburgh took his bike to Leven on the new rail link. He was pleased with the provision for cyclists at Cameron Bridge: a 'gazebo' with a canopy open at the bottom to allow air to circulate and bikes to be visible, but keeping the rain out. There's a segregated cycle path from the station exit to a nearby road junction, then cycle lanes from there to Methil. How unusual, and welcome, he says, for an authority to consider cyclists in advance! However, at Leven station the main entrance isn't signed for cyclists, although the access is partly segregated.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

TfGM is working with Wigan Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority on plans for a new station on the West Coast Main Line at Golborne in Wigan. It would be a key part of the Bee Network, with an hourly Wigan - Stalybridge service via Manchester Victoria.

Once again, all the toilets at Rochdale Station were firmly locked at 1600 on a Wednesday afternoon, much to the distress of a guide dog user. Luckily he knew that the Clitheroe service from which he had just alighted dwells 20 minutes before departing, so he was able to reboard the train and use its facilities.

East Suffolk Travel Association

On 19 August, three ESTA members met Greater Anglia's Stakeholder, Customer and Community Engagement Manager Alan Neville, in Norwich. GA's timetable planners have ESTA's report, but the East Suffolk Lines timetable may not be revised until May 2026 due to ECML timetable delays. Concern was expressed that cuts in Chelmsford stops meant longer East Suffolk journeys. Mr Neville explained that two cuts in the morning peak were made to speed up the London service, but evening peak stops at Chelmsford had actually increased. The timetable was now very resilient.

GA would be willing to help improve pedestrian access to Westerfield station, but cannot fund it; the Ipswich Garden Village developer should pay for a footpath. NR is considering new ideas regarding car parking at Beccles station.

East Suffolk Council has "paused" its plan for a restaurant on a new floor of the currently disused eastern part of Lowestoft station. The Lowestoft Central Project, which runs the station shop and Parcels Office, said: "Whilst we are keen to find a new use for the building and see it restored in a sympathetic manner, the most urgent need is to reinstate the concourse roof and improve the toilet facilities." They hope the Railway Heritage Trust will consider grant support to NR to ensure the structure does not deteriorate further.

Bedford Commuters Association

In June, the Chairmen of APTU and BCA met the GTR Train Services Director to express their deep concern about the high level of Thameslink cancellations, and press for the issue to be resolved as a matter of urgency. The level has since reduced, but BCA is monitoring the situation, and will call for further meetings if required.

On 7 August, a test train ran westbound on East West Rail from Bletchley to Bicester and returned the next day, running to the Railway Technical Centre in Derby. The train included an observation car and was pulled by a Class 37 loco. It ran under speed and safety restrictions, as the signalling and control systems weren't yet fully commissioned. The first passenger train over the new line will be Pathfinder Railtours' "[Verney Venturer](#)" from Bristol on 16 November. Chiltern will seemingly operate the EWR service, but the stock hasn't yet been allocated. It may be Class 196 diesel units, or its current fleet could simply cover the line.

BCA responded to the Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) consultation on its Local Transport Plan. EWR is a game changer that will open up new opportunities for rail travel. CBC should gather evidence for park and ride facilities at Ridgmont station (close to the M1) and Tempsford station (close to the A1) to contribute to modal shift, while East Midlands Railway InterCity services should call at Bedford to interchange with EWR for onward travel to the Midlands and the North.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Many connections at Newbury have been missed because the Bedwyn shuttle has not been held. BTPG protested to GWR, who have reminded staff to be watchful and instigate a hold.

Bedwyn will have full blockades with bus replacements on 11 - 14 November from Theale, and on 10 - 12 December from Newbury.

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

Rf endorses the Rail Industry Association Autumn Budget submission that asks the Government to:

- Commit to the value of rail, with institutional reforms to give the market confidence that what is planned will be delivered
- Set an investment trajectory that ends 'boom and bust' in the supply chain, and covers recruitment and training
- Leverage private investment in the rail network with a clear policy and playbook
- Protect critical rail capability: complete HS2 between Euston and Old Oak Common; order sufficient rolling stock to keep factories open, and maintain a minimum level of electrification, around 350 single track km/year.

More specifically, it makes the following points:

- The focus of Restoring Your Railways (RYR) on reconnecting isolated communities would not have created the scale of economic growth needed, but some locations do require public investment in rail infrastructure to enable that development
- Rail operating cost and revenue must be managed as one so that effective business decisions can minimise subsidy by the taxpayer
- Road User Charging is already effectively in place through fuel duty, but a mechanism is required to extend it to electric vehicles.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

Ending the RYR Fund has jeopardised the 20-year campaign to reopen Haxby station north of York. It is vital to reduce car commuting, enable local residents to access further employment centres such as Leeds and Newcastle, and for leisure trips to Scarborough, relieving pressure on the A64. Luke Charters, the new MP for York Outer, has said he will explore alternative sources of funding - that needs to happen NOW!

Open access operators are so valuable for people living in Hull, the Calder Valley and elsewhere in Yorkshire. Grand Central, who operate to Bradford and Sunderland, want to extend its track access agreement until 2038 using new bi-mode trains with 20% more seats than the current Class 180s. Hopefully, these will be 6-car sets compared to the current 5-car, or GC will lose its big selling point of comfortable seating with good leg room. If it goes down the Lumo road of just one class and no catering, it will lose many of its existing passengers.

RAILFUTURE NORTH WEST

In Liverpool, the Baltic Triangle has seen over 1,000 flats built since 2012, with plans for at least 3,000 more. Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, said: "It is important that people can enjoy a reliable, accessible, cheap and integrated public transport network that makes getting around an easy, untroubled experience. Liverpool Baltic is...part of my commitment to 'Merseyrail for All". He has pledged to build three more new stations at Daresbury in Halton, Woodchurch on the Wirral, and Carr Mill in St Helens.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

In June, the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority authorised a new bus service between Chatteris, Manea, Christchurch and Wisbech, co-ordinated with train times at Manea. A limited test service on Saturday 10 August left Chatteris at 0845 to connect with the 0911 train to Peterborough. A return journey meets the 1817 arrival at Manea.

RAIL EAST noted the need for Peterborough passengers to be better informed regarding their connecting train and from which platform it would depart. LNER has since installed perhaps the best CIS in Britain, showing clearly where the train is currently and any delay. An interpreter also communicates with the deaf one service at a time.

RfEA welcomes David Hughes, formerly Major Programmes Director at Arup, as the new Chief Executive of EWR Company. Previous rail roles include DfT Director General for Rail Infrastructure, Investment Planning Director at TfL, and a Director at Transport for the North. Hopefully the appointment of such an experienced rail professional at a crucial time for EWR signals a determination from Government to ensure a successful and speedy outcome to this vital project.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

Rf supports Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce in seeking private finance to revive the western rail access to Heathrow. A branch off the Great Western main line at Langley would run mostly in tunnel to Terminal 5, with four trains an hour from Reading.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTH EAST

Two rail schemes that might benefit from housing development are the Hoo Peninsular, north of the Medway in Kent, and bridging the gap between Uckfield and Lewes. Rf contributed to both Medway Council's pre-draft Local Plan 2041 and Kent County Council's draft Transport Plan 5. Before it was cancelled in July 2023, the Housing Infrastructure Fund allocation provided for a new station at Hoo St Werburgh, and Hoo Peninsula Railway had secured strategic policy support in both NR's North & East Kent Connectivity Strategic Study and TfSE's Strategic Investment Plan for Chatham and Aylesford; Gillingham and Rainham; Rochester and Strood.

RAILFUTURE DEVON AND CORNWALL

Work has started on the new Okehampton Interchange station, and also the Mid-Cornwall Metro, the first phase of which, doubling the Par - Newquay service to hourly, starts in May.

However, three rail development projects are at risk: restoring Tavistock - Bere Alston - Plymouth services; reopening Cullompton station between Exeter St David's and Tiverton Parkway, and a new Edginswell station (Torbay Gateway) on the Riviera line between Newton Abbot and Torre.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

According to CBT's new [impact report](#), the alternatives to driving needs much improvement. It is constantly pressing the Government to invest in public transport, walking and cycling to make them more available and attractive.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN has postponed its AGM, and the vote regarding its proposal to pursue charitable status, until 28 January. Applications are invited for Board Directors, to help shape the future direction of the organisation and community rail.

Dementia Adventure would like to develop local partnerships to develop the confidence in rail travel of people living with dementia. If your CRP or station group might be interested in running a simple pilot – most likely a day trip – please [get in touch](#).

According to a recent report from transport consultants Stantec, the Esk Valley train service from Whitby to Middlesbrough fails to meet any of the markets it is intended to serve. The £7m awarded eight years ago by the then York Potash for infrastructure improvements but still unspent would allow up to four more services/day. Esk Valley CRP is seeking support for early action from North Yorkshire Mayor David Skaith and the new Scarborough and Whitby MP Alison Hume.

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

[Railway 200](#) is a programme of activities and events across the UK in 2025 to mark 200 years of the modern railway. It is supported by the rail industry, the Government, Transport Scotland, Transport for Wales, the Northern Ireland Executive, many Heritage lines, Visit Britain, the Museums Association, civic and community groups, and a wide range of other partners.

Having replaced off-peak fares on journeys involving London, Newcastle and Edinburgh with a 70-minute flex ticket, LNER sought to counter workarounds by extending the trial area to all stations from Newcastle out to Edinburgh Airport, Gateway, Park and Brunstane. However, Mark Smith, the Man in Seat 61, promptly revealed new workarounds: for London, book to/from Finsbury Park via King's Cross; beyond Edinburgh, book to/from Falkirk. LNER is state owned, so Louise Haigh, the new Transport Secretary, could end this charade at a stroke.

New lifts at Anniesland station in Glasgow now provide step-free access to passengers. And lift shafts at Tilehurst station near Reading have brought the accessibility project closer to completion.

The new £21m tram line to Blackpool North station no longer runs after 1900.

The Government is "minded to refuse" Tritax Symmetry's plans for a £750m National Rail Freight Interchange on a 662 acre site at Hinckley in Leicestershire, but has extended the deadline for a decision until March to gather further information.

According to the East of England All-Party Parliamentary Group, upgrading Ely and Haughley rail junctions would unlock economic growth across the country (Ely is cited in the strategies of both Transport for the North and Midlands Connect) and allow more passenger and freight services. [Keeping Trade on Track](#) highlights how the scheme will directly contribute to the DfT's strategic priorities, with a very high BCR of 4.89.

Greater Cambridge Partnership is to ask the County Council to seek a TWAO for a busway from Fourwentways Services on the A11 to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. But would the money be better spent on reopening the railway line to Haverhill? Elisa Meschini, deputy leader of the County Council and Chairperson of the GCP Board, said that would cost "in the region" of £800m, since much of the land from the old railway line had already been built on.

Housing minister Baroness Taylor has reassured CBC that the UKDayOne proposal for a new town of around 300,000 people at Tempsford, as reported in the August RUX, "isn't linked to the Government or any current work by EWR".

England's Economic Heartland has published a series of brochures on the strategic transport interventions needed to realise the region's economic potential. [Connecting Economies](#) provides a compendium of evidence that make the case for improved connectivity and infrastructure investment in its region. And its latest connectivity studies - [The Thames Valley-Northampton](#) and [Southern East-West Movements](#) (Buckinghamshire to Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire) - identify some potential rail improvements:

- Thames Valley and London: Aylesbury - Milton Keynes; the Chiltern Main Line and links to Old Oak Common
- West Coast Main Line: making best use of capacity released from new lines
- Amersham - Watford - St Albans: enhanced urban connectivity.

Funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, GWR and Bristol City Council, a new station opened at Ashley Down on 28 September with an hourly service between Bristol Temple Meads and Filton Abbey Wood. It forms part of the MetroWest Phase 2 project to reopen the Henbury Line with further new stations in North Filton and Henbury.

The 57th edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' map](#) has two minor changes. A new note marks the delay in opening the Newcastle – Ashington line, possibly not until the December timetable change. And the 'west curve' at Didcot opened on 14 September at the start of a Bristol - Oxford Saturday service.

...and finally

Nine years ago, Elliott Badger began to collect a ticket to Northampton station from each of the other 2,700 in the country. "All Aboard to Northampton" now displays about 2,100 of them, in alphabetical order and with a named space for each of the missing ones.

Freightliner has named a Class 90 locomotive Pete Waterman OBE to mark the veteran music producer and rail enthusiast's contribution to the industry. He has served as President of the Railway Benefit Fund for five years, and in that time raised almost £2 million in donations.

GWR had to terminate a Reading - Gatwick Airport service at Redhill after two squirrels boarded and staff tried unsuccessfully to shoo one of them off. The squirrel that refused to leave was returned to Reading in the train.

CONSULTATIONS

- Norfolk CC: [Norfolk Rail Prospectus 2024](#), closes 21 October.
- NR: [Transpennine Route Upgrade – Stalybridge to Diggle](#), closes 25 October.
- South Oxfordshire / Vale of White Horse: [Local Plan 2041](#), closes 12 November.
- Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 4 (*URL: devon.cc/ltp4*), closes 30 November.
- DfT: [Closure of Ravensthorpe station](#), closes 5 January.

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.

October

■ Saturday 12. Joint Rf Yorkshire/East Midlands/Lincolnshire branches, Hallam University, **Sheffield**, 1300.

■ Saturday 12. East Suffolk Travel Association, **Beccles** station, 1400.

■ Monday 14. Avocet Line Rail User Group AGM, Manor Hotel, **Exmouth**, 1930.

■ 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 and 9 January in Lewes).

■ Tuesday 29. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 3 December).

November

■ Saturday 2. Fen Line Users Association AGM, the Library, 6 The Cloisters, **Ely**, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4ZH, 1400.

- Monday 11. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).
- Monday 11. Bedford Commuters Association AGM, RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, **Bedford**, 1930
- Wednesday 13. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 16. Rf North West. Venue: tbc.
- Saturday 16. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, **St Albans**, 1100.
- Saturday 16. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.
- Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, White Swan, **Barton**, 2000.
- Thursday 21. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.
- Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 30. Joint Rf North West/Yorkshire branches, Friends Meeting House, Mount St. **Manchester** M2 5NS, 1300.

Further Ahead

- 7 December. Rf East Anglia, The Signal Box Community Centre, Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge** CB2 8DB.
- 10 December. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Rail Lines Group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- 28 January. CRN AGM, **Online**, 1400 (change of date).

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

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