



December 2024

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Whilst there will naturally be dissenting voices, the East West Rail Co is to be congratulated on a very comprehensive [consultation document](#) that clearly sets out the many options. Do give it your full attention so that, when it comes, the statutory consultation on the final design is as authoritative as possible.

Roger Smith

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

### Furness Line Action Group

Cumbrian MPs, Councils, the LEP and Chamber of Commerce urged Transport Secretary at the time Louise Haigh to secure the future of the Cumbrian Coast line; FLAG identified the issues to be addressed:

- Ensure that Cumbria receives a fair share of funding released by the cancellation of the Northern leg of HS2
- Modernise signalling and automate level crossings north of Barrow
- Improve service frequencies and times of first and last trains
- Improve cross-platform access, particularly at Ulverston and Arnside
- Integrate rail and bus with interchanges at railway stations
- Replace the 40-year-old Sprinter trains with battery/hybrid units that reflect the needs of passengers
- Promote the Furness and Cumbrian Coast lines in all tourist literature
- Re-examine the case for re-opening the Penrith to Keswick branch with a direct connection from the main line.

However, investment in the line has been set back by three developments:

- The High Court has quashed plans for a new coal mine
- The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is refusing to hand over land on the Moorside site designated for new nuclear use for a small modular reactor programme
- The Dalston oil terminal south of Carlisle is set to close at the end of the year following the end of oil refining operations at Grangemouth in Scotland.

A model developed by Chrome Angel Solutions and Northern shows the optimal speed and braking pattern for drivers to minimise fuel consumption while keeping to time; an initial test between Middlesbrough and Whitby saved 7%. Whilst this will vary across the network, the potential saving for Northern's annual fuel bill of some £50m is huge. It now plans to conduct practical tests on six more of its routes.

### **South East Northumberland Rail User Group**

The Northumberland line will open for passenger services on 15 December, 19 years after the SENRUG campaign began in March 2005. Initially, trains will only call at Ashington, Seaton Delaval and Newcastle (and about half on weekdays also at Manors). Bedlington, Bebside, Newsham and the Metro interchange station at Northumberland Park are all still under construction and will be opened at later stages.

### **Ribble Valley Rail**

RVR is celebrating 30 years of passenger services since the Ribble Valley Line was restored, as well as the all-year round Saturday Yorkshire Dales Explorer to Hellifield, Settle and Ribbleshead that began on 8 June in place of the summer Sunday only DalesRail that was cancelled in 2023. The communal effort to bring it about by the Rail Authorities, Local Government, and Community Groups including RVR, Lancs Rail Ramblers and Friends of the Settle and Carlisle earned it a nomination for the national Community Rail Awards and the Rail Business Awards.

RVR volunteers have counted well over three and a half thousand DalesRail passengers, who travel for various reasons: mainly summer walks and rambles, but also for connections north to Carlisle and south towards Leeds. Southbound travel for visits from the Dales to Clitheroe has also grown. RVR hopes this will continue through the winter; it is working with Northern and Community Rail Lancashire to promote the almost weekly events in the town.

### **Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership**

A SELRAP presentation on re-opening Skipton - Colne to a meeting that included the Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, and representatives from Drax Power Station and the Skipton Building Society drew the following quote from the Mayor, David Skaith (edited):

'We had a really insightful meeting. The line would close a network gap where there is currently no easy or quick way to travel by rail between East Lancashire and North and West Yorkshire. Completing the route across the Pennines would improve connectivity for both passengers and freight, and make Skipton a more accessible gateway to and from North Yorkshire.'

'It is clear this is a strategic trans-Pennine corridor for the north, with significant potential benefits for Lancashire and West Yorkshire as well as our region. While we're supportive of the campaign's aspirations, this £300m-plus scheme is beyond the resource of any one council or combined authority. We'll work with Transport for the North and the DfT on how the case for Skipton - Colne re-opening can be taken forward.'

### **Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines**

Rail North and local Mayors asked Northern Rail how it planned to reduce the many cancellations in its service pattern: 24 of 33 trains on Sunday 10 November. Many ran their route as empty carriage stock because there was no guard. However, STORM wonders why the Mayors are only now expressing their concern, as this has been going on for at least the last six months.

The RMT is to consult its drivers and conductors on a new deal for Sunday working, which is not currently in their contract. Northern aims to have 90% of its trains run on time with only 2% of

services cancelled within three years, but Rail North Chair and Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham said the plan “lacked the interim milestones we need to hold you to account”.

STORM has sent a copy of its new membership leaflet to every Rochdale councillor and local MP. It is now looking for help to distribute it to libraries, heritage centres, and other public spaces.

### **East Suffolk Travel Association**

An ESTA survey of local people revealed a strong demand for all East Suffolk Line trains to call at Westerfield. It raised the findings with NR, Suffolk County Council and the Ipswich MP, and has pressed Greater Anglia on this. Suffolk County Council is also asking GA to improve the service, and Ipswich MP Jack Abbott wishes to see the service for his Ipswich Garden suburb constituents improved. Disappointingly, GA has shown no enthusiasm to make any such improvements, and does not think it feasible to make changes before 2026, by which time GB Railways may well operate the service.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

Due to extensive work at Westbury station, all train services running via Westbury will be affected from 27 December to 23 January. GWR’s long-distance services between London Paddington and the West of England will call at Frome instead of Westbury. So, if you are heading west during this period, check your trains.

### **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](#).*

### **RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA**

The two emails RFEA sent to every General Election candidate in its area, one urging completion of EWR from Bedford to Cambridge and getting the go ahead to improve Ely North junction, the other enclosing a copy of its New Geography for East Anglia report, a vision for the rail network up to 2050, attracted 26 positive responses. Suggestions included retaining the existing Waterbeach station when the new one is built, and new services from Wisbech to Peterborough and to Cambridge, and from Peterborough to Corby/Kettering via a new chord at Luffenham.

Rf fully supports EWR and the proposed route from Bedford to Cambridge. An east-to-north curve at Bletchley is essential to enable through passenger and freight services from Cambridge to Milton Keynes, Northampton and beyond, with six tracks between Bletchley and Milton Keynes. The ten stations between Bletchley and Bedford should be reduced to a few ‘travel hub’ stations, with integrated active travel and bus links to nearby communities.

Services at Bedford station should be kept separate, with new platforms on the eastern side and two more tracks north of the station, but with a link from EWR to the MML slow lines to allow freight services from the East of England to reach terminals closer to London, and passenger services from Cambridge to Luton, Luton Airport Parkway and St Albans. An additional platform on the MML Up Fast line is also necessary so that intercity services from the East Midlands can call at Bedford to connect with EWR without incurring any journey time penalties.

EWR should plan for an additional station on the eastern edge of St Neots to serve significant housing development alongside the projected route. Cambridge North and the new Waterbeach station should have ‘turnback’ platforms for trains to run ‘across the city’, so too Cambridge East on the Newmarket line, which must be redoubled for services to Ipswich and Felixstowe.

Major infrastructure projects are process-driven and can take several years to reach the construction phase, so urgent funding commitments and rapid action on the ground are required. Timely delivery of EWR should be seen as a test of the Government's commitment to reform the planning process and support economic growth.

RFEA welcomes the appointment by Norfolk County Council of consultants to look at the potential for new stations including Hethersett/Thickthorn, southwest of Norwich, and Long Stratton between Norwich and Diss. Rf has long advocated these as potential sites.

Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) politicians promoting a busway from the Biomedical Campus to a park and ride site on the A11, rather than reinstating the rail link to Haverhill, have erred. It would not be difficult to create new alignments around the few places where the old trackbed has been built on, and while the rail line would indeed need new structures, so too would the busway. The rail link does have industry support: the DfT RYR team classified it as "a good case for future development", while the projected cost of £800m is totally baseless. With alternative sources of funding, £400m would allow £28m/mile for 14.5 miles, set against £19.3m/mile for the Leven line. Finally, this need not be "just a spur", but could operate across the city to Cambridge North and Waterbeach New Town.

### COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The Esk Valley CRP says that on New Year's Day 2025 Northern will again extend two limited stop Whitby - Middlesbrough return services to Thornaby and the ECML at Darlington to facilitate day trips to the North York Moors National Park and Whitby.

Greater Anglia has announced the formation of its sixth CRP: the 55-mile Mid Anglia route from Ipswich to Cambridge via Stowmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, that could also include Soham on the line to Ely.

### TRANSPORT FOCUS

As rail reform gathers pace, TF and the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) continue to develop a customer community made up of rail users from across a diverse range of needs and experiences that aims to build a clear understanding of how it is for them now, and what they want in the future.

On an overcrowded GWR service from Bodmin to London, Mr R was unable to use his reserved seats and had to stand for five hours with no refreshments. There was limited access to toilets, and no staff members to assist. GWR advised TF that a detailed event plan was in place with a website post relating to the Boardmasters festival and the expected travel disruption. However, as Mr R had booked via Trainline and had amended his train plan, it was unable to send him an advance warning for this particular journey. Recognising that the journey was difficult for the passenger, the operator issued a full refund and an additional e-voucher.

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

To protect the future of Hitachi's Newton Aycliffe factory in County Durham, the Government has awarded it a £500m contract to build 14 new trains.

Passenger journeys and fares revenues continued to increase over the year, but remain short of pre-pandemic levels. Between April 2023 and March 2024 revenue from fares rose by 14% to £10.4 billion compared to the previous twelve months, but at a slower rate than passenger journeys, which rose 16%. Fares income is also 18% below pre-pandemic levels and Government support remains substantial, at just under half of the income required for the day to day running of the railway, so ORR is working with NR and other stakeholders on robust financial monitoring, reporting and holding to account.

ORR has approved [plans by Go-op](#) to operate open access services from next December between Taunton, Frome and Westbury, with some extended to Swindon, and more trains between Taunton and Weston-super-Mare. But in order to use this capacity, the new co-operatively owned operator must show that it has sufficient finance to secure the necessary rolling stock, enhance level crossings, and sustain the operation.

In the year to March 2024, HGVs struck 1,532 rail bridges in Britain causing over 150,000 minutes of delays to passengers. NR urges lorry drivers to 'Wise Up, Size Up' by knowing the height of their vehicle, and choosing a suitable route before setting off.

Local MP Lee Barron has called on North Northamptonshire Council to review its decision to raise the daily charge to park a car at Corby station from £3.50 to £10, albeit with an off peak rate of £5.

Rail User Express reader Simon Geller welcomes TfW's progress, as reported in RUEx last month, but says there is more to do. What was a relaxing and reliable service to West Wales is now a bit of a nightmare. A Stockport – Milford Haven service left full and standing but was empty by Shrewsbury; it needs another unit on the busiest part of this journey. For Milford Haven – Manchester, TfW put on two Class 153 units, with knees up against chins for the 7-hour journey; the sooner these are retired the better. It lost its Class 175 units before it had fully rolled out the new train. Simon's last train, from Cardiff to Manchester, was very plush - but the chef couldn't get into the kitchen, so there were no hot meals, nor even any sandwiches.

On 15 December, CrossCountry will start the first service between Wales and Scotland, with trains from Cardiff and Penzance to Edinburgh via the ECML joining at Birmingham New Street. Southbound trains will divide at Gloucester before proceeding to Cardiff and Plymouth.

Peter Robins notes that TfW advance fares are available almost up to departure time; he uses them when flying into Manchester to go home to Chester. You can't book ahead, as you've no idea if you will land on time, or how long it will take to get through customs, but once at the station, you can use wi-fi to book and download an advance ticket, saving pounds off the cost of a single.

Some Finsbury Park - Moorgate trains began to run under the European Train Control System a year ago. Now, with more drivers trained, they all are. It's part of the £1.4bn East Coast Digital Programme to replace lineside signals on the ECML between King's Cross and Grantham, a base from which ETCS can be expanded across the GB rail network.

The Victorian Society said that a revised proposal to redevelop Liverpool Street Station did not address objections raised by the previous plan, and was still "perverse". It urged NR to "stop looking at this handsome station as a development site", and recognise it as a historic artefact. NR said that, as Britain's busiest station, it needed significant improvement, and a new office building was the way to fund it.

Lord Blunkett has called for an urgent review into "death trap" Tube platforms after he fell into a gap when boarding a District line train with his guide dog at Westminster station. TfL needs to do more to keep visually impaired people safe.

The 2025 European Passenger Federation's [Conference](#) organised by TravelWatch South West will be held in Swindon on 13/14 June. Rf members are entitled to the reduced delegate fee.

The improvement works at Dorchester South Station are finally ending. Whilst some local rail users would like to have seen a more ambitious project, including the provision of proper disabled access between the two platforms, the end result will see improved accessibility on the Platform 1 side, including a better ramp and automatic doors to the booking hall, and better waiting shelters on both platforms. The demolition of the former parcels office has removed a dreadful eyesore, and the rather unkempt area at the front of the station is going to be remodelled. As a key gateway to the County Town, South Station will now present a more welcoming impression to both visitors and residents.



The 58th edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' map](#) includes the withdrawal of LNER between Edinburgh and Glasgow and between Newcastle and Sunderland from the timetable change on 15 December.

...and finally

All Aboard to Northampton aims to display a ticket from every UK station, in alphabetical order with a space for any missing ones. The project has now caught the imagination of a group of train enthusiasts, who have banded together to help ticket collector Elliott Badger fill in the blanks.

Frustrated passengers have been unable to pay for tickets at Melton Mowbray Railway Station because the self-service machines are not accepting notes with the head of King Charles. East Midlands Railway is upgrading its TVMs - but the work will not take place until the new year.

## CONSULTATIONS

- Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU): [Closure of Moorgate Halt Level Crossing](#), closes 20 December.
- DfT: [Closure of Ravensthorpe station](#), closes 5 January.
- East West Rail: [Non-statutory consultation](#), closes 24 January.
- North East Mayor: [Local Transport Plan for NE Combined Authority](#), closes 26 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.

### January

■ Tuesday 7. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 11 February).

■ Thursday 9. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Lewes**.

■ Monday 13. Friends of Littleborough Station, History Centre, **Littleborough**, 1900.

■ Monday 13. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 10 March).

■ Wednesday 15. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900 (Also 12 March).

■ Thursday 16. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.

■ Tuesday 21. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930.

■ Tuesday 28. CRN AGM, **Online**, 1400.

■ 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).

### February

■ Tuesday 11. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Rail Lines Group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.

■ Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.

■ Saturday 22. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St Edmunds**, IP33 1SJ (Also 24 April in Peterborough Museum (joint meeting) and 21 June in Ipswich).

## Further Ahead

- 1 March. East Suffolk Travel Association, Methodist Church, Woodbridge (Also 10 May (AGM)).

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

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