



April 2025

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Ever hopeful, RUX contains its usual quota of rail schemes worthy of financial support. But as Lord Hendy told SELRAP, there is no money - for rail that is, although it seems £10 billion can be found for a new road under the Thames. Even schemes such as Ely area capacity enhancement that would support both of the Government's aims of growth and net zero go begging.

Roger Smith

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

### Newburgh Train Station Group

The Scottish budget prioritised a station for Newburgh, Fife, and Transport Scotland has refreshed its evaluation under the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) protocol, so hopes are high.

### Furness Line Action Group

Tim Farron MP chaired a Cumbria Better Connected meeting on Zoom that was addressed by representatives from NR, Northern, Avanti, Trans Pennine (TPE), Stagecoach and Accessibility.

The WCML will close for the first two weeks in January 2026 to replace the M6 bridge at Clifton, and other work at different points on the WCML will prevent trains running as far as Oxenholme. Settle - Carlisle is being considered as a diversionary route, rather than replacement buses. FLAG's Tony Parker asked if the Cumbrian Coast could act as an alternative; Owain Roberts replied that its single-track sections would limit capacity to do this, but Northern could look to double its capacity with 4-car trains.

Nuclear Transport Solutions, a division of DRS, are taking aggregate from Shap Summit Quarry to the Nuclear Waste Services' repository near Drigg. On four days a week, two trains each carry 750 tons, equivalent to that carried by 36 HGVs. They usually run via Carlisle, but sometimes use the Furness line via Carnforth.

### Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

At the SELRAP AGM in Colne, Andy Dixon reported that Rail Minister Lord Hendy had agreed that re-opening Skipton - Colne was a 'good scheme, with a good business case - but no money was available at present'; the 'progressometer' had moved from orange to green; the Treasury Green Book had scope for looking at the strategic benefits from schemes, not just a cost/benefit analysis.

### **Stalybridge to Huddersfield Rail Users' Group**

SHRUG has met with TPE and the TransPennine Route Upgrade team regarding timetabling and bus replacement during TRU-related work. The remodelling of Huddersfield station will see bus replacement for Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite on at least 19 weekends in 2025, culminating in a month-long closure in September.

Wakefield Kirkgate, Normanton and Castleford gained regular direct services to York on the same day that Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite lost all their through services to Leeds. It seems they will be reinstated from September until December 2026, when it will be impracticable to terminate trains from the west at Huddersfield, but not in the long term.

### **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association**

Northern's Mid Cheshire Line services were abysmal towards the end of 2024; the first two months of 2025 showed a significant improvement, but they will continue to suffer until there is an agreement with the guards on rest day working. Another recurring theme is its inability to make decisions in the best interests of the passengers when things go wrong. In one nightmare scenario, passengers were told to disembark at Mobberley, whence the train ran non-stop to Chester. But the promised bus did not arrive, and the passengers were abandoned at a station with no information boards, so they had no idea when the next train would arrive.

Stockport Council and TfGM back a new station at Cheadle, but NR and Northern do not. MCRUA also has reservations, as the time taken for the extra call would affect presentation times at Edgeley and Mickle Trafford Junctions. To compensate, some stations such as Ashley and Plumley could be reduced to a 2-hourly service.

### **East Suffolk Travel Association**

Leaflets and posters are being produced to promote an enhanced Katch bus service centred on Wickham Market station (in Campsea Ashe).

Committee member John Thompson wrote personally to the Transport Secretary on GBR and its policy on bicycles on trains: "I think most operators do their best to accommodate bikes on their services within the limitations of their rolling stock, [but] the variations in capacity for bikes make for clumsy journeys involving more than one operator. I hope there will be dialogue on the issue, perhaps even a working party. Renationalisation will be an opportunity for a common policy, rather than different managements having different ideas and perceptions."

ESTA will launch a Railway 200 exhibition in the Fromus Centre, Saxmundham on 11 October, and then take it around the area. Its theme will be "East Suffolk Railway – Past, Present & Future" (or "Past, Present and Potential"). It will promote ESTA and its aspirations for the coming decade, as set out in "[A Railway For All Purposes](#)" that it published in December 2022.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

In a meeting with Lee Dillon MP and Danny Kruger MP, Tom Lydon (GWR's head of public affairs) said that extending the Bedwyn service to Westbury (involving additional rolling stock), further electrification or battery-operated trains were not short-term options. He acknowledged that how the line is operated is not ideal but there isn't the money to sort it out. GWR is constrained by tight governance from the DfT, and all fare revenue goes directly to the Treasury. It is also likely that GWR will be nationalised next year.

## Pilning Station Group

Despite stiff local opposition, Pilning station's footbridge was demolished in 2016 to make way for electrification wires, cutting off access to the westbound platform altogether and rendering the service "one direction only" towards Bristol. To return, passengers have to go through the Severn Tunnel into Wales, change at Severn Tunnel Junction and return the way they have just come, extending a 20-minute journey to one-hour-plus.

Local residents are furious over the recent theft of its entrance gate. Group Chair Olga Taylor said: "If Pilning station were treated as a fully functioning station — with proper CCTV surveillance, regular stopping services, a safe and accessible footbridge, and a steady stream of passengers — such blatant vandalism or theft would be far less likely to occur. Instead, the station remains forgotten and undervalued, leaving it open to these disgraceful incidents."

## 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

Ahead of Rachel Reeve's Spring Statement, Neil Middleton, Rf Vice Chair said: "Rail is much more than a cost to HM Treasury – it is a key enabler for the government's wider policy objectives. Rail helps kick start economic growth and break down the barriers to opportunities, so improved rail performance and connectivity help achieve wider objectives such as the government's Plan for Change. It can also bring in more fare revenue, so reducing costs paid by the taxpayer. We have one key desire tomorrow – to see evidence that the Government sees the railway as much more than just a subsidy payment."

## RAILFUTURE SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government has long been urged to dual the entire A96 road between Aberdeen and Inverness at a cost of up to £5 billion. To find a cheaper alternative, Transport Scotland commissioned and has now published an independent report that advocates several railway improvements including higher line speeds, more passing loops and more rail freight.

St Andrews will again host the Open Championship in 2027. The detailed options appraisal for a railway link has languished in the Cabinet Secretary's in-tray for a year, but this development could help to push the case to the top of the pile.

## RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

Yorkshire's three Metro Mayors recently signed the White Rose Agreement to harness the powers of devolution. Lord Blunkett will review its rail connectivity. Tracy Brabin mentioned Leeds -Sheffield electrification, but the need is for a rolling programme based on the 10-year old Northern Sparks task force report, which gave top priority to the strategic Calder Valley line.

Transport for Wales is introducing cycle trains this year, based on Class 153 one-car sprinters; ScotRail already has these Active Travel Units, but not yet England. There is massive potential to deploy them in Yorkshire and across the North to access its National Parks and the numerous cross-country trails, eg the Coast to Coast. The train is the best way to get to the starting point and then and back home - if you can get your bike on board! So where is the vision for fully integrated, sustainable tourism and Active Travel in the North?

Reinstating Beverley to York would involve several new stretches of line, and the strategic outline business case (SOBC) submitted jointly by the Minsters Rail Campaign and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council in 2022 under RYR examined a number of possible alternative routes. They will now make the case for funding a full outline business case (OBC) to the Hull & East Yorkshire Combined Authority (CA) as it becomes a reality with the election of a mayor on 1 May.

Tidying up the Hope Valley line continues a year after the capacity scheme became operational. But despite the new and improved tracks, there still isn't platform and track capacity around either Sheffield or Piccadilly to run more trains. Nor would there be enough rolling stock or train crews to run them anyway without cutting services elsewhere. Northern doesn't have enough volunteers as it is to run its full Sunday timetable.

## **RAILFUTURE WALES**

Rf explained its purpose and aspirations in Wales to David Chadwick, MP for Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe. They include at least a two hourly service on every line, and a simplified fare structure. Mr Chadwick was particularly interested in the Heart of Wales line through his constituency, which has been cut from five trains/day to four.

Civil engineering group Graham has been selected to design and build the £100m tram–train line between Cardiff Central station and Cardiff Bay, which could open by the end of 2028.

## **RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS**

RfWM questions the need for a third runway at London Heathrow when Birmingham has spare capacity - and its excellent rail and road connections will get even better: with HS2, it will be just 31mins from Old Oak Common, against 21 by the Elizabeth line to Heathrow. However, the Government still subsidises the more polluting form of transport by not taxing aviation fuel.

Preet Kaur Gill MP and local politicians met with Midlands Connect and representatives from West Midlands Rail Executive, West Midlands Trains and NR at University station to discuss how the Midlands Rail Hub could deliver up to 100 extra trains into and out of Birmingham every day, with a “turn up and go” service on the Cross-City line through University and Five Ways stations.

The MPs for Lichfield, Northfield, Selly Oak and Erdington also back the improvements to the Hub: new platforms at Birmingham Moor Street station (adjacent to Curzon Street HS2 station) will allow for more trains from both the Worcester/Bristol and Derby/Leicester directions with no need to use New Street station. The project will also directly link Coventry and Leicester.

## **RAILFUTURE LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST**

Subject to further information from Gatwick Airport Ltd by 24 April, the Transport Secretary is minded to approve its application for the routine use of the existing northern runway. To allow for more consultation, she has put the deadline for a final decision back to 27 October.

## **RAILFUTURE SEVERNSIDE**

Running along the River Avon under the Clifton Suspension Bridge, the 9-mile Bristol to Portishead line closed to passengers in 1964. Dan Norris, Mayor of the West of England CA, has announced that funding for its restoration and for another new station at Pill has finally been agreed. Construction is expected to begin this summer, with services starting in 2027.

WECA has also agreed nearly £3m of funding to start on design and preparatory work for a new station at North Filton in Bristol as part of Metrowest Phase 2. It will serve the £2 billion Brabazon housing development on the former Filton Airfield.

## RAILFUTURE WESSEX

Rf supports the bid by Alliance Rail (Southern) for an open access service from Marchwood on the freight only Waterside line west of Southampton. It would also restore a third train each hour from Southampton to Waterloo after the service was reduced during the pandemic.

Rf also wants a station to serve the 6,000-home development at Welborne, north of Fareham. A site for it has been safeguarded, but the fight to get it built goes on. There are also calls for a new station further up the line as Eastleigh Borough Council seeks sites for more housing. First identify the location, and then the resources needed to make for an attractive service.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

This year's Better Transport Week from 16 - 22 June will highlight how more sustainable transport can help bring communities and people together, with positive stories from around England and Wales, and encourage people to travel sustainably during the week.

Gemma Bridge PhD reports on the Engaging Young People in Consultations ([EYPiC](#)) project. The existing model often suffers low participation, where public input has little influence over decisions. Young people are unsure how to engage, and those who do say that their contributions are ignored or undervalued. A shift from tokenistic consultations to participatory decision-making will help to ensure that young voices can truly shape the future of transport and local governance.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Kettering Town Council has made a £3,000 Environmental Grant to the Civic Society to add to £1,000 from CRN for a series of panels on the inside of the station's covered footbridge.

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

In March, ORR published an industry-wide review on [Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Health and Safety Interventions in Rail](#), and wrote a [letter](#) to industry with a summary of its key findings and recommendations. It also published its annual report into rail productivity. Expenditure on the operational railway is over £25 billion/year, with nearly half of this government funded, so even small percentage changes in productivity can make a big difference in value for passengers, freight users and taxpayers. Productivity in the industry has recovered since the pandemic, but remains below the level seen nearly a decade ago.

The January RUX warned of the danger of new 25,000 volt overhead electric wires. But the 750 volt third rail can be just as lethal, so NR and British Transport Police have launched a series of films called "[Stay off the Tracks](#)" as part of their You vs Train campaign, to educate people of the horrific consequences of trespassing on the railway, which spikes during British Summer Time. New survey data reveals 59% of Brits don't know what the 'third' rail is, and 38% believe electrocution from rail tracks won't cause serious injury.

The Transport for Wales stations at Cwmbran and Ludlow are now step free, with Newtown, Abergavenny, Llanelli, and Flint to follow shortly.

A year ago, RUX reported that drivers were being penalised for using the wrong car park at Long Buckby, west of Northampton. But despite extra signage, it's [still happening](#).

The growth in footfall on the Corby line, from 118,000 in 2009/10 to over 498,000 in 2023/24, leading to its electrification and double the service, shows how enhanced connectivity can boost urban economic regeneration, eg East West Rail (EWR) between Oxford - Cambridge. However, in [Maximising EWR](#) England's Economic Heartland (EEH) says EWR must also catalyse wider transport corridors such as Northampton - Milton Keynes - Aylesbury - High Wycombe - Old Oak Common, and Bristol to Ipswich and Norwich.

With Innovate UK funding, and in collaboration with the University of Exeter, EEH and City Science are leveraging innovative techniques, including AI, to automate and enhance the development of a [strategic multi-modal transport model](#). EEH Chair Cllr Liz Leffman said: "It will be a vital tool for EEH and its local and regional partners as we ensure transport is better integrated, and investment in schemes such as EWR is maximised".

The EWR consultation that closed on 24 January saw over 5,500 responses, and attendance more than double the previous round of engagement. Chiltern Railways has been chosen to operate the Oxford - Milton Keynes section via Bicester Village and Bletchley, due to open later this year, and the new station at Winslow.

A Luton Council [petition](#) calls on the Government and NR to commit to a full redevelopment of Luton station, as well as a date for step free access at Leagrave Station.

A strategic rail freight interchange on the former Handley Page airfield at Radlett, on the MML and near the M25, is now underway after the High Court rejected an appeal by protesters. However, the Transport Secretary has [refused](#) the planning application for one at Hinckley in Leicestershire.

...and finally

Three Victorian rail clocks above Newcastle Central Station's main entrance have broken five months after being repaired at a cost of £21,000, and NR said they would be accurate for "years to come". A specialist team is investigating.

## CONSULTATIONS

- DfT: [Rail Sector Transformation Programme](#), closes 15 April.

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.

### April

■ Saturday 12. Rf London & South East AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, **London**, EC1Y 1AU, 1100.

■ Saturday 12. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station 1400.

■ Tuesday 29. Rf Northern Branches Webinar, 1030.

■ Tuesday 29. Rf Thames Valley AGM, West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX2 0BT, 1730.

■ Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).

### May

■ Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway division in person, 1800.

■ Saturday 10. Rf Yorkshire AGM, Mill Hill Chapel, City Square, **Leeds**, 1300.

■ Saturday 10. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, Parcels Office, **Lowestoft** station, 1400.

■ Monday 12 May. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900.

■ Tuesday 13. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.

■ Wednesday 14. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.

- Thursday 15. Rf East Anglia (joint conference), **Peterborough** Museum, 1300  
(Also 21 June in Ipswich).
- Thursday 15. Friends of the Barton Line, No1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** at 1900, (Also 16 July at the White Swan **Barton** (AGM)).
- Thursday 15. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 4 July).
- Saturday 17. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **St Albans**.
- Saturday 17. Rf West Midlands AGM, **Birmingham**

#### **Further Ahead**

- 4 July. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Norseman Hotel, **Wick**, 1200.
- 5 July. Rf AGM, Great North Museum, Barras Bridge, **Newcastle**, 1100.

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