



May 2025

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Both Rf and RUX are non-political. However, it would be remiss not to speculate on the impact that Reform might have in the areas that it now controls, both county wide and mayoral, and on future Government policy. With devolution comes financial clout, while former Transport Secretary Louise Haigh has argued that tax rises as part of an 'economic reset' would allow a 'serious programme of investment and reindustrialisation'. Carpe diem!

Roger Smith

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

### Rail Action Group East of Scotland

The draft December 2025 timetable had gaps in service during the evening peak: 1hr 31m for Dunbar, 1hr 36m for East Linton, and 2hr 1m for Reston. RAGES sent letters to the UK Minister for Transport, all the Train Operating Companies (TOCs), Scottish Transport Secretary, MSPs, UK MPs for East Lothian and the Southeast of Scotland, local councillors and community councils. Committee members also raised its concerns at a Transpennine Stakeholders event in January.

The county town of Haddington still lacks a train service to the capital. Although East Lothian Council's consultant, Stantec, passed the second stage of its Access Study narrowing down the possible options for appraisal by Transport Scotland in March 2024, nothing more has been heard, so RAGES has asked the Transport Secretary, Fiona Hyslop MSP, for a meeting.

Ten years on from when the 30-mile Borders Railway from Edinburgh to Tweedbank opened, approval has been given to explore the case for completing it to Carlisle. The UK DfT and the Scottish Government will each fund up to £5m through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. This will allow the appointment of a Project Manager to lead a team to assess its benefits and challenges. The feasibility study and the development of the business case is the next key part of the project.

### Lakes Line Rail User Group

[TriLink](#) is NR's long-running programme of intelligent renewal of the WCML from Warrington to Gretna, over the Scottish border. NR will close the line from 31 December to 15 January 2026 to replace the bridge over the M6 at Clifton, south of Penrith. Built in 1967, it was designed with materials and procedures that are now outdated – although the next railway bridge to the north, over the Eamont, has lasted since the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway opened in 1846!

LLRUG commends three Ranger tickets that include the Lakes Line:

- **Cumbria Day Ranger:** stretches from Dumfries and Lockerbie in the north to Preston and Skipton in the south, and Whitehaven in the west to Haltwhistle in the east
- **Cumbria Round Robin:** includes the Lakes, Furness, and Cumbrian Coast Lines, and the WCML from Carlisle to Lancaster
- **Lakes Day Ranger:** includes the Lakes, Furness, Cumbrian Coast, and Morecambe lines, the WCML between Penrith and Lancaster, and Stagecoach buses including Workington – Penrith, as well as a scheduled half lake cruise with Windermere Lake Cruises.

### **Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line**

Authored by a railwayman closely involved with the SCL, a signalling engineer and two train planners, the internally circulated Allport is a highly credible report on the line's potential. With minimal additional capital work/infrastructure, it could support 80mph 'InterCity' services such as Leeds – Glasgow and an enhanced stopping service, as well as all existing and predicted freight paths at the current 60mph.

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

At a memorial event on 26 April for the late Derek Jennings, a founder member and past Chairman of SELRAP, Pendle MP Jonathan Hinder unveiled a plaque at Colne Railway Station, with former Pendle MP Andrew Stephenson also in attendance. And a bench at Brierfield station was also dedicated to Derek's memory.

### **Light Rail Transit Association**

LRTA welcomes the planned extension of West Midland Metro to Solihull, and hopes that the Combined Authority secures funding for a project that will greatly improve connectivity throughout East Birmingham and Solihull, and across the county.

### **Friends of the Barton Line**

At its Stakeholder Conference in January, East Midlands Railway (EMR) said that a shortage of wheel sets would limit the availability of its Class 158 units for up to 12 months; the asbestos roof on the building in which the sets are manufactured was blown off during Storm Darragh.

### **Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group**

January saw 40 EMR Norwich services to or from Nottingham or Liverpool cancelled. February was better with 26 cancelled, and just 12 in March.

EMR also told its Stakeholder Conference that its fleet of Class 170 Turbostars will have more parts standardised and an optimised maintenance regime. The ex-Anglia units will not get new seats except in the former First Class area. There was no mention of wi-fi, or whether anyone has made the toilets work. All units, including Class 158s, will have a new passenger information system, and those 158s without phone chargers will get them.

As part of its community support, Great Anglia has awarded Breckland District Council £12,000 to survey the Grade II listed Attleborough station building that dates from 1845 with a view to its potential utilisation. It has stood empty since its renovation in 2018/19.

### **Fen Line Users Association**

As well as Railway 200, this year FLUA celebrates its 40th Anniversary. However, train travel today isn't always as nice as it should be. A Fen Line user said: "I used to love a long train journey, but there is not much pleasure to be gained from a comfortable train if someone in the carriage is watching TikTok or having a phone conversation on speaker mode."

Some Inter-City services have 'quiet coaches', with a conductor to enforce the rules, but not the Fen Line, as it was deemed impractical to police such a policy effectively. The behaviour on trains sadly reflects a more general decline in good manners and acceptable conduct. Recently a college student was doing her make up and styling her hair using heated tongs plugged into the onboard power socket; whilst this might seem bizarre, for many it appears to be perfectly acceptable!

GTR's accessibility forum discussed the poor reliability of lifts. Waiting for non-standard parts often delays repairs. Passengers needing assistance can book it in advance or from a help point on the platform, but should use the "emergency" button that connects to GTR's operations centre, not the "information" button that NR enquiries often fails to answer; GTR is looking to revise the labelling to make this clearer. Staff based at Downham Market also provide assistance at Watlington and Littleport, but Waterbeach is too remote, so passengers requesting assistance there are provided with a taxi to Cambridge or Ely.

Class 379s have started to appear on Great Northern. Videos on YouTube show that internally the units look in good order - while in First Class there's the relative luxury of reclining in 2 + 1 seating!

### **British Regional Transport Association**

BRTA calls on all tiers of government and authority to restore tracks for more trains, and people and goods by rail. To build a groundswell of support for reopening Guildford – Shoreham with links to the existing Horsham – Portsmouth line, it needs volunteers to deliver a questionnaire around the Guildford and Cranleigh areas. Politicians know that being 'earthed' is essential to court votes at election time, and we must have the same savvy instinct to what works; if leafleting didn't, politicians would not continue to use it regardless of a digital age!

Other BRTA campaigns include Stansted Airport – Braintree; Northampton - Market Harborough, and the Great Central corridor. And regardless of East West Rail, the Bedford - Bletchley shuttle should continue with all stations retained and upgraded, and a Sunday service for leisure.

### **Bedford Commuters Association**

The number of Thameslink cancellations due to staff unavailability has significantly dropped since the New Year, and as more new drivers complete their training it should fall still further.

The consultation document A Railway Fit for Britain's Future rightly identifies the number of organisations and interfaces as the source of high costs and inefficiencies in the industry. BCA would like to see all the functions of the ORR transferred to other bodies such as the Competition and Markets Authority or the new Standards Authority. And there is no reason why GBR should not train and license drivers. It should also be responsible for capital projects and new trains, with five-year plans concurrent with the Control Periods to develop and enhance the network, levelling the playing field with the Road Investment Strategy.

Universal's [first theme park in Europe](#) near Bedford could attract 8.5 million visitors in its first year. A full planning proposal will be submitted to the Government, with construction expected to start in 2026 and opening in 2031. It will transform the Marston Vale section of East West Rail; the statutory consultation next year will have revised station locations and service patterns. London and Luton Airport will have trains to Wixams station on the MML, but its construction has been paused to consider proposals for a larger one. The Mayor of Bedford thinks it could possibly accommodate trains from abroad.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

Andrew Robinson, NR's Senior Strategic Planner – Western region, has updated BTPG on its plans for an hourly service to Westbury: "Since the strategic study last autumn, our internal design team have reviewed and refined the preferred track and signalling layout for Platform 0 at Westbury.

“Western Gateway have proposed to fund a follow-on piece of work looking at the building and civils work associated with bringing the platform back into use, and we are in the process of agreeing the contract for that, with the intention to start work imminently. We are engaging with train and freight operating colleagues to agree the scope of a further phase of timetabling work. This will include testing options for retaining semi-fast calls at Pewsey in peak hours”.

Funding will then be required to develop a full Strategic Outline Business Case. “A strong and united voice will be needed to encourage the necessary investment in Wiltshire, and we hope you will lend your support to that”. However, BTPG does not expect this to happen in this decade; in the meantime, it will continue to campaign for the full reinstatement of hourly direct services to Paddington.

### **Tunbridge Wells Rail Travellers' Association**

TWRTA has sadly folded. However, members are entitled to free membership of Tonbridge Line Commuters (TLC).

### **Dorchester Transport Action Group**

On 4 April, Dorchester TAG celebrated the opening of a remodelled South station. Its Secretary Giles Watts tried out the new [Beryl Bike point](#), a good local example of modal integration.

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

Campaigning means influencing and ultimately convincing, so RfL&SE must know its audience, right down to the personal level of local Cabinet Members where it has specific campaigns such as the Hoo Peninsula Railway and Uckfield – Ringmer – Lewes.

### **TRANSPORT FOCUS**

A TF train operator [scorecard](#) examines how passengers rate their overall journey, the punctuality of their service, the level of cancellations, and satisfaction with complaints. It will use this evidence to challenge train companies to improve their reliability, and address issues such as information during disruption and crowding.

### **CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT**

On 11 June, the Comprehensive Spending Review will set out four-year spending plans for every Government department. CBT wants to ensure the Chancellor provided for public transport.

Rail through the Channel Tunnel currently uses less than 50% of its passenger capacity, and just 10% for freight. A wider range of rail services such as UK to Geneva, Frankfurt or the French Alps would also be good news for the planet: there are 17 million flights/year to cities in mainland Europe that trains could easily reach, as explored in a new [CBT report](#). But with international connectivity outside the scope of the rail reform programme, this potential risks being overlooked.

Transport affects both physical and mental health, yet most policy is focused on economic outcomes and carbon reduction. CBT asked [Dr Aagash Vadera GP](#) what part it plays in his patients' health, and how the Government could make things better. “We are losing the battle against inactivity. Transport has a key role to play in countering this trend. Our current transport system bakes in sedentary living, yet active travel (including at the start and end of each trip) makes movement an intrinsic part of our day-to-day lives, thereby unlocking the monumental benefits of increased physical activity”.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

To help members get the most from Community Rail Week from 19-25 May, CRN has developed a [digital toolkit](#) that includes social media posts, online graphics, and a press release template.

CRN's [tourism and leisure strategy](#) to March 2028 is focused on five key aims:

- Support members to deliver effective, evidence-led campaigns locally and regionally
- Provide online platforms for members to bolster their tourism and leisure promotions
- Encourage the tourism and leisure industry to promote rail as a sustainable and healthy way to travel, drawing on and working with community rail
- Influence strategy and thinking at a regional level, towards more sustainable, inclusive and healthy travel, drawing on local insights and initiatives, including in community rail
- Secure funding for CRN's tourism and leisure work, to provide a sound financial footing.

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

The minimum age to be a train driver has been lowered from 20 to 18. The current shortage often disrupts services, and TOCs will struggle to replace the number retiring. Aslef General Secretary Mick Whelan said the industry is missing out on young people "as they don't wait around until they turn 20 to find a career". NR's Armed Forces Employee Network highlights how transferrable skills like leadership, discipline and problem solving also make the rail industry ideal for veterans.

[CCTV footage](#) shows pedestrians risking their life at level crossings. In the four years from 1 April 2021, there were 1574 such incidents, over one/day. Mobile phones distract young people in particular, when total concentration is vital. A train doing 100mph the length of a football pitch away will be on you in just two seconds.

ORR's Business Plan for 2025 supports the Government's agenda for civil service efficiencies and savings. More streamlined processes, including the use of AI, will improve response times and thus productivity. Reducing the administrative burden will benefit both ORR and its stakeholders.

ORR has issued the Authorisation to Place into Service electrification of the Midland Main Line between Kettering and Wigston, south of Leicester. Seven bridges and four signal gantries on this section use [voltage controlled clearance](#) technology to avoid the need for bridge rebuilds and lengthy road closures. EMR is set to introduce its £400m bi-mode Aurora InterCity fleet on the MML in the autumn. Test-runs and staff training are underway.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander MP is to address this year's European Passengers' Federation (EPF) [conference](#) that brings together public transport users' associations from some 30 countries. It will be held in English in Swindon on 13/14 June, the first time in the UK since 2009. Rf members receive a 50% reduction in the conference fee.

NR has totally renovated the grade II-listed [Keighley station](#) in partnership with Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, which has transformed the historic water tower into a visitor centre. Guests at the official unveiling on 4 April were treated to a trip along the heritage line behind a steam engine dating from the era when the station was built.

The Government is to contribute £30m to the reopening of Doncaster Sheffield Airport, formerly RAF Finningley and then Robin Hood Airport. Alongside the Doncaster – Lincoln line, it should have a direct rail link, ideally via a loop off the ECML – as RUX reported in 2019!

Bookings have opened for visits to [Inspiration](#), the Railway 200 exhibition train to be launched at the Severn Valley Railway in Worcestershire on 27 June. In the following year it will visit 60 locations across Britain, showcasing rail's past, present and future in fun and engaging ways. Admission to the train is free, but normal entry charges to heritage railways and private sites where it is located will apply.

To operate under ETCS (European Train Control System), each class of locomotive must show that it can do so effectively and safely. As part of the East Coast Digital Programme (ECDP) heritage pathfinder project, 60163 Tornado, an evolution of the Peppercorn Class A1 built in 2008, was tested at speed overnight on the Cambrian line between Shrewsbury and Newtown, and Deltic 55022 Royal Scots Grey is expected to undergo dynamic testing on the line later this year. Freight locomotives 66039 and 67002 are also getting first-in-class fitment of ETCS.

During the weekend of 17-18 May, ECDP will achieve a significant milestone as the old signals on the Northern City Line between Finsbury Park and Moorgate are turned off and taken out of use. Every train on this section will then be signalled digitally – a first for a commuter railway in the UK. There will also be high-speed testing between Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin prior to this section going live in early 2026, and preparatory work between Biggleswade and Peterborough.

ACME and NR Property have submitted plans to increase the capacity of [Liverpool Street station](#) from 118 to 200 million passengers a year and create a landmark gateway to the City. New office space above the station will cover the cost running into hundreds of millions of pounds.

Access for All projects are now complete at Herne Bay, Stoneleigh, Shortlands and Leatherhead; work at Hither Green is ongoing. However, the National Technical Specification Notice states that lifts are not obligatory for stations with fewer than 1,000 passengers/day, or an accessible station within 31 miles on the same route, so some stations such as Harlington, north of Luton, lose out – there a £7.9m project will merely replace its ageing footbridge.

NR and GWR are merging their control functions; their teams in Swindon will manage jointly, with Daryn McCombe, GWR's Train Service Delivery and Performance Director, also serving as Network Operations Director.

On 26 April, the signal boxes at Farncombe, Petersfield and Haslemere passed their final steam train - 35028 Merchant Navy Class Clan Line on the first part of its Great Britain XVII tour - before being decommissioned and control transferred to the Basingstoke Rail Operating Centre (ROC). The Haslemere box will be converted into a small museum run by the Community Station and Signal Box Trust.

The 59th edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' map](#) has no new routes but a few tweaks: through Bristol - Oxford Saturday services are withdrawn for the summer, so the Didcot West curve is removed until September; the Carmarthen avoiding line is now disused, and an error in routing LNER trains in the Bradford area has been corrected. Also some owners are changing: DfT OLR Holdings is now DfT Operator Ltd, and takes over SWR (and c2c from July), and [GTS Rail Operations Ltd](#) has taken over the Elizabeth Line from the MTR Corporation (Crossrail) Ltd. No new open access operators are expected until early 2026.

...and finally

On 10 April, following two cancellations, the 1618 to Carmarthen left London Paddington jam-packed. So when it made an unscheduled stop at Swindon to collect a relief driver, the guard opened the doors to let in some fresh air. Eight people took the opportunity to get off and wait on the platform – which was a mistake as, with no announcement, the doors closed and the train left with their luggage still on board! GWR has apologised for the inconvenience this caused.

## CONSULTATIONS

- Planning Inspectorate: [Gatwick Airport Northern Runway](#), closes 9 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

- Saturday 17. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Paul's Church, Blandford Road, **St Albans**, 1100 (Also 17 June and 17 July on Zoom, both at 1930).
- Saturday 17. Rf West Midlands AGM, **Birmingham**

### June

- Tuesday 10. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also 12 August).
- Friday/Saturday 13/14. European Passengers' Federation annual conference. GWR STEAM Museum, **Swindon**.
- Tuesday 17. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 5 August and 16 September).
- Thursday 19. London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, **Brighton**, BN1 1YD, 1800 (Also 17 July Online).
- Saturday 21. Rf East Midlands AGM, Central Library, **Nottingham**, 1300.
- Saturday 21. Rf East Anglia, St. Mary's at Stoke, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, 1400.
- 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).

### Further Ahead

- 4 July. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Norseman Hotel, Riverside, **Wick**, 1200.
- 5 July. Rf AGM, Great North Museum, Barras Bridge, **Newcastle**, 1100.
- 10 July. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 18 September and 20 November).
- 12 July. British Regional Transport Association AGM, United Reformed Church, 83 Portsmouth Road, **Guildford**, GU2 4VS, 1400.
- 14 July. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs. BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 8 September).
- 16 July. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800.
- 16 August. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.

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