



September 2025

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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As well as 200 years of the modern railway, September saw the 10th anniversary of the Borders Line in Scotland reopening. Like the few others since, it has exceeded every expectation, so should inspire many more. Keep the campaigns going!

Roger Smith

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

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association

MARPA discussed a number of concerns with Greater Anglia in July, but these need to be seen in a context of generally punctual services provided by high quality trains and helpful staff, making for increased passenger footfall – but that in itself can lead to problems.

From 18 June - 11 July, many of the 0618 and 0656 services from Ipswich to Cambridge ran with 3-car units, sometimes resulting in passengers left on the platform. GA said that in that period there had been availability issues of 4-car units, with NR activity around Norwich overnight causing dispatch problems at Crown Point depot. Apart from two at the end of the day, it aims to run all Mid Anglia services with 4-car units, in particular the 0618 and 0656 from Ipswich, and the 1646 and 1746 from Cambridge. Since the meeting, 4-car trains have been deployed more routinely.

The May 2026 timetable will address some current morning gaps, but further stops at Kennett are unlikely. And a later final service from Cambridge depends on completion of the wider Cambridge resignalling project. The scant improvement to the Mid Anglia timetable is disappointing, although the obstacles to this lie outside GA's remit. A meeting with GA involving NR would be helpful.

Active travel to and from Bury St Edmunds station has been boosted by a new cycle storage facility adjacent to the north side entrance that opened in 2022, and a zebra crossing on Tayfen Road.

Bedford Commuters Association

BCA welcomes the announcement by Universal Studios to build a theme park just outside Bedford, but Wixams will need a much larger railway station than would be needed solely for its residents. BCA will press for it to have four platforms built in two phases:

- Firstly on the slow lines with facilities for residents, and construction workers at the theme park
- Then on the fast lines to complete the station.

BCA urges the Government to reconsider pausing MML electrification, as design work will be halted, and teams re-established at great cost.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

The Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle is not always held when connecting trains from Paddington are delayed; on two occasions, it left with passengers either on the overbridge or about to board. GWR has told its staff not to allow this to happen. Passengers can request a hold by messaging WhatsApp at 07890 608043; however, one doesn't always get a positive response.

GWR has a hold policy for weekdays, but BTPG also wants one for the two-hourly Sunday service at Reading; its Control staff need clarity on which trains to hold. If the delay is going to be well over an hour or indeterminate, ask the Duty Station Manager to arrange a taxi. At Newbury, speak to the platform staff, or use the Help Points if the station is unstaffed. BTPG has asked GWR to arrange a contract with a Newbury-based taxi firm; at present, taxis have to come from Reading.

GWR has yet to say how introducing the Class 175 trains will affect the Bedwyn service; the fear is that the three IETs that it lost could simply bolster the Paddington fleet. The December timetable is unchanged, so the next opportunity to restore a direct off-peak Paddington service is next May.

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

Last year, the RPI increased by 3.6% and rail fares by 4.6%. One percent over 4.8% this year would see a rise of 5.8%. Rf spokesman Bruce Williamson says raising fares above inflation cannot be justified: "It's ripping off the customer, driving people off the trains and onto our congested road network, which is in no one's interest." DfT responded: "No decisions have been made on next year's fares, but our aim is that prices balance affordability for both passengers and taxpayers."

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The [Travelling with Confidence](#) project funded by the Motability Foundation helps to develop the confidence, skills and resilience for hundreds of disabled people across the UK in planning and making trips by rail. As part of the programme, CRN is providing some grants and support to accredited CRPs to set up similar local initiatives in their areas, and contribute to the wider project up to December 2026.

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

ORR has approved three more open access services on the ECML from December to enhance connectivity from King's Cross to Glasgow, Hull and Newcastle, but rejected three via the WCML, including that of the Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway. It is currently assessing proposals from Eurostar and potential new users of Temple Mills depot to determine its best use, and expects to make a decision at the end of October.

In a 'deep dive' into ORR's Rail Network Investment Framework, some 200 stakeholders had a strong appetite to invest in the rail sector, but identified barriers such as a lack of clear policy on encouraging private capital and of commercial models, limited visibility of long-term investment pipelines, and complex delivery pathways with uncertain planning and approval processes.

An alternative to university, apprenticeships in the rail industry offer real career opportunities. Hands-on experience, structured learning and nationally recognised qualifications develop skills essential to its next generation of experts.

On 6 September, the Scottish First Minister John Swinney joined around 100 guests in Galashiels to mark ten years since the Borders Railway to Tweedbank reopened with seven new stations. The line has since seen over 13m passenger journeys. It has also been a catalyst for social and economic change, helping to generate inward investment to local communities, and unlocking over 400 acres of land along the line for commercial development.

The £9m station at East Kilbride that opened on 20 August is more accessible and significantly improves the passenger experience, with a new ticket office, barriers and waiting area. The wider East Kilbride enhancement project is a £144m investment by the Scottish Government to electrify the line and improve rail services between the town and Glasgow.

The Scottish Government has scrapped peak fares on Scotrail trains. A pilot scheme was ended in September 2024 for a lack of funding, but if the new scheme does not become self-financing through increased passenger numbers, the ScotRail budget will bear the cost - a simpler and more flexible form of ticketing.

Contrast that with LNER's "Simpler Fares pilot" that now includes every station from King's Cross to Stevenage. So from Knebworth to Newcastle, you can no longer buy a flexible Super Off-Peak single for £91.90. Other than the Anytime Single at £176.90(!), the only options are a journey at a set time, or what it calls 'Semi Flexible', so you can travel on a 'valid train' up to 70 minutes before or after your booked journey.

But in a new digital ticketing trial, East Midlands Railway (EMR) passengers between Leicester, Derby and Nottingham can now pay the best fare for their journey by checking in and out on an [app](#) that uses GPS to track their travel. For ticket inspections and to go through ticket barriers, it will present a unique barcode to be scanned. Northern will conduct a further trial in Yorkshire from the end of September.

EMR has added the following routes to its penalty fare network:

- Belper to Matlock
- Crewe to Nottingham (except Peartree)
- Peterborough to Doncaster via Lincoln
- Nottingham to Liverpool Lime Street (except Irlam, Hough Green and Hunts Cross)
- Nottingham to Lincoln (except Bleasby, Rolleston and Thurgarton).

NR will partner VolkerRail, Laing O'Rourke, AtkinsRéalis and Siemens Mobility to deliver the next stage of the Midlands Rail Hub. Two new chords in Bordesley will connect the Chiltern main line into Moor Street with the Camp Hill lines that link the South West to the East Midlands, and reopening Platform 4 at Snow Hill will permit more services to London Marylebone. Redeveloping Kings Norton station and its lines will enable extra Cross City trains, as well as new services.

Bedford Council is against new East West Rail plans to demolish ten properties in Ashburnham Road including a GP surgery, a Polish cultural centre, Council-owned temporary accommodation, multiple flats and long-established local businesses. EWR claim that the project could otherwise take another two to three years.

South Eastern Railway (SER) has engaged Flint Engineering to combat excessive heat in its signalling cabinets. In its new, patented IsoMat™ technology, liquid in a mat of sealed channels transfers heat through a rapid cycle of evaporation and condensation. It requires no power, maintenance, or internal modification, and can be installed in under an hour.

From December, SER will extend some of its busiest trains from 8 to 12 carriages, and three more Class 377 Electrostar trains with air conditioning, charging points and greater comfort will join the fleet. The improvements respond to growing passenger demand and feedback. SER saw almost

138m journeys last year – up 9m from the previous year. Growth is continuing this year, and journey numbers are on track to be over 143m by the end of March 2026.

On 31 August, Bristol Temple Meads celebrated its 185th birthday. Its name derives from the Knights Templar, who once owned the land it was built on. When Brunel opened the station in 1840, passengers could travel as far as Bath; through traffic to London started almost a year later.

The [Telegraph](#) reports that suspension of the final phase of the South West Resilience Programme threatens the very existence of the only line to Cornwall. Newton Abbott MP Martin Wrigley said that sections of towering sandstone cliff could fall onto the line at any time; it may now be a case of when, not if. A NR engineer told him that the 2014 collapse was still not properly understood: "It was a sudden, almost tectonic type of shift, not gradual. So the gauges they are putting on will tell us that nothing has changed until suddenly the cliff collapses and there's a massive fall." (*This adds a whole new imperative to reopening [Okehampton – Tavistock](#) – Ed.*)

The 60th edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' Map](#) adds the first part of EWR from Oxford to Milton Keynes to be opened by Chiltern Railways in December, as well as more TOCs moving to DfT Operator Ltd (DFTO), including those changing over the next five months. Use of the Didcot West curve is restored for the Saturday Bristol - Oxford service.

...and finally

A six-year-old German Shepherd could help to cheer up TransPennine Express customers. Nya is a certified therapy dog owned and trained by Stephen O'Callaghan, who leads its safeguarding and crime prevention team. He said: "I've always recognised the strong connection that dogs can have on improving people's wellbeing and the natural calming abilities that they bring to people, as well as the social interaction that they provide." Just as well, as under half of TPE trains arrive on time.

After HS2 bought and then let out Alan Wilkinson's house in Whitmore Heath, it was turned into a cannabis farm. HS2 has spent a total of £3.79bn acquiring property, including £633m on the route from Birmingham to Manchester.

CONSULTATIONS

- Oxfordshire CC: [OxRail 2040 Rail Strategy](#), closes 1 October.
- Dorset and BCP Council [Local Transport Plan](#) (LTP4), closes 13 October.
- Transport Committee: [Joined-up Journeys: achieving and measuring transport integration](#), closes 16 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 events
- Local Group events.

September

■ Tuesday 16. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh** EH1 2JL, 1900 (Also 23 October, 18 November, 16 December).

■ Tuesday 16. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 28 October and 2 December).

■ Thursday 18. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 20 November).

■ Saturday 27. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400.

October

■ Saturday 4. Joint Rf Yorkshire, East Midlands and Lincolnshire meeting , **Nottingham** Central Library.

■ Wednesday 8. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900
(Also 10 December at the White Swan, Barton, 1800).

■ Wednesday 8. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds division, **Online**, 1930
(Also 4 November).

■ Tuesday 14. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also 9 December).

■ 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).

Further Ahead

■ November 5. Community Rail Network AGM, **Online**, 1400.

■ November 10. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, BB7 2JN, 1900.

■ November 12 Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.

■ November 15 Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.

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Contact the editor by e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, or phone: 01462 815992.

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*Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, BS21 7NP – **for legal correspondence only.***

All other correspondence to: 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU