



December 2025

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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This edition of RUX marks the completion of ten years as your editor; it's been a real privilege. However, I couldn't do it alone. I send the draft text as a Word document to Tony Smale, the former editor, who reads the proof and converts the final version to pdf. Together with the notifications, this is then distributed, either by Jerry Alderson or Neil Middleton, both Rf Directors, so it is a real team effort. But of course RUX would not exist at all were it not for my trusty band of contributors up and down the country. So keep the copy coming!

Roger Smith

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Having achieved its main objective to restore regular rail passenger services to Levenmouth, the LMRC was wound up at its AGM on 24 June.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

On the Northumberland Line, Blyth-Bebsey Station opened on 19 October 2025. Dates are still awaited for Northumberland Park and Bedlington to complete Phase 1 of the project.

On 20 November, LNER briefed SENRUG on the new ECML timetable. Morpeth and Berwick have fewer LNER services, but the Newcastle - London service is increased from 2 to 3 tph each way. Aspects of the timetable are controversial, but a better understanding of its objectives, constraints and opportunities for improvements will help SENRUG in its campaign work. LNER also covered other developments within the company that are happening or planned.

Furness Line Action Group

Whitehaven tunnel is closed until next Spring at the earliest, as track renewal and drainage work in September revealed voids due to old mining, some less than a yard below the surface and affecting a third of its length. Fortunately, NR could find the rectification cost of £35-40m. Initially, a replacement bus service ran all the way from Sellafield to Workington, but from 11 August, trains from the north were extended into the bay platform at Whitehaven station, and from 1 September - credit to local MP Josh MacAlister, NR and Northern Rail - trains from the south run as far as Corkickle, resulting in only a short bus transfer through Whitehaven. Stops at Braystones and Nethertown were also reinstated.

However, services both north and south of Whitehaven are much reduced, so FLAG asked Northern if staff and stock were available to fill some of the gaps. Regional Stakeholder Manager Owain Roberts responded: "The current train plan makes the best use of the resources and track access that we have available." Josh MacAlister has met with Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander in a bid to accelerate the full Cumbrian Coast line upgrade rather than letting the infrastructure become dilapidated and having to patch problems.

On 19-20 August, a battery-powered train set a new world record for the longest railway journey on a single charge, breaking the previous record of 139 miles set by a Stadler Flirt in Berlin in 2021. A specially adapted [GWR Class 230 train](#) travelled overnight in [super-efficient mode](#) over a 200-mile route from Reading train care depot between London Paddington and Oxford using only five of its six batteries; GWR said it could have travelled about another 58 miles. Now every TOC, including Northern, wants to know if battery/hybrid trains could replace their diesel fleet. FLAG wonders whether they could be used on the Cumbrian Coast line beyond the end of electric power at Carnforth.

Halifax & District Rail Action Group

HADRAG welcomed West Yorkshire CA's draft local transport plan, but high-speed rail or mass transit schemes might never reach the Calder Valley. A Bradford, Halifax, Elland and Brighouse service to Sheffield via Barnsley or Wakefield would be more direct, and much faster than changing trains at Leeds. Meadowhall could be served en route, with a possible new station at Horbury for Ossett. The service via Barnsley would need the mothballed link line at Crigglestone to be reinstated. Going via Wakefield Kirkgate would be less costly, with lower track costs and only a small increase in journey time. Longer-term, both routes could be developed.

An upgraded and fully electrified Calder Valley line could deliver extra trains taking 40mins between Bradford and Manchester, and serve Halifax and Rochdale at a fraction of the cost of a new high-speed line. Every branch needs to be wired: York and Leeds to Manchester via both Bradford and Brighouse, and through Burnley and Blackburn to Preston services linking with the Blackpool line is an urgent need; HADRAG wants affordable upgrades, with benefits in our lifetime.

Mid-Anglia Rail Passengers' Association

Over the weekend of 29/30 November several teams of engineers worked very efficiently to erect the eagerly awaited footbridge at Stowmarket. Its lightweight steel construction and modular composition made this significantly easier because it arrives on site in readily transportable bits, a first of its kind and potentially a template for future. Alongside the new stairs (with a roof!), passenger lifts will make travel so much easier for anyone using the Ipswich bound platform who finds stairs either impossible or a real challenge. The new bridge should be open for use from early in January, while installation dates for the lifts are still to be confirmed.

MARPA claims that, during the refurbishment of 2022, the physical ticket office at Bury was removed without the required public consultation, so customers have been severely prejudiced. The single member of staff available has to oversee the new ticket gates, thus reducing their ability to assist customers with their travel/ticketing queries. So it is delighted to learn that GA will substantially increase staffing at the station early in 2026, and they will be on duty for longer. MARPA will monitor the situation closely to ensure that all of the staff are fully trained on every aspect of customer service and ticketing.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

As a concession to BTPG, GWR made a Network Railcard valid on the 0846 from Bedwyn (0852 Hungerford and 0857 Kintbury) - but not on the ticket machine at Bedwyn station, only online. However, thanks are due to the passenger who discovered this workaround: press the 'Tickets for future travel' button, but use today's date. Titbits such as this are always welcome.

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 welcomes East West Rail’s latest [proposals](#). Its [You Said, We Did](#) report details how these have evolved since its latest consultation. However, delivery is what is needed, and the long-promised Oxford - Milton Keynes service has still yet to start. According to the [Telegraph](#), the delay is due to a trade union dispute about who should operate the train doors. (*Shame the rail unions can’t merge along with GBR – Ed.*)

The budget introduces Electric Vehicle Excise Duty (eVED) for electric and plug-in hybrid cars, but not until April 2028. And the fuel duty is not cut until next August, and then only gradually restored to its pre-2022 level. The good news is the funding to extend the Docklands Light Railway to Thamesmead.

Regulated rail fares in England and set by English TOCs have been frozen until March 2027. They include season tickets on most commuter routes, some off-peak return tickets on long-distance journeys, and flexible tickets for travel in and around major cities. Whilst TOCs are free to set unregulated fares, including advance tickets and first-class seats, these typically follow similar patterns to regulated fares.

The [Railways Bill](#) should give GBR the tools and authority it needs to deliver a railway for passengers, freight and taxpayers, and hold it unambiguously accountable for doing so – although not for another year, so the real work will start in 2027. The aims of a Long Term Rail Strategy - meeting customers’ needs; economic growth; financial and environmental sustainability, and reducing regional and national inequality - reflect Rf’s [strategic objectives](#).

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

A Transport East study by Arup shows that Cambridge has a fast growing and very productive economic area to the east, with research centres in Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Thetford, all just as important as those to the west, so EWR should continue on to Ipswich and Norwich. If it were running today, passengers arriving at Cambridge would have to wait for up to an hour for an onward connection. Transport East commits ‘to ... work with partners to assemble a funding package to develop a formal Strategic Outline Business Case for the EWR-Eastern section, to make the case for entry into the Government’s investment programme.’

The concept of the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) with a democratic mandate for strategic transport planning has been extended to 13 more areas. The DfT has informed the Sub-National Transport Bodies that funding for their operations will cease at the end of March 2027; FY 2026/7 will be a ‘transitional’ year, and they will no longer be expected to produce or update their strategies. In the case of Transport East, there will be just two MCAs, Essex and Norfolk & Suffolk. England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) might survive in a scaled down format focused on the Oxford/Cambridge Arc; the pattern of MCAs within its boundary has yet to be established. (*Labour has since announced that elections for both of the East Anglian MCAs will be deferred until 2028 – Ed.*)

Following consultation on potential new station sites, Norfolk CC is taking forward two locations for further investigation: Broadland Business Park (East Norwich) on the Bittern line, and another to the south of King’s Lynn. RfEA believes that Hethersett (SW Norwich) and Long Stratton on the Great Eastern line should also be looked at. And Salhouse station on the Cromer line will need a major upgrade to accommodate demand from the North Rackheath development.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTHEAST

Rf has [proposed](#) to Lord Hendy, the Rail Minister, for:

- Gatwick Express to be abolished as a dedicated operator, but form part of Southern's services to the airport, with all of its Victoria services branded Gatwick Express
- A single fare to/from Central London stations with direct services to/from Gatwick, set between those for Thameslink and Southern. This will give price transparency to passengers and, it believes, lead to a growth in overall revenue.

Nor is Rf L&SE impressed by the fare model for the Project Oval extensions of contactless fares; there seems to be a London-wide directive of switching to new fares for all contactless stations. It wants operators to offer cheap advance fares and a flexible fare at weekends (although it senses resistance from TfL in introducing a third price point), and continues to push for funding for contactless to support Railcards - the promise of "at some point" is not good enough.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is sad to bid farewell to Sally Whitehead, who has coordinated its [Travelling with Confidence](#) programme funded by Motability Foundation. Partnering with 40 community organisations, five CRPs have engaged with almost 600 disabled people this year to create 147 empowering travel skills activities and 43 train journeys. CRN looks forward to more CRPs being awarded grants to join in developing this work.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT welcomes the announcement in the budget to rebalance transport costs towards more sustainable modes. Fuel duty for drivers has not increased for over a decade, and in 2022 it was cut by 5p a litre, while regulated rail fares have risen year-on-year. And more private jets will be subject to a higher rate of Air Passenger Duty; they are massively polluting.

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

The Railways Bill will significantly change ORR's role as an independent, expert advisor to the Secretary of State, and its integration with the wider reform programme. This new role includes:

- Broader monitoring and reporting of all of GBR's activities, informed by guidance from the Secretary of State, alongside a licence enforcement role that includes long-term asset stewardship
- A reduced enforcement role in other areas, with a greater role for the Secretary of State in holding GBR to account
- A wider scope in a new funding process, centred on advising funders on GBR's integrated "track and train" business plan
- A reduced role in relation to access and use of the network.

NR has set up [Platform4](#) to build 40,000 new homes and over 230 acres of commercial space over the next ten years. [Integrating](#) rail land use with transport planning is vital. All but one of Labour's 12 'new towns' are already served by rail or are the subject of rail proposals. But developments that add to existing towns or cities may overload community services; if they're not within easy reach of a town centre station, there is an extra cost to bring in new rail infrastructure. Including employment sites to increase property values, or using lower-cost factory-built homes can improve their viability.

Rail safety education will form part of the national curriculum from September 2026. NR 's 'Switched On Travels with Suzi' takes children aged 3-6 on a journey to a nature reserve. Children aged 7-11 are taught to identify potential dangers and spot risky behaviours in others. Resources for those aged 12-16 developed by Big Manny, science creator of 2024, demonstrate the science behind railway dangers, and the potentially life-changing impact of unsafe decisions.

Carlisle station will benefit from a £13.5m Government investment to transform it into a modern transport hub that will create an accessible gateway to the city with better parking, easier navigation and restored heritage features.

Fleetwood's main line closed in 1966; a branch line operated until May 1970, when all passenger services were discontinued. Local MP Lorraine Beavers called in Parliament for its restoration. Its lack of connectivity is detrimental to health, wealth and education. Lancashire CC, led by Reform UK, needs to put forward a business plan.

At 0700 on 3 December, the first of EMR's new Aurora fleet (Unit 810010) left Sheffield for London St Pancras. The 33 bi-mode trains, built by Hitachi Rail, can use the £1.5bn MML upgrade. Once fully rolled out, the fleet will deliver a 46% increase in total seat capacity on the line.

Freightliner has carried hydrogen for the first time on Britain's rail network from Doncaster to High Marnham via NR's world-leading net-zero test track in Tuxford, adjacent to HyMarnham Power, the UK's largest green hydrogen production facility operated by GeoPura and JG Pears.

EEH thinks that the Midlands Rail Hub could deliver an hourly Swindon - Birmingham service via Stroud, with over 2m more seats/year. It is also working to secure a regular Bristol - Oxford service.

South Western Railway has restored the hourly service between Waterloo and Exeter St Davids. The driest spring and hottest summer ever recorded in the UK dried out embankments between Salisbury and Exeter, a condition known as 'soil moisture deficit'. Autumn rain has now rehydrated and stabilised them, allowing NR to restore the track levels and remove the speed restrictions between Gillingham and Axminster.

In a 60-day pilot, GWR will create fast and more reliable wi-fi on an IET using a hybrid system of signals from mobile phone masts and satellites, technology originally developed for Formula 1. The scheme has been developed by Motion Applied, a British company, in partnership with Peninsula Transport, the SNTB for the West of England.

The 61st edition of Barry Doe's National Rail Operators' map shows: the re-instatement of the Winchburgh - Dalmeny loop, giving Glasgow direct access to the Forth Bridge; LUMO services from Edinburgh to Glasgow; LNER no longer running between Leeds and York; a new Caledonian Sleeper route via Birmingham International avoiding New Street and Wolverhampton, and a delay to opening Bicester - Bletchley, now expected by May 2026.

...and finally

After a public backlash, ORR has reversed its decision to order Avanti West Coast to run its 0700 Manchester Piccadilly - London Euston service without passengers in the new timetable. However, with First Lumo's open access train services to Stirling due to start, the following services are being removed or curtailed:

- 0939 London Euston – Blackpool North (Monday to Friday)
- 1252 Blackpool North – London Euston (Monday to Friday)
- 1932 Chester – London Euston (Monday to Friday)
- 1753 Holyhead – London Euston will terminate at Crewe (Sunday).

CONSULTATIONS

- Peak District National Park Authority: [Local Plan Review Preferred Approach](#), closes 21 December.
- West Oxfordshire District Council: [Local Plan Preferred Spatial Options](#), closes 22 December.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any more consultations.

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.

December

■ Tuesday 16. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh** EH1 2JL, 1900.

January

■ Thursday 8. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.

■ Monday 12. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 9 March and 11 May).

■ Wednesday 14. Rf West Midlands, Moor Street station, **Birmingham** (Also 11 February, 11 March, 8 April and 13 May).

■ Wednesday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 10 February Online and 7 March in St Albans, 1100).

■ Thursday 22. Rf London & South East, Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, Farringdon, 1900 (Also 12 March).

Further Ahead

■ 11 February. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes station, (Also 8 April in Barton, and 10 June (AGM) in Cleethorpes).

■ 21 February. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.

■ 28 February. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ.

■ 19 March. Community Rail Awards, Pride Park, **Derby**, DE24 8JB.

■ 18 April. Rf London and South East Branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, City Road, **London** EC1.

■ 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**.

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

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