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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The war in the Middle East will surely impact the UK economy adversely, making the case for new or reopened rail lines even more difficult. However, the rising cost of petrol and diesel could encourage a modal shift from road to rail.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines

Britain's only snow shed, Cruach on Rannoch Moor a mile from the station, has been dismantled. NR's Community Relations Executive said it was dilapidated and no longer needed. "Today's railway benefits from modern snow management systems that are far more effective than traditional shelters. They are in place across the network, helping to prevent snow accumulation and keep services running smoothly. Additionally, due to changes in climate, this area no longer experiences the extreme snowfall that once made the snow shed essential.

A full-time Weather Desk has been set up in Scotland to protect the railway. Seasonal Resilience Teams will also support preparation and aid recovery, with equipment including snowploughs, a Winter Train for defrosting infrastructure, and a dedicated NR helicopter for aerial inspections.

In October, some passengers on a Mallaig – Glasgow train ordered their food online from The Real Food Café in Tyndrum. When the train reached Upper Tyndrum, the bags of breakfast rolls, fried egg, sausages and bacon were waiting for them - a reminder of when, in North British Railway and LNER days, passengers could order a lunch basket at Glasgow to be handed to them in Crianlarich.

Skipton and East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Alarming new Government deprivation data clearly shows that poverty in East Lancashire has significantly worsened over the last five years. Reinstating the Skipton – Colne line through the only natural gap in the Pennines would cost just 1% of the budget for Northern Powerhouse Rail. With the track-bed still intact, its wide-ranging benefits could all be delivered long before the 2040s. In collaboration with its North and West Yorkshire counterparts and Whitehall, the new Lancashire County Combined Authority must drive the project forward.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Having congratulated Northern for most of 2025 on an improved service with fewer cancellations, December saw many more, mostly attributed to 'problems with train crew', which usually means, a shortage of staff. There have also been fewer 4-car trains as Northern struggle with unit numbers throughout its region as it transferred more units to the immensely successful Northumberland Line. This was constructed on a business case based of 200,000 passengers per year. That figure was reached within 3 months, and reached a million after about 14 months with two stations still to be completed. So maybe the predicted usage of the Middlewich Line needs to be revisited.

Since 1992, campaigners have sought to restore passenger services to this vital link. Now a town of close to 14,500 people, Middlewich is the largest civil parish by population in Cheshire not to be served by a railway station. Mid Cheshire is crying out for transport infrastructure investment to help it fulfil its untapped potential. However, a rethink is required on how to get such schemes over the line. Mayoral Combined Authorities are empowered to develop them and decide what's best for their areas, which is why devolution for Cheshire and Warrington is so important.

A TfGM [report](#) outlines its vision for the railways within Greater Manchester; any changes or improvements will inevitably impact lines outside GM including the Mid Cheshire Line and the Cheshire stations on the WCML.

MCRUA keeps its MPs informed and asks for their views and support when issues arise, and they are usually very supportive. Andrew Cooper and Esther McVey have helped with issues such as Middlewich reopening, two trains an hour, Cheadle Station and the Ardwick blockade. And Connor Rand and Andrew Cooper took part in the Railway 200 Walk.

Friends of the Barton Line

Following FoBL's letters to its MPs, Melanie Onn highlighted its concerns on [Facebook](#), and asked the Transport Secretary how the DfT has assessed the potential implications for her policies of the frequency of the cancellations on the Barton Line, and what steps were being taken to address this. Keir Mather responded: We recognise that recent performance on the Barton Line has been below what passengers rightly expect. The DfT is aware that East Midlands Railway is working to improve train performance on this route. To achieve this, EMR:

- Introduced a revised timetable in December 2025 to reduce the impact of service disruption and delays
- Is continuing with its major train refurbishments to improve reliability and performance
- Is continuing to work with NR to address infrastructure and operational issues.

On 23 February, she met with FoBL and Paul Barnfield, EMR Operations Director at Great Coates station to discuss the issues raised. A constituent who has had persistent issues with disabled access there was also invited.

Thanks to a donation from two of its officers, FoBL will be sponsoring Barton Town FC vs Wombwell Town on 4 April. Anyone presenting a Barton Line ticket will be given 50% off the admission fee; FoBL will cover the other 50%.

An updated and revised version of the Rail Ale Trail Guide is planned for Summer 2026 with a new layout and the addition of the extra information. A print run of 1500 will be ordered in time for the Barton Town match so that copies are available to give to all adults along with a current timetable.

British Regional Transport Association

BRTA wants reform of Redhill on the Brighton Main Line. Proposals include third-rail electrification of the North Downs Line to enable East Croydon - Guildford and Reading, Thameslink network growth, and release diesel stock for deployment elsewhere; a flyover from Tonbridge to the Reading

line to enable Channel Tunnel - Oxford and beyond freight and passenger trains orbiting London, freeing up capacity on existing lines, and a direct Tonbridge - Gatwick - Brighton link.

Partial re-railing of the Great Central Corridor south of Rugby would offer stronger routing options between the area and London, Heathrow, Brighton, Bicester, Oxford, Southampton and Bristol. New rail links parallel to the HS2 lines from both Aylesbury and East West Rail should follow the former corridor as much as possible to Rugby, Lutterworth and the Leicester - Nuneaton lines.

A new link from south of Willoughby could run into Rugby via the WCML north of the Kilsby Tunnel area. At Rugby, a link with the Northampton Loop Line and DIRFT running alongside M1 could serve Magna Park, one of the largest industrial warehouse complexes in Europe without a rail link. Lutterworth, where the M1, M6 and A14 converge, is also lacking a rail link that could offer strong potential for intermodal freight locations.

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

To reflect growing demand, Greater Anglia timetable improvements from May will include an additional peak hour service to Cambridge from Norwich and from Ipswich, and more Norwich to London trains stopping at Stowmarket, giving a half-hourly service for most of the day. Great Yarmouth sees an additional morning and evening peak hour service, with departures timed to better connect with East Midlands trains at Norwich. Lowestoft will see two early morning services running through to Cambridge, with one extended to Stansted Airport.

RfEA was present on 31 January and 1 February when the Rail200 'Inspiration' train visited Cambridge station. It attracted over 1,500 people across the two days. Rf shared a stall with the local Cam Valley CRP, and had so many visitors that it exhausted its supply of RAIL EAST, Railwatch and Rf membership leaflets. The CRP gave away around 300 copies of its line guide, about the same in postcards, and around 200 each of the walk leaflets. Not to mention around 400 pens!

Breckland covers a large mostly rural area in central Norfolk, with Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton as its principal centres. Rf responded to some of the development proposed in the draft Breckland Local Plan, much of it concentrated along the A11 corridor with good rail access to the Ely - Norwich line. It would run along the southern edge of the proposed development of up to 6,000 homes at Larling. Harling Road station is well placed to serve the new community. It would need upgrading, and have a regular stopping service rather than the handful of trains that presently call. A local Thetford - Norwich service, potentially extending to North Walsham, should also be considered.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

In her [George Bradshaw Address](#), Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander outlined her vision for the future of Britain's railway, where public interest is at the heart; decision-making is brought closer to communities, and rail becomes a powerful catalyst for socio-economic change. Acknowledging the challenges of affordability, complexity and accessibility, she expressed her determination to open up rail to all, and to shift far more journeys and freight onto rail.

In its [report](#) on the Railways Bill, the Transport Select Committee called for clearer timelines, a long-term strategy to deliver a more integrated, accountable network, and changes to prevent undue political interference. As reform progresses, CRN continues to work to ensure community rail is respected and supported, and embedded in the new rail landscape.

The CRN Motability Foundation-funded project, Travelling with Confidence, continues to achieve significant success into its second year. Seven CRPs have received small grants to co-produce initiatives and empower disabled people to overcome travel barriers. There is still funding available for accredited CRPs.

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

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) called on the Chancellor to accelerate the delivery of projects already announced, promised or procured in her Spring Statement. Priority areas include regional mass transit, bus franchising, housing-enabling infrastructure, strategic rail upgrades, flood alleviation and major renewals. CEO Milda Manomaityte said: "Targeted investment in smaller, regionally impactful schemes alongside certainty on existing commitments would unlock economic benefits and tackle regional inequality. Speed is now needed from Government to secure investment and signal certainty to industry".

Between April and September 2025, train operators closed 164,809 complaints, up 4% year on year, against an 8% increase in journeys. 97.6% of cases were closed within 20 working days and 74.8% in 10 working days. ORR continues to work on both the speed and quality of complaint responses, and to provide an escalation route through its sponsorship of the Ombudsman when passengers are unhappy with how operators have dealt with their complaints.

ORR authorised the opening of Northumberland Park Station on the Northumberland Line on 22 February. It confirmed that the station met required standards on health and safety, accessibility and environmental protection, with step-free access, a new platform and a waiting shelter, and is adjacent to the existing Tyne & Wear Metro station. The final station on the line, Bedlington, will open on 29 March.

In a debate on 10 February, Michelle Welsh, Labour MP for Sherwood Forest, said the Robin Hood Line from Nottingham to Worksop should be extended. "We have a redundant train station with a track that would need some work, but is essentially ready to go. For me this is low-hanging fruit". A Nottinghamshire CC report in 2015 mooted the extension with Warsop and Edwinstowe stations renovated and a new one for Ollerton, but work never materialised.

DfT is consulting on the closure of Bordesley station in Birmingham on or after 4 June 2029. Midlands Rail Hub plans for more services into Moor Street and Snow Hill stations will require two new elevated chords to connect the lines on the existing Bordesley viaduct to the Camp Hill line, and the junction for these will be where Bordesley station is located.

The Government is preparing to provide over £1billion in support of the Universal Studios theme park on the site of the former Stewartby brickworks west of Bedford. Planned transport upgrades include a new station for East West Rail and expanding the new Wixams station on the Midland Main Line.

A BBC File on 4 [investigation](#) has revealed that CCTV on trains and stations is often unavailable or unusable. Rail operators are not legally obliged to have working CCTV on all trains and stations, and can also decide the period for retaining footage, which can result in evidence being deleted within as little as 48 hours. And there are three major Underground lines in London with little or no CCTV in the train carriages.

The fare dodger reported last month who did not pay for 112 journeys on GTR was given a three month prison sentence suspended for a year, ordered to pay £3,629 in unpaid fares, and to complete 150 hours of unpaid work. He told the court that probation could assist him in securing accommodation and employment.

And after dodging £5,911 worth of fares by "doughnutting" – buying tickets between stations at the beginning and end of a journey but not for those in between - a former HSBC executive was

sentenced to ten-months in jail suspended for 18 months, 80 hours of unpaid work and £5,000 in compensation, and banned from Southeastern Railway for 12 months.

From 26 July to 16 August, Southeastern services into Charing Cross and Waterloo East will be diverted to Victoria, Cannon Street and Blackfriars, with some terminating at London Bridge. Their temporary closure will allow a package of essential upgrades including the replacement of over a mile of life-expired track.

Mike Harris wrote to his MP, Mark Francois, concerning the false claim made by Government that "The Chancellor is set to freeze fares at the Budget, with passengers not paying a penny more on season tickets, peak returns for commuters and off-peak returns between major cities". Some of the fares on the Southend - London line have increased by between 16% and 41%.

On 13 February, 175 years since the first train travelled from Ashford to Hastings via Rye in 1851, Hastings Mayor Becca Horn opened the celebration organised by the Marshlink CRP with a grant from GTR. Mayors from Rye and Ashford joined the event, while the deputy Mayor of Winchelsea greeted the anniversary train as it passed through the station.

Major work to restore an hourly Portishead - Bristol Temple Meads service in around 25mins begins in April, and the public are invited to drop-in sessions in Portishead on 26 March, and in Pill on 31 March. The route runs along the Avon Gorge under the Clifton Suspension Bridge, one of the most scenic stretches of railway in the country. It is planned to connect to the Henbury Line, with new stations at North Filton and Henbury.

5,700km of small disused railway lines in France have left many rural areas with no public transport. Uber's solution is a vehicle that can switch smoothly from road to rail. Ferromobiles designed to carry up to eight people have begun trials on the Courpière - Vertolaye line in the Auvergne region. The fleet has the flexibility to operate on a fixed schedule, or be booked by phone like an Uber car. They would not share any track used by normal rail services, but are there any unused lines in the UK that this could reinvigorate?

...and finally

The Kettering Civic Society moved into the station in exchange for creating a garden in its car park. Its secretary Monica Ozdemirits said it gave her a "sense of pride, and it's a lovely welcome for visitors to the town. We started off with a garden that was just Tarmac, and used a pickaxe to plant roses. We even have an exhibition space in our room - it's wonderful to see how it's evolved and grown."

CONSULTATIONS

- Oxfordshire Leaders: [Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy - Stage 2 Project Prioritisation](#), closes 19 March.
- Wealden District Council: [Revised Wealden Local Plan](#), closes 20 March.
- MHCLG: [Areas for Producing Spatial Development Strategies](#), closes 26 March.
- Buckinghamshire Council: [Local Transport Plan 5, 2025-45](#), closes 30 March.
- MHCLG: [Establishing a Development Corporation in Greater Cambridge](#), closes 1 April.
- Eastbourne Borough Council: [Draft Local Plan](#), closes 10 April.
- DfT: [Proposed Closure of Bordesley Station](#), closes 15 May.

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

March

- Tuesday 17. South East Northumberland Rail User Group, Town Hall, **Morpeth**,
- Thursday 19. Community Rail Awards 2026., Derby Arena, Royal Way, Pride Park, **Derby**, DE24 8JB, 1930.
- Thursday 26. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Saturday 28. Lakes Line Rail User Group AGM, Stonecross Manor Hotel, **Kendal**, 1400.
- Tuesday 31. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 12 May).

April

- Wednesday 8. Rf West Midlands, Moor Street station, **Birmingham**, 1745 (Also 13 May).
- Wednesday 8. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800 (Also 10 June (AGM) in Cleethorpes).
- Wednesday 8. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Zoom**, 1930 (Also 14 May).
- Friday 10. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Commodore Inn, 112-117 West Clyde Street, **Helensburgh**, G84 8ES.
- Saturday 11. Furness Line Action Group AGM, Furness & Midland Hall, **Carnforth**, 1400.
- Tuesday 14. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- Saturday 18. Rf West Midlands Branch AGM, Birmingham Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, **Birmingham**, B3 3BS, 1030.
- Saturday 18. Rf London and South East Branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, Farringdon, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1100.

Further Ahead

- 7 May. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- 11 May. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900.
- 12 May. Rf Thames Valley AGM, West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX2 0BT, 1900.
- 16 May. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- 16 May. East Suffolk Transport Association, AGM, **Halesworth**.
- 21 May. Rf London & South East, Metro & Eastern division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1900.
- 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**, Holland.
- 19 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Lovat Arms Hotel, **Beaulieu**, 1045.
- 4 July. Rf AGM, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF.

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

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