



May 2026

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Cars are swamping the Peak District, so as part of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, the National Park Authority has launched a [Tube-style map](#) to promote the use of public transport. This could be a good time to reinstate former railway lines such as the Monsal, Tissington and High Peak Trails. See below for a positive development regarding the Peaks and Dales Line. As well as its direct benefit, it would also relieve the maxed out Hope Valley Line.

Roger Smith

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

### Rail Action Group East of Scotland

Since it opened in December 2023, East Linton annual footfall has grown close to 100,000. It now has 13 southbound trains midweek (was 10) and 14 northbound (was 10). However, there are still some gaps forcing villagers to travel to Dunbar, Drem and North Berwick at key times of the day. RAGES is engaging with the rail companies, politicians and Scottish and UK Governments to fill these, especially the first southbound train in the morning, and in the late afternoon/early evening.

Haddington is well served by buses, but rail would offer a far quicker and more reliable journey to Edinburgh. Its population of 11,354 (per the 2022 census) is significantly larger than towns such as North Berwick, which has over half a million rail journeys each year. A reinstated Haddington line would be expected to attract similar demand.

### Lakes Line Rail User Group

At the LLRUG AGM in March, Chris Coleman set out NR's 15 year plans to improve the overhead power supply and signalling on the WCML from south of Warrington to the Scottish Border, and prepare for the European Train Control System (ETCS) in-cab signalling, and for HS2 trains to operate over the 'classic' lines. The impact of Northern Powerhouse Rail must also be considered. Background information shared included a May 2027 timetable recast, and plans for Manchester Airport Station to accommodate 12-coach trains. Funding only extends to replacement of current assets, but some improvement in turnoffs to passing loops to accommodate slower 775m freight trains can be included. Any enhancement such as a loop at Burneside on the Lakes Line as part of the Windermere Station Gateway project would need a business case approved by the DfT.

Westmorland and Furness Council has appointed a contractor to draw up plans for the Windermere station area. Design work costing £150,000 will aim to create better connections for walking, cycling, taxis and buses. The Council also hopes the Government will agree to fund its plans for a new passing loop and platform to double train frequency and reduce road congestion.

### **Ribble Valley Rail**

On 9 February, King Charles III arrived at Clitheroe station on the Royal Train headed by 67006 "Royal Sovereign" before visiting various businesses and venues in the Ribble Valley.

RVR volunteers still continue to count passenger numbers each Saturday on the Yorkshire Dales Explorer (YDE). An increasing number of southbound passengers from the Settle/Hellifield area has been noted. That is very welcome, especially as there seems to be little or no advertising in the area. On 7 March, Mr P Metcalfe of Hellifield made the 10,000th passenger journey over the "Missing Link", and was awarded a Family Weekend Pass by Northern.

All of the Friends of Settle-Carlisle Line's (FoSCL's) [free guided walks](#) start and/or finish from train stations, usually on the Leeds – Settle – Carlisle Line, and do not require a car. There is no need to book in advance; just buy your train ticket and meet at the station! Lancashire Rail Ramblers free guided walks programme from the YDE service and connecting coaches starts on Saturday, 23 May, and then from stations beyond Ribbleshead: on 27 June, Kirkby Lonsdale; 25 July, Swaledale/Richmond; 29 August, Bowland; and 26 September, Wensleydale/Leyburn.

Northern has appointed a Fleet Procurement Manager to oversee the supply of some 400 new trains, a mix of fully electric, battery-powered and multi-modal units. Final tenders are due in February with contracts awarded by early 2027, and delivery of the first trains in 2030. Currently only 25% of Northern's network is electrified, but further expansion is planned. Battery and hybrid trains will be convertible to electric as new routes are upgraded.

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

Barton Line performance should be improved from 17 May by tweaks to TPE times east of Scunthorpe, and TPE and Freightliner changes in the Hope Valley to improve punctuality on the Cleethorpes - Liverpool service.

CRN has funded 1500 copies of FoBL's new Rail Ale Guide, with much more useful and easy to follow information. EMR Community Engagement Manager Kaye Robinson asked FoBL to help Marston Vale line colleagues produce a similar guide for their line. They were supplied with electronic versions of the current guide and paper versions of the last two editions.

EMR kindly provided a new memorial bench in the community garden at New Holland Station to honour the late Alan Rank, who dedicated many hours to keeping the garden looking beautiful, but within 24 hours of its installation, someone attempted to steal it. A memorial plaque has now been added, and FoBL hopes this will help prevent any further incidents.

### **British Regional Transport Association**

Most local rail reopenings have exceeded usage predictions, so BRTA believes it is time for more. Bideford and Tavistock in Devon, Colne - Skipton in the North West and many others are almost 'ready to go' but need Government permission and match funding at very least. It should have a mechanism to take a suggestion at face value, work it up to its satisfaction, and have a pathway that lay and professional interest can follow with incentives and funding to enable progression.

## Windsor Lines Passengers' Association

There have been many positive comments about the new Class 701 stock but also some issues. The most frequent complaint is the non-stop list of station calls, so no peace for the traveller. More than half of the sixty 10-coach 701s are in service with the rest being released gradually, especially where 450s and 458/5s ran on the Windsor Lines. Most of the thirty 5-coach versions are still in store, but a few have been seen at Wimbledon. Where they will serve is not yet known.

Funding is now available to build a case for the West London Orbital Line. West Hampstead is no longer a northern terminus, nor Kew Bridge in the south, so the line would be Hendon to Hounslow, although alternatives are being discussed as turnaround at Hounslow would be an issue. One idea is to send the line via Whitton to Platform 2 at Twickenham, but the additional four tph on the Hounslow Loop and from Whitton Junction to Twickenham may rule this out.

## Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

At a GWR drop in session for MPs in March, MD Mark Hopwood was very positive regarding restoring direct Paddington services, but there is no timescale. Martin Pearce, GWR's DfT contact, asked for a summary of the problems with the shuttles. His kind reply acknowledged the issues. BTPG also spoke with Zach Bailey, responsible for station development, about extending the 'nose first' parking at Bedywn Station. It has put him in contact with the Parish Council.

A business case is being developed for an hourly Paddington - Westbury service. A Local Transport Forum also held in March was told that from early to mid 2030s new battery/electric trains are proposed, but the battery range isn't quite there yet for Newbury to Westbury. BTPG doesn't want the Westbury extension lost due to the wrong rolling stock being purchased.

If the Bedwyn line is blocked, can you use Didcot or Swindon? Measures are put in place for planned closures, but for unscheduled events it is down to Control to make the decision. From past experience these are slow in coming and often not communicated effectively to passengers. So what if one just drove to Didcot or Swindon and presented oneself at the barrier? GWR responded that you'd likely be allowed through, but there is no guarantee. If you had to pay for an additional ticket, BTPG would take up your case with GWR management and request a refund.

The ticket machines (TVMs) do not offer the same walk-on fares available online; eg one can buy an off-peak day return to Luton for the 0846 Bedwyn departure online, but even after 0830, its TVM does not offer this option. GWR will soon have aligned TVMs with what is available online.

## 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

RfEA is encouraging members and supporters to stress the following points in their responses to the ongoing East West Rail consultation:

- Electrify the full route from Oxford to Cambridge East
- Provide an additional station at St Neots — or at least make passive provision for one
- Locate Cambridge East station at Cherry Hinton rather than at the southern end of Cambridge Airport
- Accelerate full delivery of the project.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

On the day that the Government launched its [Better Connected Strategy for Integrated Transport](#), CRN hosted Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham at Altrincham Interchange. It stressed the vital role community rail plays in creating a more joined-up inclusive transport network. Mid Cheshire CRP and the Friends of Altrincham Interchange are doing exceptional work, connecting people, improving access, and ensuring stations and services reflect the needs of their communities; such local knowledge and commitment gives community rail its unique value.

At the end of June, after nine and a half years as CRN Chief Executive, Jools Townsend will step down: "It's been a privilege to have been part of such a passionate and powerful movement. I'm confident that CRN is in a strong position for the future, with a clear strategy and a dedicated senior leadership team to take things forward". On behalf of the CRN Board, Chair Jeremy Whitaker thanked Jools for the enormous contribution that she has made to CRN and the wider community rail movement.

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

ORR's [Business Plan for 2026/27](#) details its transformation programme to reflect the rail reform proposals currently in Parliament. To monitor the whole rail network under GBR, it is developing its capability to oversee strategic decisions on rolling stock, the delivery of train services, and how future arrangements support a healthy ticket retailing market. Its work with NR and stakeholders to support third party investment continues with [Phase 3](#) of its review of the Rail Network Investment Framework, which will lower the fee rates paid by investors, and support future investment in railway infrastructure.

NR's *No Second Chances* campaign on social media, digital platforms and outdoor advertising runs until 3 June. The hard-hitting 20-second films focus on the deadly risks of being distracted when approaching the railway. 70% of 18-34 year olds believe they could get out of the way if a train approached, but one doing 100mph the length of a football pitch away will be on you in just two seconds, and take over a mile to stop.

The 62nd edition of Barry Doe's [National Rail Operators' Map](#) shows Lumo running from Stirling to London via the WCML. EWR's Oxford – Milton Keynes service via Bicester and Bletchley is now merely expected to commence 'during 2026'. The operator list has several changes as more transfer to DFTO, and Govia Thameslink changes its name to Thameslink Southern Great Northern.

Lumo's open access service to Stirling from 9 June will call at Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Crewe, Preston, Carlisle, Lockerbie, Motherwell, Whifflet, Greenfaulds, and Larbert. It will use newly refurbished Class 222 trains with enhanced wifi for improved connectivity.

LNER's next generation of Class 897 trains named '[Serenza](#)' that will replace its InterCity 225 fleet can run on overhead wires, diesel engines or batteries. The 10 carriages will have 569 seats across Standard and First Class, with wheelchair spaces with companion seating, and bike storage areas. (*Under GBR, could this be a standard design for every partially electrified Intercity route?* – Ed.)

The Better Value Rail Working Group - DfT, NR and the ORR - has submitted a Feasibility Study on reinstating the [Peaks and Dales Line](#) linking Derby and Manchester via Matlock, Bakewell and Buxton. No technical, environmental, planning or delivery barriers to develop a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) were identified. Only around 11.5 miles of new line would be required to reinstate a corridor of some 50 route miles, representing a highly efficient reuse of historic rail infrastructure. Various upgrade options are being considered across the remainder of the route. More than 26 cross-party MPs have signed a letter of support to the Minister for Rail, and Derbyshire CC is due to consider a motion of support in May.

Some 16% of those aged 16 to 24 are unemployed. Paul Bohan, CEO of Buxton-based charity Zink told GB News that for many young people in isolated towns, better-paid jobs in Manchester or Sheffield were financially out of reach: "They cannot afford the £18 daily return fare."

Alicia Kearns, MP for Rutland and Stamford, has asked the MD of EMR to examine the feasibility of a more convenient direct service from Oakham to St Pancras. The one return service a day joins a Nottingham service at Kettering, so the route is clearly viable, but it does not arrive into London until 1006 and departs at 1835. Rutland commuters would like the southbound service to arrive at about 0830, and the return to depart at about 1800. There are Nottingham trains arriving at 0827 and departing at 1805. She is also working on issues with Stamford's train service.

Greater Anglia, Great Northern, Thameslink and CrossCountry services will call at Cambridge South station from 28 June with nine tph to the centre of Cambridge. It will be the first GBR-branded station in the country, and is expected to welcome 1.8 million passengers annually.

EWR's latest consultation "[brochure](#)" is in fact a highly detailed document of over 300 pages. Its updated proposals include:

- Up to five trains an hour and longer trains for the entire route
- A new entrance to Cambridge station, and a new Cambridge East station
- Tempsford station to be brought forward five years as an ECML station
- Bedford station to be rebuilt and enlarged, with a new western entrance, additional platforms, improved drop-off and bus connections, and a public plaza
- Upgrade of the Marston Vale Line with full electrification through to Tempsford, and four new stations including one at Stewartby to serve the Universal theme park.

Passengers at Tilehurst station west of Reading now have step-free access after NR installed three new lifts, adding to the footbridge that was built during the Great Western Electrification programme in 2013. A new walkway has also been created between the car park and Platform 1.

Contracts worth £200m have been signed to reinstate the Portishead line that closed to passengers in 1964. The core work involves building two new stations, relaying three miles of track and delivering the infrastructure needed to provide a rail service from winter 2028/29. Bristol Temple Meads will take around 25mins from Portishead, and 20mins from Pill, around half the time it takes to complete these journeys by road.

*...and finally*

On 1 May, the Settle – Carlisle Line commemorated 150 years of passenger service. Heading north from Settle, passengers are treated to sweeping views of Pen-y-Ghent, Wharfedale and Ingleborough as the train winds through the Yorkshire Dales. The centrepiece of the route is the Ribbleshead Viaduct, a 24-arch engineering marvel that carries the track over 100 feet above the valley floor. Pete Myers, Chair of the Railway Development Company, said that it was essential to the line's identity and wider significance: "It is a truly green way of looking at the Dales."

## **CONSULTATIONS**

- EWR: [Public Consultation Prior to DCO](#), closes 9 June.

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

## EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites as soon as any changes 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.

### May

- Saturday 16. Tendring Transport Users AGM, Gospel Chapel, 62 Old Road, **Frinton-on-Sea**, Essex, CO13 9BY, 1030.
- Saturday 16. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400 (Also 15 August).
- Saturday 16. East Suffolk Transport Association AGM, URC Church, Quay Street, **Halesworth**, 1400.
- Thursday 21. Rf London & South East, Metro & Eastern division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross St, **London**, EC1M 6EL, 1900 (Also 23 July).
- Saturday 23. Rf Yorkshire, Friends Meeting House, Friargate. **York**, YO1 9RL, 1300.
- Saturday 30. Peterborough-Ely-Norwich RUG AGM, Methodist Church, Tanner Street, **Thetford** IP24 2BQ, 1030.

### June

- Thursday 4. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**, Holland.
- Tuesday 9. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester RUG, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also 11 August).
- Wednesday 10. Rf West Midlands branch, Platform 3, Birmingham Moor Street station, 1745.
- Wednesday 10. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900.
- Saturday 13. Rf East Midlands branch AGM, Central Library, 1 Carrington Street, **Nottingham** NG1 7FH. 13:00.
- Tuesday 16. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 4 August).
- Friday 19. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Lovat Arms Hotel, **Beaulieu**, 1045.

### Further Ahead

- 4 July. Rf AGM, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF.
- 13 July. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900

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

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