



May 2018

Welcome to the Rail User Express.

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Well, the new era is about to dawn, although the sun will rise more slowly than originally planned! Derisking the Thameslink programme over 18 months rather than 6 will see 70% of services this month, but leave some gaps in the service, particularly in the peaks. "Up north", over-running electrification has put back the cascade of diesel units on which the May timetable was originally planned.

And a final reminder: if you are not a member of Railfuture, **it is imperative that you email renewals@railfuture.org.uk** with your consent, or this will be the last Rail User Express you will receive.

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around the UK. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

There is an air of optimism around the Far North Line. Punctuality has soared since 31 October 2016, when FoFNL's secretary, Malcolm Wood, began keeping detailed weekly records. Then, on-time or early arrivals were running at 18%; now figures around 90% are becoming normal. Using the PPM standard, which has a 5 min lateness allowance, 98% has been reached recently; typically the figure is around 90%. Several factors have contributed to the turnaround: improvements to level crossings, track and signalling, as well as the reliability of the Class 158s. FoFNL is hoping for good news regarding the 'Lentran Loop'. Once trains can cross between Inverness and Muir of Ord, services will be much less prone to catastrophic disruption in the event of a delay. Fingers and toes are firmly crossed!

The business case for dualling the A9 road between Perth and Inverness included a figure of £429.8m, 23% of the total cost, for "Driver Frustration Benefit". Quantifying the "Passenger Frustration Benefit" from eliminating delays by providing more passing loops or doubling single-track lines should greatly enhance rail business cases.

Pandora has some interesting facts regarding the Class 800 Azuma IET: under the wires, it develops 11.2kW/tonne v 6.9kW/tonne on diesel. Scotrail's HST's will have a much better power/weight ratio, so it will be interesting to compare their performance on the Highland Main Line. Regarding alternative power sources, both a lithium battery and a hydrogen fuel cell produce about 2.6MJ/l, whereas the figure for diesel is 35.8MJ/l. However, battery power would be suitable for lightly loaded local journeys such as a Wick-Thurso shuttle. Alternatively, a Vivarail Class 230 D-train shuttle from Georgemas Junction to Thurso would cut almost half an hour off Inverness – Wick journeys.

HITRANS, the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership, is working on a business case for a sleeper service from Georgemas Junction to Edinburgh and Glasgow using the Mk 3 carriages that will be replaced on the Caledonian Sleeper by new Mk 5 stock, which is currently undergoing testing.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The last ten days of April saw a series of Campaign events: Friday 20th, Levenmouth Transport Study Engagement Workshop, as part of the appraisal for Transport Scotland being conducted by consultants Peter Brett Associates; Monday 23rd, Walk the Line, marking Scotland's Year of Young People; Tuesday 24th, a Rail Enhancements & Capital Investment Strategy Local Rail Development Fund Stakeholder Workshop, followed in the evening by the LMRC Monthly Meeting, and Friday 27th, Second LMRC Conference, designed for anyone and everyone who wants the rail service to Edinburgh reinstated. Phew!

Following an appeal for support from LMRC members, Fife Council has reaffirmed its commitment to reinstating the Levenmouth Rail Link. However, Co-leader David Alexander warned that the case for reopening must be “as robust as possible...a sense of entitlement to the rail connection will get us nowhere.” Later this year Transport Scotland is due to announce the funding allocations for various projects around the country, and is currently reviewing all the latest information on reconnecting Levenmouth to the outside world. LMRC Chairman Eugene Clarke said: “Reinstating the link to Thornton [and] direct train services from Leven to Edinburgh, has been described by rail experts as a ‘no-brainer’. It is technically straight-forward, as the line and all of the permissions are already in place.”

Meanwhile, Levenmouth is vulnerable to changes in bus routes and timetables. Stagecoach is switching its Glasgow – Leven express bus service - a lifeline for work and for social purposes - to Dundee via Glenrothes. Indirect services cost more in time and money, and taking up to two buses to Glenrothes or Kirkcaldy to catch the express bus is not an attractive option. Buses are not a reasonable alternative to the train for any mid- to long-distance journey. With lower car ownership than most other areas, Levenmouth cannot rely on the whims of private bus operators: the area needs public transport choice, not bus dependency.

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

RAGES Chairman and Vice-chairman discussed its aim of an Edinburgh – Berwick service, and re-opening East Linton and Reston Stations, with the MD of ScotRail and his Strategy & Planning Director. RAGES member Alice Fisher has set up an [e-campaign](#) to call for their early provision. Discussion centred on the need for passing loops at each of the stations, lengthening those at Grantshouse, and quadrupling around Prestonpans. A Line Capacity Study was looking at the needs of all ECML users, including freight.

RAGES also attended a Rail Connectivity Event in Berwick to promote and enhance Berwick's rail links. It needed a local ScotRail service to Edinburgh, to provide better late night and early morning trains for work/education, and to exploit to the full events such as the Edinburgh Festival. Councillor Mark Rowley for the Scottish Borders Council said that it was fully behind the idea, and was making a significant financial commitment to Reston Station. Dennis Fancett, Chairman of SENRUG (South East Northumberland RUG) spoke of his group's success in attracting new services for Morpeth, and its desire for a local Newcastle - Berwick service to improve the very poor connectivity to intermediate stations.

Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group

CRUG welcomes the roughly hourly Sunday service from May, but would it rely on overtime, as this could lead to gaps in service? Whitehaven's booking office will be open on Sundays from 20 May from 0930 until 1630 for a trial period of eight weeks. There are also additional weekday trains, particularly later in the evening. The 0515 from Carlisle and the 0624 from Whitehaven will now run later, and there is a gap between Sellafield and Whitehaven each afternoon, but there are more through trains to Lancaster, and the four Barrow-Manchester Airport services are restored. The walks leaflet has been updated accordingly, and should be released in time for the new timetable. Connections both in Carlisle, and with London trains at Lancaster are a concern. The recently introduced Class 68 locomotives are likely to move on in September, so the Furness line will revert to two Class 37 sets.

In the next West Coast Main Line franchise, CRUG wants more calls at Penrith and Oxenholme, more standard seats (by extending the Weekend First to some weekday trains and/or declassifying coach G), and less of an obsession with end-to-end journey times at the expense of convenient intermediate stops: for many passengers having to change trains is a real disincentive. From 2026, HS2 compatible trains should call at least at Carlisle. It hopes that WCML services from Scotland to south-west England (and possibly also the south-east) could be reinstated, though this might be outside the scope of the review.

West Cumbria Mining is holding three open days at the former Haig Museum: 17 May 1400-1900; 18 May 1000-1600, and 19 May 0900-1500. However, neither the Local Enterprise Partnership's new industrial strategy "Cumbria's Road to Prosperity", nor the March 2018 edition of In Cumbria makes any mention of rail although, in the same issue, Copeland MP Trudy Harrison says that, with the expected number of employees at Moorside and West Cumbria Mining, and Sellafield workers moving to Whitehaven, without road and rail improvements there would be chaos in Copeland.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

Approaching midnight on 20 April, the first Virgin Azuma train entered Harrogate Station, presaging the two-hourly service to London Kings Cross promised for May 2019. The train fitted comfortably within the length of the platform and below the platform canopy. The gap between the doors and the platform edge seemed less than the existing Class 43 HST trains. It successfully switched from Platform 1 to Platform 3, before moving on to repeat the checks at Shipley, Keighley and Skipton.

Skipton East Lancs Rail Action Partnership

"Best ever" sums up SELRAP's current situation: Skipton to Colne could see the return of trains by 2022. A Project Development Team is exploring how best to extend the thriving Airedale Line into depressed East Lancashire, to provide a Northern passenger service linking Leeds and Bradford to Pendle and Burnley in under an hour, as well as a new trans-Pennine route for freight. Its latest newsletter has supportive contributions and/or quotes from no fewer than eleven high profile individuals and organizations: the Prime Minister, the Transport Secretary, two MPs and Lord Greaves; Network Rail; Transport for The North; Arriva Northern; The Skipton Building Society; Peel Ports, and Drax Power.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Following a successful trial, Northern is extending its Penalty Fare scheme to Leeds – Harrogate - York; Manchester Victoria - Calder Valley - York, and Leeds – Moorthorpe - Sheffield. It will start with an education and warning phase, and no penalty will be served if there is no ticket office, TVM or platform ticket seller, or if someone with a disability cannot access the "Touch Screen" TVM. A "promise to pay" ticket has the starting station printed on it, so you can't say you got on wherever to pay the lowest possible fare. However, TVMs do not issue the full range of tickets, and finding the cheapest fare can be difficult if it defaults to an "anytime" fare, or some other option, so travellers may end up paying more than they need. Many TVMs take only cards - no use to those who have only cash, or who are too young for a credit card.

And what does one do on through services to Southport if you use an ENCTS pass as far as Apperley Bridge? Buy a ticket from there to Southport before you depart? But some TVM's won't issue a ticket from another station. So would buying the extension on the train fall foul of the penalty fare regime? Probably not if bought within the boundary. Or must you buy a new ticket at Apperley Bridge, and wait half an hour for the next train - assuming Apperley Bridge actually has a TVM (check on National Rail Enquiries)? Passengers with a genuine reason for not having a valid ticket will be able to challenge penalty fares under [new rules](#) announced by the DfT – see Transport Focus below.

From 20 May, anyone wishing to take a bicycle on board a TransPennine Express (TPE) train will need to have made a cycle reservation 24 hours in advance. Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite will be particularly affected, as they are currently served only by Northern but, other than a couple of trains in each peak, will be served only by TPE. TPE will also be the only service provider at Batley, and a major one at Deighton, Mirfield and Morley.

Work to take down the waiting rooms on Platforms 13 and 14 at Manchester Piccadilly and replace them by smaller, more modern ones, was due to start on 13 April. Meanwhile, passengers can continue to use the waiting lounge upstairs. NR has also started on a new £46m train depot as part of the Great North Rail project. The freight yard at Springs Branch railway sidings in Ince-in-Makerfield, east of Wigan, is being adapted to stable and maintain 24 electric and eight diesel trains for Northern.

Because NR favours traditional construction, loading the upfront cost to cut the ongoing cost, a new station costs £7-10 million, compared to £200,000 for a basic two-platform station standing made of wood. So does NR's costing structure need to be brought into the real world?

The [Guardian](#) discusses tree felling on railway embankments. Trees provide a degree of sound insulation for nearby residents, whereas felling may improve the view. But recent landslides between Halifax and Sowerby Bridge followed extensive felling, coupled with wet weather. Trees do absorb water for photosynthesis, but not in the winter months when the heaviest rainfall tends to occur. They also shade out other vegetation, which can hold embankments and cutting sides together, so if the trees are lost for whatever reason, there is an increased risk of landslides until other vegetation re-establishes. The consensus is that, on balance, trees are bad for railway cutting sides and embankments.

Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association

Following the completion of track and signalling work, line speed increases to 90mph in some areas will cut about 5 minutes off most Chester - Shrewsbury journeys. However, evening Virgin services from London Euston will still not connect at Chester with those towards Wrexham. SCRUA has asked Arriva Trains Wales if the latter could depart a few minutes later. SCRUA stressed to the Wales & Border franchise bid teams its desire for a semi-fast Liverpool - Cardiff service via the Halton Curve and Chester – Wrexham - Shrewsbury.

Footfall at Wrexham General has fallen by 100,000 since 2012/13, whereas Wrexham Central has seen a rise of around 33,000 in the same period, perhaps attracted by easier access to the platform and better parking provision. Line closures between Wrexham and Chester, and redoubling and improving signalling further south, may have caused some rail users to make other travel arrangements. The lack of a late evening return from Chester, and its poor connections are also factors. It is more convenient to go directly from Chester than to go from Wrexham, and have to change and wait. Given Chester's importance to the North West, with lines radiating in six directions, Cheshire West and Mersey travel are seeking to improve both its rail capacity and passenger facilities.

The £2/day parking charges at Ruabon against free parking at Chirk is likely to have made the latter more attractive, particularly to rail users in Llangollen and the Dee Valley, who have a choice. Chirk also benefits from a fully accessible, ramped footbridge, whereas Ruabon has only a traditional footbridge with two flights of stairs. Finally Gobowen, which acts as a railhead for the Oswestry area, continues to grow. Free parking, a staffed ticket office, heated waiting room and café facilities all contribute to a good passenger experience. Severn Dee Travel and its staff have been awarded 'Safe Place' status, where anyone who feels threatened or is the victim of a crime can seek support.

Friends of the Barton Line

North Lincolnshire Council is supporting Grand Central's open-access proposal for a direct service between Cleethorpes and London Kings Cross via Habrough and Scunthorpe. TPE is installing new information screens at Grimsby Town and Cleethorpes, and at the latter will also provide a shelter on Platforms 2 & 3, and ten more parking spaces. Siemens are looking to create a new £200m manufacturing plant on a 67-acre site at Goole, subject to satisfactory order book and investment decisions.

In the May timetable, the penultimate service from Doncaster via Scunthorpe will henceforth go to Nottingham to refuel, returning the following day, so the first and last Barton services will be formed of TPE Class 185's stabled at Cleethorpes. However, their size may preclude them from serving certain stations.

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

Last year was one of consolidation rather than spectacular progress. Lichfield's two local services are now run by West Midland Trains, a consortium of Abellio and two Japanese companies, operating respectively as West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway. New Cross-City trains will retain the 3-car format, despite the huge traffic growth since the Class 323s arrived in the 1990s; they will have more standing room and fewer seats, and from 2021 will provide more frequent evening and Sunday services. The Trent Valley service now runs direct from Stafford to Crewe: good for connectivity north of Lichfield, but adding a change for the Potteries.

In the East Midland franchise consultation, LRPB proposed a new Nottingham/Derby - Lichfield service via Burton, and possibly via Sutton to Birmingham International for the airport and NEC; the outcome is still awaited. The Group still wants the Lichfield-Walsall link restored, but enthusiasm from local Councils or LEPs is lacking, despite severe congestion and thus pollution on the roads. It must decide whether it has the resources needed to undertake the campaign. There has been no opportunity yet to comment on post-HS2 services when a West Coast Partnership replaces the Inter City West Coast franchise.

The increased Virgin calls at Lichfield Trent Valley from May 2016 have attracted significant new business, though Virgin has failed to capitalize on these gains. Footfall in the year to March 2017, as reported by ORR, increased by 3.4% to over just over 1.1 million; ten years ago, before the hourly London service started, it was under 250,000. However, nothing more has been heard of possible stops by an open-access operator.

Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users' Group

Of the 25 Liverpool-Norwich express units, 11 now have USB power sockets and comply with disability legislation, with another 5 by October. However, the remaining 9 belong to a different leasing company, which would like to start work on its fleet from June, creating major problems for the train operator. The blue Class 156 units are undergoing life extension work, so the operator has recruited more depot staff and stocked more spare parts in the hope of keeping as many units in service as possible. Meanwhile, the Franchising Director has finally admitted that the Flirt bi-modes on the Stansted Airport to Norwich service will not travel at "Sprinter" line speeds, though he claims that journey times between Cambridge and Norwich will be no longer than now.

Following her own mental illness, a consultant with TAS Partnership researched whether and how mental health issues might deter people from using public transport. The main issues seem to be feeling anxious and alone in a crowd; finding things difficult, exhausting or unfamiliar; fear of overcrowding, and having to interact with others; panic at not having instant access to a toilet; pressure to buy a ticket quickly, and a feeling of not having staff on hand to ask for help.

Approaching Stockport on a Buxton to Manchester service, the conductor announced the possibilities of changing for a variety of destinations but not Norwich, even though Buxton involves only the one change.

English Regional Transport Association

Further to last month's report of developments compromising any reopening of the Cobbler line from Bedford to Northampton, ERTA reports two stays of execution. In Olney, the Warrington Road developers are revising their planning application, whilst the Northampton Link Road would simply link St James Mill Road and St James Mill Road East - which are presently no-through-roads terminating on either side of the old track bed - with provision for a level crossing.

The Chiltern line from London to Aylesbury Vale is being extended to Calvert as part of East-West Rail. So why not further extend it to a Parkway Station at Brackley, sharing the Great Central track bed with HS2? The expanding town, industrial estate/logistics area, and A43 corridor including Silverstone, would gain a rail service within commuting distance of London. And from there, ERTA envisages a line to Leicester and Nuneaton, with a link into Rugby WCML Station via a chord south of Willoughby.

ERTA also believes that in Lincolnshire, a branch off a reopened Wisbech line could link March and Spalding, and possibly on to Boston. [*The latter by a 6km chord between Donington and Swineshead along the line of the South Forty Foot Drain, crossing only dead-end roads, so linking Peterborough and Cleethorpes – Ed.*]

Hitchin Rail User Group

The new Thameslink timetable will bring many benefits, but has not been universally well received. Passengers from stations north of Hitchin to those between Knebworth and Potters Bar have lost their direct service, and the deferment of one of the Cambridge-Brighton services until December has left extended service intervals in the peak, eg between 0741 and 0811 from Hitchin – Finsbury Park.

Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group

Over the weekend of 7-8 April, NR successfully raised Bridge 14 at Crouch Hill station by a foot to complete the electrification project; the overhead wires should go live shortly. By March, Bombardier had completed 16 Class 710 4-car units: all 14 of the dual voltage units for the Barking – Gospel Oak and Euston – Watford lines, and the first two of 31 AC only units for Cheshunt services via Seven Sisters/Chingford/Enfield Town. However, 'type testing' at NR's Asfordby test centre in Leicestershire, and the CEF test centre at Valenciennes, near Lille, in France is running about three months late, and the new trains cannot enter service without approval to operate on NR infrastructure - very unlikely for the start of the May timetable. The eight 2-car Class 172 diesel trains that currently operate Goblin services will transfer to the Coventry – Nuneaton service from the start of the December timetable.

Chesham & District Transport Users' Group

The Transport & Works Act Order for the Metropolitan Line Extension to Watford Junction expires on 12 July, when it will lapse unless work had started. The DfT was understood to be in discussion with the Mayor of London about refunding DfT and Herts CC monies spent by TfL if the MLE were cancelled, and it was hoped that such a threat might help to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

The line between Bedwyn and Reading closed from 23-26 April, and will again from 14-17 May, 2-7 June, 9-12 July, 16 July-5 August, 28-30 August, 8-11 October and 19-22 November. Bedwyn users faced five to six hours travelling to and from Paddington, so the Group asked for a non-stop peak bus from Bedwyn to Didcot (and return in the evening), and the same for Hungerford and Kintbury. GWR responded positively with a bus from Bedwyn at 0625, calling at Hungerford at 0640, and then direct to Reading arriving at 0725, and Paddington at 0811. The return at 1830 arrives in Hungerford at 2003 and Bedwyn at 2018. Hopefully, this 14-hour day will be a bit more tolerable! Alternatively, Bedwyn season tickets will be valid at Swindon, Chippenham, Didcot, Salisbury, Grateley, Andover, Whitchurch, Overton and Basingstoke.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

The new Monday to Friday timetable from 21 May is on a GTR [website](#). Saturday services will replicate the off-peak Monday to Friday service. On Sundays, the Portsmouth, Chichester to Victoria services will no longer run via Worthing, but will be attached to the existing Bognor to Victoria service at Barnham. West Coastway services have changed a little, but the website sets out the new timetable quite clearly.

Horsham and Redhill to London Bridge is now a Thameslink service to St Pancras and Peterborough. However, because of a shortage of stock, several of these services will have a delayed start date: the 0525, 1725 and 2225 from Horsham will start on 22 May, but the 0855, 1458 and 2055 not until 4 June; and from St Pancras, the 0945, 1545 and 2146 will run from 28 May, the 0715, 1315 and 1915 from 4 June, and the 0545 and 0615 from 22 June.

NR has embarked on a major programme of work on West Sussex lines. The Brighton main line will be closed over the half-term holidays 20-28 October and 16-24 February 2019.

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

FOSBR has published its [2018 Rail Plan](#). Bristol is concerned about clean air, but no one is effectively making the case for local train services. The Bristol travel to work area has 26 functioning stations, but with poor service frequency. FOSBR would appreciate any examples that would help make its case.

[Public Guided Walks](#) from stations on the Heart of Wessex Line (Bristol – Weymouth) started on 12 May and continue until 6 October. The walks are organised and led by volunteers from the Avon, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire Areas of the Ramblers.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

Devon and Cornwall is again suffering badly from delays in the cascade of rolling stock. On the Avocet Line between Exeter and Exmouth, many trains are being formed of only one or two carriages. This causes massive overcrowding and passengers being left behind, particularly in the morning and afternoon peaks.

The Committee met to agree ALRUG's response to the consultation of the Great Western franchise. Chris Irwin of Travelwatch SouthWest set the scene with an overview of the franchise and the work that TWSW had done on it. He also rehearsed the arguments for and against splitting the franchise, concluding, like ALRUG, that the attractions were insufficient to justify the split.

The proposal to extend the franchise was agreed, but there had been no competition since 2005, and thus no re-appraisal of the franchise requirement. ALRUG's principal concern was the need for a clear policy on rolling stock replacement. The half-hourly Sunday services should be included in the Train Service Requirement, and the weekday half-hourly services extended later into the evening. Many of its stations lacked basic facilities normally found on similar stations elsewhere, so ALRUG also wanted a formal requirement for the franchisee to be more pro-active in its dealings with NR, to make it easier to advance minor infrastructure projects such as platform lengthening.

A passenger-friendly improvement, instigated by ALRUG, might warrant wider adoption. The Avocet Line Community Rail Forum audited signage at its stations, including which signs could still be read at night. Many were either unlit or poorly lit, and some had been repositioned outside the station. However, a local manufacturer produced solar powered signs, and ALRUG successfully bid for funding from GWR's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund for six boards that light up when approached after dark. If they prove to be robust, they could be a boon to train operating companies in poorly lit locations elsewhere.

RAILFUTURE

Railfuture welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join Railfuture [here](#). From the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Railfuture and its Campaigns by clicking on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Railfuture consultation responses](#).

CONFERENCES

At Railfuture's 14th AGM on Saturday, Alex Hynes, MD of both Scotrail and NR Scotland, said that the integration of track and trains was key to giving Scotland the best railway it had ever had. The Beast From The East had proved that integrated command and control did right by the customer, unlike some franchise holders in the south. Also, far more people want to use the railway than not - but a lack of capacity prevents them, so as it cannot run more trains, Scotrail was increasing its rolling stock by 25%.

John Finnie, MSP for the Highlands and Islands, also backed a more positive approach to rail, and criticised the franchise system: companies had a legal duty to their shareholders, whereas the only shareholder on the railway was the public. It was most important to shift the emphasis on spending from road to rail: £60 billion was committed to improving roads between Stirling, Inverness and Perth, while the railway remained single track in places. He also asked for rail connections when new factories were built, and criticised the suggestion to reduce airport tax, as there was no VAT or fuel duty on air travel. The morning session ended with a brief display of stunning photographs from Fraser McDonald and Norman McNab of the Friends of The West Highland Line. The group was formed when the Serpell Report suggested cutting both the Oban and Mallaig lines back to Crianlarich, and they work to ensure passengers could continue to enjoy the spectacular scenery on the line.

In the business session after lunch, Ian Brown was returned to the Railfuture Board after a one-year absence, along with Wendy Thorne and Chris Page, re-elected for three years, and Stewart Palmer, who will serve a two-year spell. The Board was also empowered to create new membership types, and reduce fees if they felt it necessary, previously a decision that could only be made at a members' meeting.

Railfuture invites all affiliated Rail User Groups to its Summer Conference in Carlisle on 23 June to share best practice. The event is FREE, but please register in advance. In the morning there will be three speakers: a representative from Story Contracting on re-opening the Settle & Carlisle line after the landslip at Eden Brows; Mark Rand, Past Chairman, Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line, and Simon Walton, Chair, Campaign for Borders Rail. In the afternoon, Stewart Palmer (a former MD of South West Trains) will lead a workshop on how campaigners should engage with TOCs to be more effective. Each workshop group will present its conclusions through a 'market stall'.

The Branches and Groups Day on 6 October in Birmingham, from 1030 to 1630 will consider how Railfuture must change to attract new, active members. Based on last year's feedback, there will only be two workshop sessions, so that it will not feel rushed. Refreshments and lunch will be provided.

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

The [entry form](#) for this year's ACoRP Community Rail Awards is on its website; the closing date is 18 June. The gala dinner on 4 October will be in Scotland, at Glasgow's Doubletree by Hilton. The closing date for dinner bookings is 7 September. The cost for Individuals, Community/Voluntary Groups is £45+VAT (£54) per person, or £400+VAT (£480) for a table of 10. However, **every attendee will receive a complimentary ScotRail smartcard ticket, providing free travel around Scotland's network from Thursday to Sunday.**

The DfT has published a [summary](#) of the responses to the consultation on the Community Rail Strategy in England and Wales, including a number of case studies. It is working across Government and with key delivery partners to develop a strategy that reflects the views expressed.

The Leeds - Morecambe CRP welcomes the 38% increase in the number of trains on the Bentham Line between Leeds and Morecambe: up from five to seven each way Monday to Saturday, and four to five on Sundays. The 22 minute earlier first arrival in Leeds at 0843, and the later departures at 1725 and 1918 instead of 1645 are far more useful. There are connections at Carnforth to and from the Furness Line and the Cumbrian Coast route, and at Lancaster south to Preston, Manchester, Birmingham and London Euston, and north to Oxenholme (for Windermere), Carlisle, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Connections at Leeds cover the East Coast Main Line and CrossCountry services, together with local services across the North. The CRP urges travellers to make good use of the extra journey possibilities.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT has launched its Passenger Railway Challenge: an invitation to help it decide on its priorities. It's been campaigning on fares and ticketing for some time, and knows that affordability is the top issue for many passengers, but what other things are important? The first question is what do trains need more of: seats, room to stand, or leg room. More questions like this are on its [Twitter feed](#) and [Facebook page](#).

TRANSPORT FOCUS

People with disabilities, younger passengers, frequent car users, older and the retired are all more likely to use forms of transport other than rail. A Transport Focus [report](#) examines opinions and feelings of non-users towards rail. Communicating service improvements to them is key as, unlike regular passengers, they are less likely to be aware of any benefits that have been introduced.

Any passenger who boards a train without a ticket at a station where ticket-buying facilities are available may receive a penalty fare of at least £20. However, there is now a third-stage independent appeals panel, and its members are able to look beyond the rules and regulations, consider mitigating circumstances and apply a basic 'fairness test'.

Transport Focus listened to over 28,000 people to rank their satisfaction of 56 stations. The top priorities were arrival time information, waiting rooms and the overall look of the station. London King's Cross was the most popular station with a score of 96%, just above neighbouring St Pancras. Glasgow Queen Street, Scotland's third busiest station, was Britain's most unpopular with a score of only 58%, whereas nearby Glasgow Central made the top 10 with a 91% approval.

FELIXSTOWE TRAVELWATCH

Construction of a 1.4km loop west of Trimley station and work on a number of level crossings started in April. The line now closes from 1850 on Friday until early on Monday morning, or Tuesday after a bank holiday. The duration of the work is not yet known, but one report suggested that it might last until Autumn 2019 - hopefully before the new Greater Anglia timetable due in December!

Heavy snow on Wednesday, 28 February was followed by extensive drifting, resulting in many cancellations and line closures through to the weekend. The East Suffolk line was closed for six days but, commendably, a virtually full service resumed on the Felixstowe line by Friday morning. Heavy freight trains operating all through the day would have helped to prevent the build up of snowdrifts.

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

NR has alerted Cumbrian coast line users that changes in the May timetable could affect drivers who time their journeys to avoid level crossing closures. However, this will hold throughout the country, so if you have a busy crossing in your area, eg over the A10 at Foxton, please do your best to spread the word.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has announced £1 million of funding for each of two sub-national transport bodies: Transport for the South East, and England's Economic Heartland. Counties from Kent to Hampshire, and from Oxford to Cambridge will be able to influence government investment decisions at a more regional level, bridging the gap between national and local transport authorities.

The DfT has published its [response to the consultation](#) on the passenger rail public service obligation levy, which seeks to level the playing field between open access and franchise operators, so that passengers benefit from more open access, whilst securing the delivery of franchised services critical to passengers and communities. It is now consulting on the implementation of EU directive (2016/2370/EU), and on the amendments to rail markets legislation following UK's exit from the EU. Subject to certain protections, the directive will enable new rail operators to bid for access to routes with existing franchise operators, and safeguard the independence and impartiality of infrastructure managers within vertically integrated structures, where rail infrastructure and passenger services are operated and owned by a single body.

To [promote](#) Market-led proposals (MLP) - ideas for enhancing the railway that are financially credible without government support - the DfT held a Rail Investment Opportunity Day in London on 14 May, with a second in Birmingham on 5 June. Initial proposals should be submitted by 31 July.

The [Dorset Echo](#) reports that Transport Secretary Chris Grayling is to launch a formal review of South Western Railway and NR following a spate of poor performance. It will be independently chaired by Sir Michael Holden, and will be completed in summer 2018. However, one of the statistics cited is misleading: "significant lateness increased from 3.8 per cent in April, May and June 2017 to 4.8 per cent in July, August and September." But SWR didn't take over the franchise until 20 August, and that was in the middle of remodelling Waterloo station.

UKIP transport spokesman Jill Seymour MEP has [criticised](#) the Government for inviting bids to run UK rail franchises from firms in countries that exclude foreign operators; only a third of the operators eligible to bid are British. Mrs Seymour added: "It's been stated that overseas companies can bring in new innovation and fresh ideas – that may well be true - but they should only ever be granted access to our network if they are working in partnership with UK-owned companies. Revenue which is raised through our railway network must be kept in-house, to be re-invested for the good of our country. If we're not careful, they may soon be majority owned by foreign governments."

The [Public Accounts Committee](#) is also concerned that the DfT's inadequate management of two of its most important franchises calls into question its contract management capability. Regarding the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise, it cites a catalogue of failures by the DfT, NR and Govia Thameslink. On the East Coast franchise, the DfT has failed to learn the lessons from previous failures of the franchise, and has again allowed the operator to promise more than it could deliver. The issues with the East Coast and TSGN, and the small pool of potential bidders in the market, highlight the broken model of franchising.

Since their launch last year, Transport for London has issued over 30,000 [Please Offer Me A Seat](#) badges to passengers with a range of disabilities and illnesses. To mark the anniversary, 23-27 April was designated Priority Seating Week. Posters featured prominently around the network, along with newly designed priority seating signs. The campaign aims to encourage more people to offer up their seats to those with visible or non-visible impairments.

The Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents rail firms, is launching a public consultation aimed at making ticketing fairer and easier to use. About 55 million different fares exist in the current system. Passengers are not always offered the cheapest fare available due to "long-standing anomalies" such as split ticketing, and charging a peak-time fare when half a trip is on an off-peak service. Rules governing how tickets are sold and how fares are set date back to 1995. They are based on customers visiting ticket offices to buy tickets, and do not reflect the rise in smartphones, or the increase in part-time and freelance work patterns. The industry has pledged that average fares will not rise as a result of any reform.

A new [agreement](#) between Heathrow Airport Ltd, the DfT and Great Western Railway (GWR) will see the non-stop Heathrow Express retained until at least 2028. Heathrow Airport will keep the commercial aspects, including marketing, ticket pricing and revenue, while GWR will operate the service under a management contract. When the Elizabeth line (Crossrail) opens fully in December 2019, there will be 22 trains per hour from Central London to Heathrow: 12 on the Piccadilly Line, 6 on Crossrail, and 4 Heathrow Express. For its part, the DfT will develop two new rail links into Heathrow: a [Southern link](#) from Guildford and Basingstoke via Woking, and from Waterloo and Clapham Junction via Staines, and a Western link from Reading via Slough. A [consultation](#) on the latter has just opened, with a series of events from 16 May to 15 June. [*Hollow Hill Lane, that would close permanently, serves as a rat run to Iver when the M25 around the M4 is a car park – Ed.*]

Kenilworth station finally reopened on 30 April, with an hourly one-carriage service between Coventry and Leamington. Subject to approval, a two-carriage service will connect through to Nuneaton in December.

Rother Valley Railway has made an application for an order under the Transport and Works Act to link two existing railways in Sussex with a new line between a junction at Bodiam and a terminus at Robertsbridge.

The 40th edition of Barry Doe's rail franchise map is now available, and may be [downloaded](#) free of charge. Changes include Thameslink extensions, TransPennine Express routes, the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) replacing Heathrow Connect, and some adjustments to TOC legal ownership.

CONSULTATIONS

- NR: [6-month closure of Bromham Road bridge](#), Bedford (A4280), **closes 24 May** (the consultation, not the bridge!)
- DfT: [implementation of EU directive 2016/2370/EU](#) (see above), closes 8 June.
- NR: [Western rail link into Heathrow \(amended\)](#) (see above), closes 22 June.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a County Council or Unitary Authority.

...and finally

The Daily Telegraph (13 April) reports that Tom Church was so shocked by the cost a rail ticket from London to Bristol that he bought a Honda Civic with 135,000 miles on the clock for £80 instead. With £81.38 road tax, £20.43 for one day's insurance, and £25 on fuel, he completed the journey for £206.81, against the rail fare of between £210 and £218.30. And he still has the car.

BBC Look East reports that a Halesworth – Ipswich commuter logged 28 hours of delays to his journey in a year, so he invested £35 in a claim under the Consumer Rights Act. Mediation was agreed, but Greater Anglia failed to provide the requisite data, so judgement went his way, and he was awarded £350 - but only when he obtained a warrant to seize GA assets did they write him a cheque for £462!

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains the Railfuture [List of Events](#) to attend, and now a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. A Calendar of Events embedded in a pdf document can get discarded, and that is a problem if the venue changes from month to month, so a copy in Word format would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- Railfuture events (rail user group representatives are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

May

- Wednesday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, The Sloop, **Barton**, 1800 (also 18 July (AGM), 19 September, 21 November).
- Thursday 17. Magor Action Group On Rail, Golden Lion, **Magor**, 1930 (and the 3rd Thursday every month).
- Thursday 17. Edenbridge & District Rail Travellers' Association AGM, WI Hall, **Edenbridge**, 1900 for 1930.
- Monday 21. ALRUG, Redwing, **Lympstone**, 1900 (Also 15 October, AGM, Topsham.)
- Monday 21. Lichfield Rail Promotion Group, King's Head, **Lichfield**.
- Tuesday 22. Chesham and District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (also 19 June, 7 August, 18 September (followed by the AGM), 23 October, 11 December.)
- Thursday 24. Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association AGM, Severn Dee Travel waiting room/café, Gobowen station, 1900.
- Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife College, Methilhaven Road, **Buckhaven**, KY8 1EA, 1830 (also 26 June.)

June

- Friday 1. Friends of the Far North Line AGM and Conference, Portland Hotel, Princes St, **Thurso**, KW14 7AA, 1115.
- Saturday 2. Travel Watch Information Stall, East of England Co-op, Hamilton Road, **Felixstowe**, 0900-1200.
- Monday 4. Watford Rail Users' Group AGM, The Junction, **Watford**, 1830.
- Tuesday 5. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 1430.
- Friday 8-10. European Passenger Federation, **Aachen**.
- Saturday 9. Cumbrian Coast Rail Users' Group, Methodist Church hall, **Seascale**, 1350.
- Wednesday 13. Railfuture Herts and Beds, St Paul's Church, Blandford Road, **St Albans**, 1045 (Also 20 October).

- Saturday 16. Railfuture East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke Church Hall, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, IP2 8DA, 1400 (Also 29 September in Norwich TBC).
- Saturday 23. Railfuture Summer Conference, Hallmark Hotel, Court Square, **Carlisle**, CA1 1QY, 1000 for 1045.

Further Ahead

- 9 July. Skipton East Lancs Rail Action Partnership, New Road Community Centre, **Earby**, 1900 (Also, 10 September, Crown Hotel, **Colne**; 12 November, Herriots Hotel, Skipton; 28 January 2019, Earby, and 11 March, AGM at The Lesser Municipal Hall, Albert Road, Colne).
- 6 October. Railfuture Branches and Groups Day, **Birmingham**, 1030.
- 15 October. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Globe Hotel, **Topsham**, 1900.
- 16 October. Felixstowe Travel Watch, Salvation Army Church, **Felixstowe**, 1430.

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