

Conference Special



June is a big month for the Branch. We are hosting the *Railfuture* Summer Conference in Darlington on 22nd June. The theme of the Conference is the “Rebirth of the Railways” and we’ve got a great list of speakers who will share their news and insights with us. Full details of the conference, and how to book, are on the next page.

Elsewhere in this newsletter.

- Our Editor shares his views on the current state of the rail industry and its relationships with the wider world of politics.
- We’ve got reports, page 7 onwards, on our branch activities including a preview of our new leaflet. Don’t miss the report on our AGM when we were treated to a great presentation on the work of colleagues from just over the Scottish Border and their successful campaign to re-open the Waverley Line.
- Our campaigns are not ignored with progress reports on page 15.
- National News follows on page 16.
- For the first time we’ve devoted space to reports from the local Rail Users Groups – see pages 17 onwards.
- And finally, starting on page 21, we take a look around what is happening with our local Train Operating Companies.



**North East
Branch**

The North East Branch of Railfuture is proud to be hosting the Railfuture Summer Conference. The 'Rebirth of the Railways' conference will be held in Darlington on Saturday 22nd June 2019.

The emphasis at this conference will be on **new developments occurring in the industry** - and what better place to locate the event than Darlington, where railway history truly began.

Our speakers will be:

Phillip Meikle – Transport Strategy Director at NEXUS on Transport Strategy in our region

Matthew Hunt – Port Director at Port of Sunderland on aspects of freight by rail

Tim Rutter – Head of Technical Services at Hitachi Rail Europe on constructing new trains at Aycliffe

Ben Houchen – Elected Mayor of Tees Valley providing a 'political take' on rail in the Tees Valley

Alan Williams – Chair of the Esk Valley Rail Development Company talking about the joys and sorrows of running a country railway.

The event is to be held at the Dolphin Centre in Darlington - less than 10 minutes' walk from the Railway Station. Conference starts at 10:55 with registration from 10:30. Places are still available - but bookings for this conference will close on 20th June 2019. It would help us if you could make your bookings before 10th June – we have to give numbers to the caterers on that day. Tickets cost £15.00 for the day Holders of 16 – 25 Railcards will only pay £10.00. Those aged under 16 will also be charged £10.

Bookings via <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/#book> and for further details please email conferences@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture is a national, independent body that advocates a modern and effective passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.

The North East is one of twelve branches in England along with Railfuture Scotland and Railfuture Wales that make up the national organisation. Web site: www.railfuture.co.uk. Twitter: @Railfuture and @RailfutureNEast

**From
the
Editor's**



Casting my eye over the national railway scene – well there are so many “issues” on the go it really is hard to know what to include and what to omit.

The Keith Williams Review set up on the back of the various timetable melt-downs

post-May 2018 is probably a good start point. Described by some as a once in a life time chance to correct flaws in the current railway organisation, its Chair is “independent” though the review itself has been commissioned by the Government so clearly is not free from Whitehall influence. Williams says he intends to have at least part of his report ready by this Autumn. Indications so far suggest that franchising is being closely examined and is likely to be drastically modified or even abandoned. And the development of a core strategic rail group having an overall “command” remit with its own CEO (and independent of the DfT) seems another possibility.

Incidentally, the Rail Freight Group (RFG), has made strong representations to the Review, claiming that under current arrangements freight has to play a definite “second fiddle” to the needs of the passenger market. RFG are demanding a “level playing field”.

Climate change together with air quality have both moved rapidly “centre stage” over recent weeks. The government have been obliged to take note about the former thanks to the efforts of the group “Extinction Rebellion” and those of a sixteen-year-old Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg, leading to Environment Minister Michael Gove declaring a “climate emergency”. There are plans to set up clean air zones in some cities including Newcastle, London and Edinburgh. Charges will be levied on vehicles entering the zones with the scale of those charges determined by the size of NO₂ emissions from the vehicles concerned.

A great opportunity for rail to flag up its green credentials and at the same time help provide practical ways for people to access the central areas of our cities without recourse to transport modes that pollute the air we breathe.



Newcastle City monitored air quality over a number of years. The result: proposals for a pollution charge or tolls on the Tyne Bridges. A re-opened Ashington Blyth and Tyne line and extending the Metro will help solve the problem.

And just as we are preparing this bulletin comes news of academic research (from the Forum of International Respiratory Societies) which finds that poor air quality is a factor in causing a whole range of illnesses including, diabetes, cancer, liver disease, Parkinson's, memory loss and autism. (*"Air pollution damages every organ in the body"* – *Guardian*, 18 May 2019). Previously most medics had thought that bad air quality was

only responsible for such as asthma and other respiratory conditions.

Incidentally Ian Brown, of *Railfuture*, warns that with the coming of electric cars (and vans?) especially after 2030, rail's environmental advantages will be partly nullified. Except of course neither electric vehicles nor driverless ones will eliminate traffic congestion, especially in city environments, so in that respect rail will continue to laud it over road.

Thinking of air pollution logically leads us to rail electrification (or the lack of it!) – Leeds to Manchester immediately springs to mind, plus the Midland Main Line. And this same subject inevitably leads us to the Minister of State himself, namely Chris Grayling. It is difficult to recall anyone holding the office of Transport Secretary who has attracted such wide criticism as this one. Ernest Marples perhaps, in the sixties? Whilst *Railfuture* operates as a strictly "non-political" body it is perfectly proper for it to question Ministerial 'technical' decisions. Issues around Grayling's handling of the Channel Ferries contract, his failure to accept any responsibility for the May 2018 timetable disaster, his decisions with regard to cross-Pennine electrification, his insistence that electric/diesel trains (bi-modes) are the way forward, his reduction of incentive payments to firms that switch freight from road to rail and his interference in such as the previously agreed platform modifications at Manchester Piccadilly are all matters well

catalogued in the media. But his ministerial fingerprints are to be found in other Whitehall departments where he has had involvement as well, notably at the Department of Work and Pensions and at the Ministry of Justice.

Recent media reports estimate that his disastrous part-privatisation of the Probation Service in 2014 has cost the tax payer just over £500 million because of subsequent payments the government has had to give to the private ‘community correction companies’ to make good their respective losses. Added to the estimated £40 million plus that the ferries episode cost Chris Grayling seems to have got through well over half a billion pounds that had not been previously budgeted for by the Treasury. It is no wonder his level of competence has been questioned, and not surprising therefore that calls for his resignation have come. *“MP’s unite to tell May: sack Grayling for his ferry fiasco” – Observer 10th February 2019) and “Calls for Grayling to quit” – Guardian 2nd March 2019.* My own assessment (-Ed) is that the Minister has lost the confidence (and trust?) of the rail industry and has embarrassed his civil servants at the DfT. That is clearly a worrying state of affairs given the importance of his post!

HS2 seems to have been gaining increased media coverage since publication of the last edition of the Branch Bulletin in November 2018. Sadly, much of this has been of the negative variety with the “usual suspects” lining up to attack the project. *Guardian* columnist Simon Jenkins, *The Spectator* Editor, Fraser Nelson, former Leader of the House of Commons Andrea Leadsom MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss MP, Nigel Farage and the *Daily Mail* together with several local protest groups from along the line’s route, are among them. Much of the anti HS2 rhetoric centres on its cost and usually includes well-rehearsed mantras such as *“£50 billion just to save 20 minutes between London and Birmingham”*. But it’s all very well for mostly London based journalists and politicians to pen their theoretical objections. They mostly fail to address issues of rail capacity for instance, and they conveniently ignore the fact that HS2 isn’t just about getting from London to Birmingham. It is also about links between Birmingham and Sheffield and Leeds for example, and about links between Birmingham and Crewe and Manchester. Perhaps Simon Jenkins et al haven’t experienced the quality of travel north of Birmingham? Perhaps they don’t understand the urgent need to expand local passenger services and freight movements in the catchment areas of

HS2, which can only happen if more space is made available on the existing network?

Your Editor's opinion is that for whatever reason the anti-HS2 brigade are now mobilising a concerted effort to kill it off once and for all' almost certainly aided and abetted by the powerful road and oil lobbies. Fortunately, there are some strong defenders of HS2 such as Andy Burnham (Mayor of Manchester), the Leader of Leeds City Council together with business people associated with the Northern Powerhouse. And perhaps HS2 detractors should note that already some 9000 jobs, particularly in construction, have been created with a wide range of high grade engineering apprenticeships in the pipeline.

Then there is the recent mess-up over the franchise competition for the West Coast Partnership (due to be awarded this Autumn) which has seen the Virgin-Stagecoach bid disqualified because of a dispute with the DfT over a hefty deficit in the rail pensions fund. Virgin have threatened to seek a judicial review of the decision. So.....watch this space as they say!

Is there any good news you may ask? Well, yes there is actually. For example, the new timetables commencing 19th May provided 1000+ additional daily services in Great Britain. The message from the train companies was that lessons had been learnt from May 2018 and that extra staff would be on duty for a period following introduction of the amended timetables to deal with any hiccups.

New ways of powering our trains are now being developed including the use of hydrogen with the possibility that some trials might take place in the Tees Valley area. And there seems to be increased awareness in Whitehall that VERY light rail might have a contribution to make to mass transit of people in urban centres and travel between rural communities. To this end the Government held a "light rail" consultation earlier in the year. So maybe the air pollution and congestion issues are beginning to concentrate minds in high places?

And possible re-openings? On 8th February last the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne (ABT) line received a surprise (and top secret) visit from no less than Chris Grayling himself. *(See page 21 for details).*

Still on the "good news" theme we note that the Mark 5 carriages comprising the new rolling stock for the Caledonian Sleeper began operating in April. The Mark 5's, as compared with the former BR built sleeping cars, represent a massive step forward in luxury with en-suite bedrooms and much improved catering provision.

railfuture

NE Branch News

Chair, **Keith Simpson**, is emphasising the need for the Branch to widen its appeal and to become more attractive to potential new members. Although Allison Cosgrove, is able to attend some of our Committee meetings

as a representative of the national Board of Directors, the need for a regular, local female presence and input is very apparent. Any women interested should please contact Keith.



One key aspect of the widening appeal strategy has been the decision that the Branch become more pro-active in mounting specific campaigns in our region (see page 15 for details). Another has been the design, and recent publication, of a glossy Branch publicity pamphlet designed by Dennis Fancett. The pamphlet is an essential element in trying to get our organisation better known amongst the wider public. Copies will be distributed at future suitable events such as model railway exhibitions or on special Heritage Rail occasions, as well as at the Summer Conference in June.

And yet a further way of raising our profile was the decision (reported in the November 2018 Bulletin) to enhance the North East section of the national *Railfuture* web site. Dave Shaw undertook the task. Our thanks to him as the fruits of his labours now become apparent. Do be sure to take a look, comments and/or

suggestions most welcome.

We, the Chair and Committee, have also pledged to try and form a closer relationship with the four Rail User Groups (RUG's) in our area. Pooling *Railfuture*

know-how about the workings and idiosyncrasies of the nation's rail system with the detailed information concerning specific local routes held by RUG personnel will, we believe, assist in sharpening our combined efforts to bring about tangible service improvements in the NE.

Symbolising this desire for closer inter-play between *Railfuture NE* and the area's RUG's are the reports to be found in this bulletin from Coastliners Rail Users' Group, Saltburn Line Users' Group (SLUG), South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group (SENRUG) and Tyne Valley Rail Users' Group (TVRUG). (See pages 17 to 22).

BRANCH OPEN MEETING – WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY 2019 – NEWCASTLE ARTS CENTRE. Guest speaker: Paul Makepeace, Head of Business Delivery, Direct Rail Services (DRS).



Paul outlined the current business remit of DRS - the company was set up in 1995 and is owned by the Nuclear Development Agency. Its major task is to move nuclear fuels (including those that are spent) around GB. Other duties include long distance freight haulage, providing assistance to Network Rail, charter work, some limited involvement with *Northern* (on the Cumbrian Coast) and provision of locomotives to

haul the new Nova 3 trains for TPE.

Then followed a brief review of traction modes used in the rail freight business namely diesel, electric, battery, hydrogen, natural gas and electro/diesel. Paul emphasised the need for freight locos to be reliable, durable and capable of hauling a wide mix of trains from day to day. He reminded us that only a small amount of rail freight is moved by electric trains. Few freight terminals are wired so access to them is difficult and time consuming.

An immediate challenge facing road hauliers is the likely creation of clean air zones in urban centres which will impact on operational costs. So, Paul thought there may be opportunities for rail to develop a viable national parcels service between major centres with last mile delivery by electric vans from freight terminals or stations to the end customer. This would allow rail to compete in the 'on-line shopping' arena.

For rail freight 10% of its costs are down to fuel, so any improvements in fuel/power efficiency would give an important fillip to the industry. Paul

emphasised the increasing need for freight trains to be “fast” so that they could be slotted into busy passenger train flows.

He closed with a brief mention of Brexit which is apparently leading to some unusual stockpiling of certain goods and therefore increased work for both rail and road hauliers.

BRANCH AGM – SATURDAY 16 MARCH 2019 – NEWCASTLE ARTS CENTRE. Guest speaker: Simon Walton, Chair of Borders’ Rail

Simon had addressed the Branch AGM in 2014 when the Borders Line between Edinburgh and Tweedbank was under construction. It opened in September 2015 since when some four million passengers have used it, way ahead of expectations. Not only had Simon’s campaign group been surprised by the size of the uptake, so too had officials at *Transport for Scotland (TfS)*.

Car parks along the line are heavily used, train overcrowding is a problem and there have been instances of passengers being left behind on platforms. There is a thirty minute frequency through the day, though actual train running is sometimes constrained by the large amount of single track. Borders’ Rail had warned *TfS* during the construction phase that the reduction of much of the originally projected double track would impact on performance, notably general timekeeping and recovery from untoward events.

Simon, interestingly, referred back to the original closure of the old Waverley route between Edinburgh and Carlisle in 1969 – the present 35 miles Borders’ Rail comprises the northern end of that Waverley line. He recalls that there were sustained protests about the closure proposal for Waverley, a measure originally proposed in the infamous Beeching Plan of 1963. Local people had tried to emphasise the collateral benefits of the line ahead of closure, such as giving good connectivity between the small towns along the route, economic aspects particularly in relation to tourism, availability of easy commuting into either Edinburgh or Carlisle with the attendant advantages for employment opportunities for people living in the line’s catchment area and general “quality of life” factors such as



A class 170 at Tweedbank Station. Note the large, and nearly full, car park. It's only a short walk from the platform end to the bus stop, café and cycle sheds.

access to shops and leisure facilities and access to schools and colleges of further education. Operationally the Waverley line also provided a diversionary Anglo-Scottish route in the event of any mishaps affecting the West Coast Main Line.

In a scathing reflection about Beeching, and Ernest Marples - the now discredited Transport Minister who encouraged Beeching to be ruthless in his pruning of the



Melrose Station was closed in 1969 and a bypass was built over most of the railway alignment. However, the station building and up platform remain with just enough space for a single track line.

national railway system, Simon reminded us that both Beeching and Marples vehemently discounted any of the identified 'collateral' benefits of railways. It transpires that Beeching wanted the line to be dismantled after closure so that it could not be reopened. *(Talk about State vandalism! – Ed).*

The Borders' Rail group was formed in 1999. From the outset it campaigned vigorously on the theme of economic regeneration. As the campaign progressed local people had to be

dissuaded from advocating "better roads" as opposed to the Borders' railway. In the event, the reopened line seems to have proved a "winner" with the community. Villages have been "put on the map", some economic regeneration is seen to have happened and new travel options have been provided.

Tweedbank is currently the southern terminus of the line, but Simon regards this simply as a staging point. Melrose and Hawick along the remaining 56 miles to Carlisle are now firmly in his sights. Simon recognised that getting to Carlisle would not be a 'bed of roses'. The actual construction process will cause pain and inconvenience and there are some very "tricky" areas for the engineers to tackle, such as around Melrose. Additionally, the Campaign group would face vigorous opposition from the road lobby. In Scotland, as in England, a lot more money was going into roads than into railways. He observed dryly "probably we shall see a person on Mars before the line reaches Carlisle".

He had noted that in any mention of roads, peoples' first thoughts tended to be about by-passes. These usually had the effect of removing cars from town centres, but also removing people. Railways had the advantage of both being able to remove cars and deliver people into towns.

In answer to questions Simon emphasised the importance of any rail reopening campaign group making themselves available to local communities to explain what they were hoping to achieve, and always to emphasise the collateral benefits of rail mentioned above. These are sometimes the “intangibles” that are vastly important in that they directly affect peoples’ lives.

He also flagged up the importance of campaign groups having recognised ‘experts’ amongst their membership. In particular financial, architectural and construction engineering expertise were essential, plus an inside knowledge about the nuts and bolts of any effective public relations campaign.

This was a stimulating address by someone well versed in the art of campaigning on behalf of a specific (and large scale) railway project. If nothing else Simon made us aware of just how arduous campaigning can be, though, as in the case of Borders’ Rail, there are some high rewards to be had, eventually!

AGM – Business section



Our Chairman, Keith Simpson presented his report for the past year. He drew attention to the *Railfuture* Blueprint for the North Document, a combined piece of work with *Railfuture Yorkshire*, plus some assistance from Ian Brown a *Railfuture* Board member, for eventual submission to the Williams Review. The idea was to emphasise to Williams

some of the special circumstances that affected the railway in the north of England, including under-investment.

Keith mentioned the various projects adopted by the Branch with a view to setting away campaign movements for their eventual implementation. (See page 15). He hoped that Branch Members beyond those who served on the Committee would become involved with any of the projects which particularly interested them.

He noted that arrangements for the financing of the new Horden station on the Coast Line had been agreed and that opening was planned for 2020. Progress had been made in advancing the re-opening process for the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line which involved an upgrading from its present freight only status to full passenger standard. (See also page 21).

Keith alluded to the timetable chaos of summer 2018 which meant that implementing some promises made when Northern and TPE started their new franchise contracts in 2016 would be delayed. None of the new TPE trains were yet in revenue service, and there were delays affecting introduction of Northern's new stock.

He thanked members for their support and urged everyone to try hard to introduce new people to the branch. He also thanked Dave Shaw for his current work on re-designing the Branch's website.

Noted there were approximately 30 attenders at this AGM including Allison Cosgrove (Board Member) and Graham Collett from *Railfuture Yorkshire*.

Elections:

The following branch officers were returned unopposed:-

Chair: Keith Simpson

Vice-Chair: Trevor Watson

Secretary: Ian Walker

Treasurer: Damian Bell

Press officer: Dennis Fancett

***Railwatch* Correspondent:** Peter Walker

Martin Murphy continues as **Honorary Branch President**.

Work of the Branch Committee.

The Committee has met on four occasions – 20 November 2018, 22 January, 19 March and 22 May 2019. The primary business covered across those four meetings included:-

- Submission to DfT concerning new Cross-Country franchise with reference to services in and through the North East. This franchise process subsequently frozen due to setting up of the Williams Review.
- Decision to produce a branch publicity leaflet. **(Final version printed and ready for distribution by April 2019).**
- Planning of future activities –including securing of guest speakers for local branch meetings, responding to formal consultations, arranging branch representation at special interest meetings and conferences, relationships with local TOC's, liaison with area RUG's etc

- Formalising of the branch's eight special campaign projects with regular reviews of same.
- Special concern with the ABT reopening headed by Dennis Fancett and SENRUG. Also special concern with use of Stillington (freight only) line for passenger use – updates from Peter Walker of Coastliners RUG.
- The branch's budget and financial situation – regular reviews.
- The Summer (2019) Conference in Darlington – regular feedback from the organising work group.
- Exchange of information about rail in the NE, including freight.
- Redesign of our part of the Railfuture web-site.
- Agreeing material for inclusion in the official, national *Railfuture* response to the Williams Review, in particular that section concerning rail in the north known as "*A blueprint for the north*".
- Reviews of industrial action on *Northern*.
- The May (2019) timetable changes.

The above list demonstrates the very broad range of issues with which our Branch Committee is required to deal. Any Branch members who would like to become involved please speak with Keith Simpson!

Meeting between Branch Committee and Tim Burleigh - Head of External Relations, Eversholt Rail (Train Leasing Company): Tuesday 19 March 2019 at Antioch House, Durham.

Branch Chair Keith Simpson and five Committee colleagues, including your Editor, attended this two hour meeting. As always Tim was highly informative and helped us to get our heads around some current railway developments. He provided a detailed run-down on present rolling stock deployments, actual and possible. Space does not permit setting out all his information, here are just a few extracts:-

Arriva North Trains (*Northern*) –Eversholt supplying all new trains to this TOC: DMU Class 195 – fifty eight units that are now being introduced. EMU Class 331 – forty-seven units of 3 and 4 carriages will be introduced during 2019.

Eversholt are supplying TPE with twelve, five car Class 397 EMU's for Manchester-Glasgow services. Tim remarked these particular units represented a step change improvement in TPE train quality. The Class 185 refurbishments are now complete and

are very reliable trains. Some 22 of them come off lease at end of 2019 and will be available for other operators. Eversholt believe they should stay in the north, ideally under TPE umbrella – maybe leased to *Northern* under special deal though there were rumours that Irish Rail might be interested in them.

Interesting aside from Tim: Eversholt needed new trains to be delivered on time **and** to enter service asap since they only start making cash for his company when actually in revenue earning mode.

Williams Review causing uncertainty, so some reluctance for TOC's to commit whilst it is deliberating. The arrival of the new boss at Network Rail, Andrew Haines, should make *NR* 'up its game' and move from "can't do" to "can do"!

Definite indications that the mixed traction economy is on the way. Eg some EMU's may have batteries built in as well to give greater flexibility: or hydrogen trains might also carry electric batteries. Tim commended work and influence of Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley, who is looking at converting surplus electric trains to hydrogen. Alston are developing a hydrogen train for testing in Germany. Hydrogen buses already operating in Aberdeen and London – need for rail to catch up. Hydrogen trains likely to flourish in areas where there are presently large deployments of DMU's

Noted that time frames for traction development (generally reckoned at 10 years) do not necessarily coincide with franchise time lines which are usually seven years. Tim, like many others familiar with the contemporary railway, considers that the days of the franchise system are numbered.

Besides the likely entry into service of hydrogen powered local trains, the DfT also becoming interested in increased possibilities for very light rail. *(See also page 6)*.

Tim was impressed with TfN personnel. But he noted that whilst TfN has delegated authority, it has no delegated finances. He also applauded recent work of think – tank IPPR (North) in relation to rail.

As on past occasions, Tim was able to "lift the curtain" to reveal some of the hard facts of running the country's railway. A refreshing change from simply relying on "official" statements from wherever. We are most grateful that he is prepared to include RFNE in his busy itinerary at least once every twelve months.

railfuture North East – Campaign projects – Progress reports

The most spectacular progress has been with the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne

Railfuture North East Campaigns Overview

- 1. Faster Journeys Teesside to Tyneside:** Reduce train journey times between Teesside and Tyneside from 75 to 55 minutes by running passenger services along the 10-mile fully operational Stillington freight line. This will assist in the regeneration of Teesside by creating access to jobs in Newcastle, and attract industry to Teesside through better connectivity across the region.
- 2. New Station at Ferryhill:** Build a new station at Ferryhill, served either by the existing TransPennine Express services, a new local service from Darlington to Newcastle or the new Teesside – Tyneside service. Ferryhill station would serve 45,000 people living within a 4 mile radius and promote significant economic regeneration of local communities.
- 3. New Railway from Ferryhill to Heworth:** Create a new 21-mile railway on the former Leamside Line alignment with new stations at Belmont, Peshaw and Washington. This would provide rail connectivity between East Durham and Tyneside with a Metro connection at Heworth and inject an economic stimulus to the area. It would also free capacity on the East Coast Main Line by taking freight off it, offer an alternative route for long distance trains during disruption and reduce traffic on the A1.
- 4. New Station at Team Valley:** A new station at Team Valley, served by either an extension to the Tyne & Wear Metro or local train services would provide access to employment at Team Valley and relieve traffic congestion on the A1, as well as providing public transport connectivity for local residents.
- 5. New Station at Gilsland:** A new station on the Tyne Valley line would assist in the regeneration of the local community by providing connectivity to both Carlisle and Newcastle, and greatly increase tourism to the World Heritage Site of Hadrian’s Wall, along with Tyne Valley walking and cycling routes.
- 6. New Rail Service From Newcastle to Ashington:** A new passenger service on the 24-mile fully operational freight line between Newcastle and Woodhorn, with stations at Northumberland Park (Metro connection), Seghill, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Bebside, Bedlington, Ashington and Woodhorn. This would dramatically assist the economic regeneration of South East Northumberland by creating access to jobs at Cobalt and Newcastle.
- 7. North of Morpeth Local Service:** Extend the local Newcastle – Morpeth service to Berwick, creating an hourly service each way for Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill. In addition, stations at Belford and Beal, and possibly Warkworth (for Amble) should be re-opened. The service would re-invigorate the North Northumberland economy by providing transport connectivity for employment and education and increasing tourism.

passenger reopening project – details can be found in the SENRUG report at *page 21* in this current bulletin.

With regard to the upgrade of the Stillington (Ferryhill-Stockton) freight only line to passenger capability so as to create a new Tees Valley –Tyneside route for passenger trains – well, at the time this bulletin went to press we (*Railfuture North East*) remain “hopeful”.

Leamside re-instatement: there are some indications from NEXUS that part of the route between Washington and Belmont (Durham) might eventually be included within a Metro extension programme. Durham County Council remain supportive of reopening (*as per the new Durham County Plan – 2018*) and continue to prevent the route being impeded by new building developments. Realistically a more pro-active approach from the Council would be good. And so too would the involvement of

Transport for the North (TfN) which, theoretically at least, has strategic responsibility for new rail developments

The logo for Railfuture, featuring the word "railfuture" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The "i" in "rail" has a red dot, and the "f" in "future" is green.**National News****The Williams Review**

There was earlier reference to the preparation of a national Railfuture response for submission to the Williams Review. Our Branch has played a

constructive part in helping prepare evidence pertinent to the North of England for inclusion in that response. It can, incidentally, be found on the *Railfuture* web-site at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1820-Williams-Rail-Review>

The National AGM at Cardiff on 18th May 2019

Our rep at Conference was Branch Secretary Ian Walker who writes: -

Five people were elected to fill vacancies on the board, namely Alison Cosgrove and Messrs R Blake, C Hyomes, W Whiting and G Ellis. Transport journalist Christian Wolmar continues as Honorary President.

Christian confirmed he is not in favour of HS2 but believes it should not be abandoned without guarantees that the money earmarked for it is allotted to other rail transport projects. Incidentally, Christian forecast that in his forthcoming bid for the Conservative party leadership, Boris Johnson would campaign on a “no HS2” ticket.

Railfuture Director Ian Brown, a former industry professional, cautioned that the coming of electric road vehicles would dent rail’s current claims to be superior over road transport when it comes to air quality. Ian, separately, emphasised that *Railfuture* must not become a negative, protest organisation or it will lose the considerable credibility it presently holds with both the rail industry and Whitehall officials.

Another Director, Wendy Thorne, warned that *Railfuture* was coming to a ‘cliff edge’ in so far as its income stream was concerned. Subscriptions were having to be increased to £20 pa, the first rise in 12 years. But even this new rate will not give financial security in that basic organisational costs, let alone campaigning, will not be fully covered. Legacies were urgently needed, and of even greater urgency was the recruitment of many younger people.

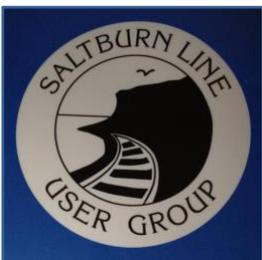
In a ‘non-business’ session after lunch two guest speakers spoke about rail transport in Wales.

Colin Lea, Transport for Wales' Commercial and Customer Experience Director, described the new arrangements for the governance of the railway in Wales. Formerly a 'normal' franchise trading as 'Wales and Borders', the new order comprises a Keollis/Amey partnership responsible for day to day operations with *Transport for Wales (TfW)* having a general oversight. There are 244 stations, fifty staffed. In the longer term *TfW* seeks greater control over bus services.

A completely new train fleet is envisaged, some of it to be built at Newport, Wales. Part of the new fleet will comprise 'tri-mode' units. These are seen as providing a 'game changer' in reducing the costs of rail electrification in that, for instance, most bridges will not require rebuilding to accommodate the OLE.

Mark Barry, Professor of Practice in Connectivity at Cardiff University, acknowledged the previous folly of removing so much public transport provision in Wales. Now there has to be a substantive 'catching-up' process. Professor Barry said it was imperative for planning and public transport facilities to be considered as part of a joint package. He pointed to the Cardiff area where 3000 new homes are planned, yet already it is assumed that some 80% of these will be car dependent. Housing development, area employment strategies together with the provision of public services, including transport, must be considered holistically.

NEWS FROM THE NORTH EAST'S RAIL USER GROUPS (RUG'S)



Pete Myers of *Northern* spoke to the Saltburn Line Users Group (SLUG) members at their AGM on 7th May last. He referred to the May 2018 timetable problems explaining that when *Network Rail* had advised completion of the Bolton line electrification would be delayed, there had been a scramble to produce new timetables within a very short time frame. In the event these had led to a lot of problems, exacerbated by station plans at Leeds and Sheffield having to be changed which in turn had produced numerous operational conflicts. Fortunately, the modified timetables issued in December had solved most of these and proved much more reliable. For most part the 2019 timetable has only minor changes and does include two trains per hour from Newcastle to Carlisle.

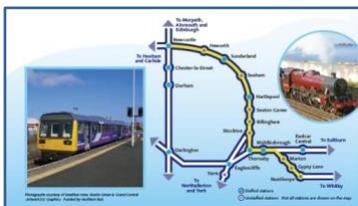
On the newly introduced penalty fares Pete said his experience (in Yorkshire) had suggested there was less public opposition than had been expected. Discretion will be used by on-board conductors, but already a marked drop in fraudulent travel had been noted.

New trains – driver training was under way. The new *Northern* electric sets were first expected to run between Doncaster and Leeds shortly. Pacers will be gone by Christmas; in the NE they will be replaced by 156's and most of the current 156 services replaced by 158's.

A second AGM guest speaker was Sean English of *Grand Central (GC)*. Reliability problems with the Class 180's, capacity of the services operated and difficulty in retaining drivers attracted by high salaries offered elsewhere were all issues currently exercising the company. *GC* intended opening an academy to train new drivers in the hope this would help improve retention rates.

To enhance passenger capacity, he anticipated the company would bid for the four Class 180's presently with *Hull Trains* which were to be superseded by Class 802 IEP sets presently on order from Hitachi. This would enable *GC* to strengthen their Class 180 sets to six or seven coaches. Converting redundant HST's had been ruled out on cost grounds. He confirmed that *GC* had applied for an additional path in each direction on both their West Riding and Sunderland routes and were waiting to hear the outcome. An application to stop their trains at Peterborough had been rejected as failing the "not primarily abstractive" test applied to open access operators.

More about the SLUG at <https://en-gb.facebook.com/saltburnlineusergroup/>



Coastliners RUG – serving the Durham Coast Line and associated routes. Peter Walker, writes:-

We have had opportunity to meet Tees Valley transport planners at the *Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)*

HQ in Stockton on some three occasions, once with Graham Meiklejohn of TPE joining the discussion. It became clear, however, that the train operator was bound by the strict terms of its current franchise rather than by the wish to respond to emerging passenger requirements. The message, basically, was wait until the next franchise bidding starts when you can make your suggestions known. But then along came the Williams Review.....!!!

June 2019

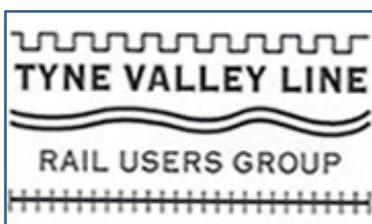
Another Williams casualty has been the premature end of the Cross-Country bidding process in which *Coastliners* and the TVCA were lobbying for a regular main-line express to link Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland with the Cross-Country network, hourly, in both directions. The fact that the matter cannot (apparently) be progressed until the bidding process is resumed (whenever that might be) underlies the innate defects in rail franchising all the more.

Construction work at Horden station site continues (slowly!). And *Coastliners* have met with guests from *Tyne Valley RUG* and Sunderland City Council to agree common ground both before and after the Williams review closes.

But what of the increasing concern over climate? Whence any moves to extend electrification to the Durham Coast Line and similar secondary but well-populated lines in the NE? We look in vain. A recent Strategic Transport Plan 'event' held by *Transport for the North (TfN)* at Newcastle Airport looked welcome in scope but was more of a back-slapping exercise for *TfN*, with the merits of that airport hymned ecstatically, completely ignoring any grim environmental implications.

But one piece of really good news! After months of asking, *Coastliners* have been able to secure a dedicated Poster Case at Hartlepool Station for its publicity material, the facility to be shared with the associated "Friends of Hartlepool Station".

More about Coastliners at <http://www.necoastliners.co.uk>



Information based on notes supplied by *Tyne Valley RUG* Chairman Patrick Rice who was appointed to this post in November 2018:-

Tyne Valley Service frequency was improved from 19th May with a regular two trains per hour service, both directions, Newcastle to Carlisle. Apparently limited paths and capacity over King Edward Bridge, and platform capacity issues within Central Station make any intended service improvements difficult to implement. (*We have been warned!* – Ed)

Close working links with *Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership (TVCRP)* are demonstrated by Patrick's recent appointment as a Partnership Board member. In March members of the RUG were able to travel on one of *Northern's* newly delivered and refurbished "Digital 158" units which are being cascaded to the

Tyne Valley Line, to replace the Pacers. The new 158 units, and also the existing 156 sets, are being refurbished to a high standard, and will include better seating, free on-board wi-fi, charging points at seats, digital destination boards and digital reservation displays at seat ready for the later introduction of Northern Connect services on the line, which will make use of this feature.

Over the last six months *TVRUG* has placed greater emphasis on using social media in order to improve information sharing as well as capture service users' thoughts and opinions. Feedback and soundings have also been obtained from RUG members as to their experiences or issues on the line, in order to provide evidence for submission to the Williams Review. This in turn has been incorporated by Malcolm Chainey of the *TVCRP* into a formal submission.

The introduction of Penalty Fares is being closely monitored in Tyne Valley. Passengers are being invited to share their experiences so that relevant information can be passed to *Northern*. Initial issues of concern relate to such as stations with only one automatic TVM or how people with mobility and/or disability issues might be affected. *TVRUG*, like *SLUG*, have been assured by *Northern*, that train conductors will act with discretion.

As part of a visitor promotional exercise, members of *TVRUG*, together with colleagues from the Community Partnership, participated in a "Rail in the City" day at Glasgow Central Station in mid-May. This was designed to highlight the attractions of Tyne Valley (including Hadrian's Wall of course) to potential visitors from further afield. There was excellent engagement with passengers in the station with over 800 queries or comments recorded.

Patrick reported the joint meeting with *Coastliners RUG* and reps from Sunderland City Council at Hartlepool this May. He had explained how *TVRUG* and *TVCRP* were able to work together successfully and also to share some thoughts about the Williams Review. The meeting was regarded as helpful for all who attended.

Looking ahead Patrick has identified the need to press *Northern* to reduce or eliminate skip-stopping, or station skipping, on the local trains from the start of the December 2019 timetable. He also awaits initial statements from Williams (thought likely this Autumn). He also hopes to attend more partner RUG meetings and will DEFINITELY be at our Summer Conference in Darlington on 22nd June!

More about TVRUG at <https://tvrug.org.uk>



The **BIG** event for SENRUG was, of course, the visit by Transport Minister Chris Grayling on 8th February to take a DMU ride over part of the ABT Line. Accompanied by

Councillors and key officials from Northumberland County Council, Mr Grayling was able to see (and hear!) for himself the likely benefits a regular passenger service would bring to the area. SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett was an invited guest and, besides being afforded a cab ride, was able to speak with the Minister direct. Incidentally, Northumberland CC are now referring to the ABT as the “Northumberland Line”.

SENRUG hope that what happened on 8th February will help move the re-opening process forward. Northumberland CC, in co-operation with *Network Rail*, are preparing an application to the “*Transforming Cities Fund*” for submission in late 2019. If successful, this would provide much of the money needed for the project to be completed.

Chris Grayling referred to the involvement of NEXUS in the future upgrading of the track and station rebuilding. This caused the media to assume that NEXUS would actually operate the line as part of the T & W Metro system.

In a subsequent clarification SENRUG said that it was immaterial which organisation delivered the necessary upgrades, whether NEXUS or *Network Rail*. But what was important was the eventual route chosen between Northumberland Park and Newcastle Central. The SENRUG campaign advocated using the “heavy” rail route via Benton Curve rather than the alternative Metro route with its 13 station calls. Using the latter would mean a journey time between Ashington and Central probably coming in slower than the existing bus services. Dennis Fancett’s understanding is that NEXUS is presuming that the route will be via Benton and that the trains used will be of the “heavy rail” (i.e. non Metro) type.

Away from Northumberland Line matters, comes news that with the advent of the May 2019 timetable changes, the majority of the Morpeth – Newcastle services will run on to or start back from Carlisle. This reverses the previous loss of through services to Metro Centre, and also eliminates the former one-minute miss at Newcastle for Morpeth passengers travelling west of Hexham which effectively added a full hour to Morpeth – Carlisle journeys.

There is also an additional weekday long distance train call at Morpeth at 1849 hrs, namely the 0925 ex Penzance to Edinburgh Cross Country service. This makes 12 northbound long-distance services at Morpeth each weekday.

SENUG's campaign for the establishment of a local service between Morpeth and Berwick is backed by Northumberland CC and others. The County Council have offered 50% of the money needed to finance a feasibility study about the proposed service whilst SENUG have submitted an application to *Northern's* Seed Corn Fund for the other 50%.

An understatement to say these past 6 months have been pretty dramatic for SENUG! Heartiest congratulations to Dennis Fancett and his colleagues for all that has been achieved since the turn of the year.

More about SENUG at <http://www.senrug.co.uk>

London and
North East
Railway



LNER announced on 6 February that the underpass at Durham Station would be closed for 20 weeks to allow for an extensive upgrading.

The new LNER Azuma (Inter-City Express) trains are beginning to take to the tracks in test mode. (*'Green light for East Coast Azumas' – Railnews April 2019*) A few are expected to have entered passenger service first London to Hull followed by London to Leeds by the time this bulletin reaches the "streets" – and we have been promised services to Edinburgh this August. The problem of the faulty interface between the signalling system north of York and electronics on the trains themselves is, apparently, being dealt with. But the low power issue north of Doncaster remains an operational hindrance, albeit some of the work to rectify matters is now under way.

Trans-
Pennine
Express



Observer – (26 May) claims that *irst Group's* biggest investor Coast Capital is recommending that *First* pulls out of the UK rail business because of diminishing returns.

First is one of the owners of TPE. It also runs the South Western and GWR franchises and has designs on the future lucrative West Coast contract which will include HS2.

From the TPE annual Stakeholder Report 2018/19 we learn that 220 new carriages now being introduced. The Nova 3 units on TPE will first appear (any time now!) on the Liverpool to Scarborough route, then on Manchester Airport to Middlesbrough. A new direct Liverpool-Glasgow service will operate from Autumn 2019 via WCML and the new direct Liverpool-Edinburgh service via Newcastle & ECML should start in December. The TPE Manchester Airport –Middlesbrough trains will extend to Redcar, also from December. The rollout of smart ticketing has been happening on route by route basis. As Class 185's are released Cleethorpes to Manchester Airport trains via Doncaster & Sheffield will become 6 car trains instead of the present three – a big surge in passenger numbers is expected as suppressed demand is soaked up.

Northern
by Arriva



On 6th February *Northern's* boss, David Brown, announced that RMT had officially suspended industrial action and was to enter into talks with the company. These to be brokered by ACAS. On 8th

March ACAS confirmed that talks were under way and described how they were being structured. In other Northern news: Their smartcard was launched on 19 February. Bulletins issued by the company during March advised of various forthcoming train cancellations, notably at weekends. These were said to be due “to the availability of train crews”. Presumably what was actually meant was the “lack of availability” of said crews!

Northern are progressing the first of their new build trains into full passenger service. Northern's new electric units are first being assigned to the Leeds - Doncaster service whilst the new DMU's are being filtered in to services in the North West. Both TPE and Northern have had to deal with “teething” issues ahead of getting their new trains into full service so that the introduction programmes are behind schedule.

Tyne and
Wear
Metro



In December Hitachi and Spencer GP of Hull announced they were teaming up to mount a bid to build the new Metro trains. In the same month came a warning from NEXUS that a Metro spending

“crunch” would have to be faced in 2020. (*TPXtra – Dec 2018*). The following month came a further warning that due to uncertainties over future central government funding both bus and Metro timetables faced cuts 2020 onwards.

June 2019

The *Chronicle* of 1st February 2019 revealed that “only 68% of Metros arrived on time” during the previous November and December. “Government must take Metro expansion seriously” say North East leaders. *Chronicle – 14 March 2019*. In April came news that Metro was recruiting new drivers. (*Chronicle 15 April 2019*)

A shortage of space, plus a shortage of time (and some computer problems) means that it has not been possible to include our usual section on freight nor our regular feature “The Wider World of Transport”. We’ll try and do better next time, which will be November 2019!

And finally.....

We hope you enjoyed reading this Branch Bulletin. If you have anything to say about the content or have suggestions to make about future editions please contact the Editor, Tony Walker anthony.walker@railfuture.org.uk

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