



August 2020

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Whilst decarbonisation should promote rail over road, its viability as a transport strategy relies upon safe and convenient access to and from a station. Car parking charges provide an economic incentive to find an alternative, but too often there isn't one. Walking and cycling routes may be unsafe, whilst local buses are sadly lacking, especially in rural areas and when commuters need them. So rail campaigners should lift up their eyes and recognise that the overall journey requires a holistic solution.

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

To establish 'best practice' for timber transport by rail, the Scottish Government's Strategic Rail Freight Fund provided Vectra Railfreight with £195,000 to run a six-week trial from the first week of August from Geogemas Junction to Inverness and thus the nearby Norbord factory. It marks a major milestone in the work undertaken by Frank Roach of HITRANS [Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership] on the 'Branchliner' project. Up to 6000 tonnes of timber will be carried, saving around 250 lorry movements totalling 55,000 lorry miles. The trial will encourage more timber to be transported by rail in other parts of Scotland; loading points at Thurso, Lairg and Kyle of Lochalsh may also be used. It is hoped that a successful trial will help convince Norbord to reinstate its lost rail connection to the Inverness-Aberdeen line.

Transport Scotland's Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan was published in July. By 2035 most Scottish routes will be electrified, other than the long scenic lines. Next it is planned to electrify from Inverness to Tain, the main commuting section on the FNL. FoFNL is making a strong case that dualling the whole of the Highland Main Line from Perth to Inverness, and the Inverness-Aberdeen line, should be done before electrification. If this proves impossible, the electrification works must provide for double track, with double-width bridges and gantries and careful placing of masts.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

On 23 July, Reston and Auchencrow Community Council met with NR and RAGES Chairman Barrie Forrest to discuss the station at Reston. Once studies on bats and on the flood risk are complete, NR will submit the design to Scottish Borders Council Planning, with a 16-week consultation period. Construction is proposed for December 2021, but may go into 2022. Both Reston and East Linton stations will have two lifts, the first of a new design in the UK that is more suitable for disabled users.

Furness Line Action Group

Northern is looking for a longer-term return to full normality. It aims to restore services to pre-Covid levels by December, and start to re-promote the railway: “We need to boost confidence that services are safe to board, and coax people back out of cars again.” It is working with NR and the North West Performance Recovery Task Force to develop and deliver a new, performance-led timetable in December 2021, subject to the usual consultation.

Last November and again in March, Cumbria County Council approved the £165 million Woodhouse Colliery off the coast of St Bees, with a processing plant at Kells. However, after further objections it backtracked, and a final decision is now due on 20 August. All of the coal would be delivered by rail to Redcar Bulk Terminal, which forms part of the steelworks in Teesside.

Allerdale Borough Council’s bid to reinstate and operate the Penrith to Keswick railway line, submitted in conjunction with CKP Railway Plc, was supported by the Cumbrian LEP, Cumbria Tourism and Eden District Council. The DfT has agreed to help find the best way forward for this project, and work with the group to develop its application for funding, or to find another way.

Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Skipton - Colne restoration has reached the DfT RNEP “Develop” stage. A full engineering study on reinstating the “missing link” as a heavy rail line primarily for passenger services will establish if the costs can be substantially reduced, with further work on the passenger demand forecasts and service pattern options. The proposal is for twin-track line to full modern technical standards, with a new station in Earby, and passive provision for future electrification. A direct half-hourly passenger service from Leeds to Colne in just 50mins would start as soon as the line reopens, with the prospect of an extension to Nelson, Burnley and Accrington. Modern project management and construction techniques would avoid any interruption to existing rail services.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

[Rochdale Online](#) reports that Northern is offering a £500 reward for information leading to the conviction of a man who threw a stone at a moving Class 150 train at 1830 on Monday 22 June, as the train was passing near to Clegg Hall Lane between Smithy Bridge and Rochdale stations. It smashed the driver’s cab window causing minor injuries to the driver. A British Transport Police (BTP) investigation is ongoing, but the train operator has stepped in to appeal for further information.

A 180-year-old viaduct designed by railway pioneer George Stephenson is undergoing a multi-million-pound restoration to improve passenger journeys and secure its long-term future. The 1840 Grade II listed Gauxholme viaduct that spans the Rochdale canal will be grit blasted, then deep cleaned and repainted back to its Victorian splendour. Taylor’s bridge, which carries the railway over Rose Bank Road near Todmorden station, will also be completely reconstructed, and two disused sections permanently removed. To enable both projects, the line through Todmorden will be closed from 24 October to 1 November.

Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association

West Yorkshire Combined Authority says Northern will have too few trains if passenger numbers return to pre-virus levels. It estimates that another 38 to 43 carriages are needed just to deliver the train lengths originally proposed for December 2019 in West Yorkshire, or 50 to 56 to bring crowding levels down to an acceptable level. With many electric trains sitting idle, the long-term solution is clearly electrification, but providing more carriages in the region cannot wait for this to happen.

A presentation in a number of rail trade journals showed the Penistone Line for full electrification, together with the Midland Main Line to Sheffield, and the Transpennine route from Manchester to York for partial or full electrification. However, that would also involve rebuilding parts of the route, and road over-bridges and the Standedge tunnel are both a concern. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps told MPs last October that the upgrade would involve “quite a bit of line closure, which is one of my concerns about it”. The Yorkshire Evening Post reminded readers that the TransPennine Upgrade has been characterised by broken promises ever since its inclusion in the 2011 Autumn Statement.

With the Barrow Hill line having been awarded a share of the DfT's Ideas Fund, Sheffield City Region will continue to explore options for funding the reopening of other rail routes such as the Stocksbridge line and the North Midland route between Barnsley and Wakefield via Royston, for which it also bid.

English Regional Transport Association

ERTA has produced a pamphlet to promote re-railing the Great Central corridor from Aylesbury to Leicester, with realignments where blockages exist.

Corby – Peterborough Campaign

Owen O'Neill is working up a bid to reconnect Corby and Peterborough via the 3.5 mile ['Luffenham' chord](#) that once formed part of the Market Harborough to Stamford line. Although only 18 miles apart, the bus service takes 70-80 mins, whereas a train would take just 28. Owen can be reached by email at rail@oweno.info, or telephone 07736 548 671.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join [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 Rf and its Campaigns by clicking on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Railfuture consultation responses](#).

The Rf Board reviewed the articles '[Welcome Back to Rail](#)', '[Fairer Fares in Future?](#)' and '[Electrification Mix](#)' covering three of the five key topics identified at the previous meeting. The '[Money for ideas](#)' article on Restoring Your Railway had been published previously, and Ian Brown will write an article on the final topic, covering the industry structure needed post-COVID. Chris Page will then prepare and publish a summary, drawing the key principles from each article.

Rf contends that, to realise its true potential, the whole rail network should be powered by electric traction or some other technology that does not produce emissions at the point of use. Its [10 year electrification programme](#) is set against the need to revive the economy by investing in projects offering sustainable long term employment, to achieve a railway capable of carrying a higher market share that contributes to our future wellbeing and the direction of the country.

Tony Smale has updated the Rf lists of [Rail User Groups and Reopening Campaign Groups](#). Please take a moment to check the accuracy of any groups you know about. You can report errors to the email address shown at the top of each list. The list of Affiliated Groups further down the page has yet to be updated.

PASSENGER GROUP

Jane Ann Liston circulated a [paper](#) encouraging passengers to return to rail. Official advice to avoid public transport, intended to ensure sufficient capacity for key workers with reduced timetables and social distancing, also gave a subliminal message that public transport was unsafe. Instead, rail should be selling its advantages including toilet facilities (as many public toilets are currently closed), speed, comfort, air quality and safety. People are at a much greater risk of accidents in a car, and a safe space is easier to maintain on trains than on buses. Rail needs to come out fighting!

RAILFUTURE LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST

Transport for the South East is bidding to become a statutory sub-national transport body, able to influence government on transport issues, and with the powers needed to deliver major improvements to the transport network in support of its [thirty-year transport strategy](#). The [bid](#) is widely supported by local authorities and LEPs, industry and Transport Focus. RfLSE agrees: its [response](#) stated that TfSE should have:

- A status equivalent to the RNEP and Market-Led Proposals (MLP) for rail network enhancements
- Powers to generate revenue streams to re-invest in sub-national transport developments
- Powers to 'call in' planning applications for developments judged to impact transport networks significantly by virtue of their location, type and scale.

RAILFUTURE WESSEX

On 28 July, following a successful bid to the DfT's 'Restoring your Railway Fund' by Hampshire County Council (HCC), and New Forest National Park approval of plans for up to 5000 new homes, South Western Railway ran a special train along the full length of the [Waterside line](#) to Fawley to mark its support for re-opening the line to passenger service. On board were Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris, NR Chairman Sir Peter Hendy, SWR MD Mark Hopwood, and representatives from HCC and Southampton City Council. The line still carries freight to and from Marchwood Military Port and Container Terminal, but last saw a passenger in 1966. Reinstating it could cost £45m; the business case is due by November. Rf sees it as part of a wider "Solent Metro" cross-city service to Romsey, Eastleigh, Fareham or Portsmouth. Mark Hopwood said that with government support the line could reopen within four years.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Across Britain, unprecedented investment is going into walking and cycling development, and DfT's vision heralds a 'gear change' in active travel in England. This new focus presents opportunities for community rail in its efforts to link rail with other healthy and sustainable modes, so it's an ideal time to discuss with your local authority how you can advise and engage with active travel/public transport integration.

Under the terms of its recent Direct Award, [Southeastern](#) will fund five community rail schemes, including prospective CRPs at White Cliffs and Thanet, and three existing CRPs: Kent, Sussex and the Darent Valley. The DfT has also accredited two more CRPs: the East Suffolk Lines CRP which connects communities on the branch lines from Ipswich to Lowestoft and to Felixstowe, and Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton CRP between Cambridge and Royston.

With more people visiting the countryside and train usage increasing again, East Hampshire CRP has updated its Line Guide. Although it was not able to reintroduce the South Downs Rambler Bus this season, the information panel is provided in the expectation it will start again in 2021.

"Stitch Train Worcestershire" is a holiday project creating 18 embroidered artworks for display at its railway stations, and the civic centre in the autumn. Pupils stitch part of a carriage, a set of doors, or the front or end of a train, and can insert themselves in a window. The designs and colours represent either the new West Midlands Railway Class 196 units being launched later in the year, or GWR IETs, which call at eight Worcestershire stations. In November, the artwork will be linked to form two 11.5m long trains for exhibition at the Worcestershire CRP Anniversary event.

To promote rail safety, primary school pupils in Clapham, Cononley and Carnforth have created 'Suzy the Safety Sheep' designs for display at their local station. The Leeds-Morecambe CRP has a wide range of rail-themed activities based around the national curriculum, and would like to engage with other schools on the line: email the.bentham.line@gmail.com, call 01524 298940, or post to Bentham Station Building, Station Road, Bentham, LA2 7LF.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF asked more than 14,300 people to rank things that would most improve their journey experience. Reliability and punctuality came top, followed by value for money and getting a seat.

Whilst those travelling on public transport are generally happy with their journey, concerns over the actions of others (particularly in not wearing face coverings) means many do not yet feel safe to return. And the price of rail can be prohibitive, so TF is working to reduce some of these barriers. Both its weekly survey and the standing Transport User Panel provide rich feedback, whilst its new online 'community' focus groups enable it to dig deep into these issues, and social media add colour, quotes and images.

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

The rail industry is working hard to attract passengers back to rail. [RSSB](#) has sought to quantify the risk of infection from Covid-19 per average passenger journey. Initial values were derived for a simple scenario: loading 44 passengers onto a Class 800 carriage, travelling for 30mins, alighting 22 passengers, boarding another 22 and then travelling another 30mins before alighting all passengers. From this scenario RSSB estimates that the risk of infection per passenger journey is around 1 in 11,000.

An Infrastructure Commission for Scotland (ICS) report - '[Delivery Findings – A blueprint for Scotland](#)' – considers that an Independent, Specialist Body is pivotal to providing strategic long-term infrastructure advice to deliver a net-zero carbon economy. To be able to challenge Government while also undertaking tactical public engagement, the Body would sit at arms-length from the political system.

Preparatory work is underway for electrification of the East Kilbride and Barrhead lines under Transport Scotland's [Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan](#), together with Anniesland/Maryhill and the Borders routes. Early work will assess how inter-city routes can inform delivery programmes and funding decisions.

Notwithstanding his misgivings about the need for closure (see Page 2), Grant Shapps has confirmed £589m to upgrade the Transpennine line between Leeds, Huddersfield and Manchester, and establish a Northern Transport Acceleration Council. Four-tracking the most congested section will improve journey times and reliability, and much of the line will be electrified. The "Integrated Rail Plan" due in December could add full electrification, digital signalling, more multi-tracking and improved freight capacity.

Not to be outdone, Lord Berkeley and Michael Byng have produced a fully costed plan for £1.2bn of rail upgrades and re-openings in the South West. Their discussion paper lists seven projects:

- Salisbury to Exeter – redoubling
- Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton – upgrade at either end; then full reinstatement
- Coleford Junction to Barnstaple - upgrade existing single track railway
- Bodmin to Padstow
- Bodmin General to Fowey
- Cross Cornwall railway: Newquay - St Austell - Truro
- West Somerset Railway – services to Minehead.

NR, the Scottish Government and City of Edinburgh Council have revealed their [Masterplan](#) to transform Edinburgh Waverley station. A major public space on Waverley Bridge will provide views of the city's iconic skyline, whilst a mezzanine concourse across the whole station will allow the operational platforms to be extended, creating new facilities to cater for future growth in passengers and services, and improving the all-round experience for people using the station.

The latest designs for Cardiff Hendre Lakes, a proposed new business district to the south of St Mellons Business Park served by Cardiff Parkway railway station, include an adjacent transport interchange with facilities for local bus services, a taxi rank, cycle parking and a car park with 600 spaces with charging points for electric vehicles. It will also offer new connections for walkers and cyclists. A consultation runs until 09 September.

NR's proposal to widen and extend Platform 2 at Reigate, to create a 12-carriage turn-back platform for Thameslink trains, received positive [feedback](#) from both passengers and local residents. Work could start as early as 2023, but the project is currently unfunded.

The East West Rail Consortium has appointed consultants Steer to develop a business case for developing the Eastern section from Cambridge to Norwich and to Ipswich; the latter would entail dual-tracking Cambridge to Newmarket. An East Anglia to Oxford service will need the Central section between Bedford and Cambridge; final alignment is still awaited. Rf media contact and Ipswich councillor Phil Smart said that the Consortium was also "looking at EWR being a zero carbon railway, which means it has to be electrified. We hope that work on the Eastern section is completed by the time the Middle section is finished."

Electrification of the line between Bedford and Corby has been put back from December to May next year due to Covid-19. Problems were caused by the need for social distancing, the ability to deliver safety-critical staff training, and supply chain issues.

Alstom and Eversholt Rail are investing £1m in the development of British hydrogen-fuelled trains, which will be produced at Alstom's Transport Technology Centre in Widnes. The new Class 600 series, branded Breeze, are converted from redundant Class 321 EMUs. Alstom's MD in the UK and Ireland Nick Crossfield said: 'It's time to jump-start the UK hydrogen revolution. The Breeze is good to go, wherever the Government commits to upgrading Britain's railway with hydrogen trains.'

GB Railfreight has announced a new weekday Intermodal service from Southampton to the SEGRO Logistics Park East Midlands Gateway (SLPEMG). This 50-acre freight terminal operates 24/7, can handle up to sixteen 775m trains per day, and provides storage capacity for over 5000 shipping containers, equivalent to about 45,000 cargo pallets.

,,,and finally

7 August marked the 170th anniversary of the first train in passenger service between Peterborough and London. To mark the occasion, TV presenter and rail enthusiast Michael Portillo has made four short videos set in [Stevenage](#), [Hatfield](#) and [King's Cross](#), and one that [summarises](#) the route. The Stevenage video features the new bay Platform 5 that opened on 3 August. Hertford loop trains can now terminate there without encroaching on the main down slow line.

CONSULTATIONS

- Cardiff Hendre Lakes: [Design for a New Business District](#), closes 9 September.
- NR: [Croydon Area Re-modelling Scheme](#), closes 20 September
- England's Economic Heartland: [Draft Transport Strategy](#), closes 6 October
- Homes England: [West of Ifield Development](#), closes 1 December.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains a [List of Events](#) and a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a Calendar of Events embedded in a document may be discarded, a stand-alone list would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

NB. Because of Covid-19, events are being cancelled, postponed or conducted online. Webmasters, please update your websites with any changes as soon as they are made.

August

- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1300.
- Tuesday 18. East Norfolk Transport Users' Association AGM, Christchurch, Deneside, **Gt Yarmouth**, 1330 (**confirmed**).
- Tuesday 25. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, but all meetings currently **cancelled**).
- Saturday 29. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1030.

September

- Tuesday 1. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month).
- Thursday 3. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).
- Saturday 5. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association, Railway Hotel, **Borth**, 1200 (Also 3 October, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Tuesday 8. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Wednesday 9. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- Monday 14. Bexhill Rail Action Group, **Online**. (Also 14 September).
- Tuesday 15. England's Economic Heartland Conference, **Online**, 0930.
- Wednesday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, No. 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (Also 18 November).
- Tuesday 22. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930.
- Saturday 26. Rf East Midlands, Midland Hotel, **Derby**, AGM at 1230, open meeting at 1400.
- Saturday 26. Rf Yorkshire, **Sheffield**.
- Saturday 26. English Regional Transport Association Conference, The Court House, **Berkhamsted**, 1330
- Saturday 26. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, 5 Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW (Also 5 December in Cambridge).

Further Ahead

- 3 October. Rf Annual Conference. **Online event.**
- 3 October. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, URC Church, Quay Street, **Halesworth**, 1400.
- 10 October. Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group meeting, Methodist church hall, Gosforth Road, **Seascale**, Cumbria, CA20 1PU. 13.05.
- 31 October. Campaign for Borders Rail AGM, Tullie House, **Carlisle**.
- 4 November. Rail Action Group East of Scotland AGM, Village Hall, Ayton, 1900.
- 14 November. Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association AGM, St John's Centre, Church Street, **Penistone**, 1400.
- 7 November. Rf North West.
- 9 December. Community Rail Awards, now **Online**, time tbc.

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

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