

January 2021

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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A new year, but not yet a new beginning. As the UK economy becomes ever more fraught with the extended bail-out, so the railway financing can is kicked further down the road, and the prospect of major rail improvements, or even reverting to the status quo as was, recedes. However compelling the business case, there simply won't be the capital to invest.

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.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

Preparatory work to reinstate the Leven line is now well underway. Devegetation along the 5.5mls from Thornton North Junction will soon be complete. Site investigation will inform the final business case submission to Transport Scotland. The timeline for the project is: selection of Preferred Options (stations and infrastructure) – Winter 2021 (realistically March 21); Planning and Consenting process for stations – Summer 2021; Main construction works start on site - 2022; rail services commence - December 2023.

There are two complementary projects: Levenmouth Reconnected led by Fife Council has £10m to invest to `Maximise the economic and social value of the new railway to the local area`, and to `Develop initiatives and projects of an economic and social nature to build on the railway investment.' The River Leven Project is focused on improving the 3 mile stretch from Levenmouth to Cameron Bridge, and the network of paths and cycleways that will connect Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill, Leven and Windygates.

Campaign for Borders Rail

CBR has told Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review that extending the Borders Railway from Tweedbank through Melrose, St Boswells and Hawick to the West Coast Main Line would deliver strategic benefits central to the UCR's objectives by providing through services, and connections at Carlisle with WCML and the planned HS2 services. CBR Chair Simon Walton said that the strategic need for the extended railway was now recognised throughout the UK, and the wider network benefits were apparent to all potential stakeholders: "Investing in the Borders Railway extension is the best value way to simultaneously deliver a step-change in cross-border connectivity and substantial economic growth for the region... completing the Borders Railway serves the local community, the regional economy and the national network in equal measure."

Lakes Line Rail User Group

LLRUG has consistently sought to increase the capacity of the Lakes Line with two trains on the line at once, so that it could bring over 500 people per hour into the World Heritage site. Other railways are seeing investment in capacity increases, often to reverse the effects of cuts such as reducing a line from double to single track. Without a similar move, the Lakes Line cannot fulfil its role in making it easier for local residents to travel by train, and for visitors from home or abroad to come by sustainable transport.

On-line discussions have included the possible re-routing of freight trains to relieve the Castlefield corridor between Manchester Piccadilly and Deansgate stations, where long, slow-moving freight trains to and from Trafford Park occupy a lot of line space. The Lakes Line services to Manchester Airport would be among those to benefit.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

"A Railway Fit For the Future?" by <u>Rail Reform Group</u> member Dr Nicola Forsdike says: "This paper is written against a background in which the infection rate of Covid-19 is once again increasing. The impact this is having on the transportation systems of the UK is profound and brings both challenges and opportunities for Britain's rail network. It will have a lasting effect because many of the trends we are seeing were already in evidence before Covid-19 arrived in the UK and have simply been accelerated.

"Whilst the immediate impact of Covid-19 is presenting policy makers and transport operators with very urgent issues of funding and service provision, longer term trends call into question the very role of passenger rail in Britain. There is a need for a reappraisal of this, and for a re-focussing on the competitive advantages of rail within a multimodal transport approach.

"The temptation will be to shunt these issues into a siding until the immediate crisis has passed, but rather than focussing solely on where we are now, a better outcome will be obtained if decision makers hold to a longer-term vision. In that way, decisions taken now can build towards that, rather than acting as barriers to future development. [Article continues...see link – Ed].

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Transport Minister Chris Heaton-Harris has extended the exemption for rail replacement services from compliance with PSVAR to 30 September 2021. In a letter to the Rail Delivery Group, he reiterated his disappointment with "a situation where fully accessible vehicles cannot always be provided for all passengers". He welcomed RDG's ongoing engagement with the coach industry and wider stakeholders, and wished to explore a "long-term and more sustainable solution" to the issue. He has also mooted linking rail replacement to the application of PSVAR on in-scope home-to-school services.

Friends of Hunmanby Railway Station

An anonymous donor has commissioned a replica North Eastern Railway Tile Map over 6ft square from the original manufacturers Craven Dunnill in Ironbridge. When installed at Hunmanby, it will be the first erected at a main line station in over 100 years, and will complement the original ones at Whitby, Scarborough and Beverley.

In the Community Rail Awards on 9 December, Hunmanby won the Small Project Award for 'Attracting passengers to Hunmanby's new hourly train service'. Lying between Filey and Bridlington on the Sheffield – Hull - Scarborough line, its footfall has grown from 13,399 in 2005/6 to 22,704 last year and now 32,458, an annual rise of 43% (exceeding the group's estimate of 30%) – not bad for a station that is a 20min walk from most homes, and has no car park.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Concerns about staff shortages led Northern to revise its service from December until 25 January. The interim plan reintroduced the hourly service on the Mid-Cheshire Line, apart from the 1402 and 1801 from Chester, and the 1541 and 1940 from Piccadilly. However, the 1801 is the main commuter train from Chester; the 1702 is too early, with the station being a 15-20 minute walk from the town. MCRUG did suggest alternative trains in the middle of the day, but Northern was unable to change the revised plan.

Most services will revert to 2 coaches, although the 0709 from Piccadilly will remain as 4 coaches due to the lack of the extra peak service that should follow it. All this despite the line having a December 2017 franchise commitment for a half-hourly service all day, and an hourly Sunday service, rather than two-hourly.

The London Northwestern Crewe-Liverpool service remains hourly, mostly with 8-coach trains. Hartford has about half its normal service, and Winsford its normal hourly service. Acton Bridge too has a full service: hourly in and around the peaks, and two-hourly off-peak - much better than a few years ago.

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

LRPG seeks to reinstate passenger services along the South Staffs Line from Walsall to Wychnor, just north of Lichfield, where it joins the Birmingham - Derby line. The first part of its campaign is to get a passenger service between Lichfield, Burton-upon-Trent and Derby. The line is used by train sets after servicing by Bombardier, and occasionally by Cross Country when the line through Tamworth is closed. Ideally, the electrified Cross City line through Birmingham should be extended to Derby (or at least Burton), but at least West Midlands Rail Executive is considering trialling a hydrogen prototype.

An LRPG member claims that the UK has only 29 years to stop venting fossil carbon dioxide into the air. Around 30% of rail lines are diesel-electric. Their restricted loading gauge would need a lot of bridges and tunnels to be rebuilt or replaced, so it would be cheaper to retrofit the trains with hydrogen-electric fuel cells.

Bedford Commuters Association

Senior managers from East Midlands Railway, Govia Thameslink Railway, NR and Transport Focus attended the BCA AGM held via Zoom in November. EMR has the necessary resources to operate the May 2021 timetable, including Class 360s and drivers, and is confident that it will go ahead on time [*ie only 5 months late – Ed.*] EMR peak services will resume calling at Luton and Bedford. However, DfT specified the separation of Intercity services to Nottingham and Sheffield, and electric services to Corby, so no Intercity services will call at Bedford. However, EMR is looking at whether some contra peak flow Intercity services could call at Bedford and Wellingborough, but no decision has yet been made.

Following its cascade from First Hull Trains, EMR's Class 180 fleet has entered passenger service. Preparatory work involved a lot of maintenance, repainting it aubergine, reconditioning its Wifi and public information systems, and a deep clean. Some significantly refurbished HST's will continue to operate until May. Using six-car units instead of eight lowers operating costs and improves performance.

Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group

Almost exactly a year after the Barking - Gospel Oak service was severely disrupted by a freight train derailment near Wanstead Park, the gremlins struck again at the start of January when pointwork fractured at the entrance to Gospel Oak's bay platform. This caused the total suspension of passenger services between Upper Holloway and Gospel Oak for a number of days - ironically including the 40th anniversary of the permanent diversion of Barking - Kentish Town services to Gospel Oak from 5 January 1981, when modernisation of the St Pancras - Bedford line meant that Kentish Town could no longer accommodate the Barking service. The diversion to Gospel Oak restored a link that had last seen regular passenger services in 1926. Now, of course, it is a busy connection on TfL's London Overground network.

Meanwhile, the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) <u>report</u> on the freight-train derailment concluded that the incident - which damaged over two miles of track - was due to poor track and wagon maintenance exacerbated by poor wagon loading.

Pilning Station Group

The DfT's Ideas Fund application to reinstate the Pilning station footbridge was unsuccessful, but useful pointers were offered for making future submissions, and the <u>campaign</u> continues.

The latest ORR Station Usage data showed yet another significant increase (55%) for the period April 2019-March 2020 – and a staggering 1,440% since November 2016, when the footbridge was demolished. The Group therefore made a well argued case to GWR to reflect the increase in demand with an extra Saturday lunchtime train; but GWR refused this very modest request, giving no reasons, merely observing that the present service of two Saturday trains a week met DfT requirements, and they had no plans to increase it.

Such a negative attitude is totally at variance with Transport Secretary Grant Shapps' recent comments that rail timetabling should be more flexible and demand-responsive. He needs to make that point more forcefully to operators like GWR, and stress that hiding behind DfT minimum service requirements in this way is not acceptable.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join <u>here</u>: 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 <u>News and views</u>, <u>Press releases</u>, <u>Railfuture in the news</u>, and <u>Railfuture consultation responses</u>.

Rail campaigners have condemned the inflation-busting rail fare increases in March. "This really isn't going to help bring passengers back to trains" said Rf Chairman Chris Page, "[It] will come at a time when people are deciding whether to go back to work 5 days a week. Indeed, there's a risk that it will result in even lower revenue for the government by pricing people off the railways. Things aren't going to get back to near normal until about June at the earliest, so a 2.6% increase won't generate much cash when there are so few passengers travelling. It will just annoy the very people the industry needs to be cultivating. Rail staff may bear the brunt of this, as they are already seen to be Government supported when ordinary passengers are losing their jobs."

However, Rf is pleased that operators have been asked to introduce flexi-season tickets for 2 or 3 days travel per week. They are needed for when people start commuting to work again in April.

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan to be published in Spring 2021 is absolutely the last chance to start a rolling programme of rail electrification before the expertise is lost.

RAILFUTURE NORTH EAST

The final version of the <u>North East Transport Plan</u> will be published in March. The draft plan included improved facilities and information at stations, and reliability measures across the rail network; earlier and later local rail services, with an improved calling pattern, particularly in County Durham; and line of route audits and freight gauge clearance. Line re-openings would include the Northumberland line to Ashington, the Leamside line, and the Derwent Valley line between Consett and Newcastle, with new stations at Gilsland, Ferryhill and East Gateshead, and improvements at Cramlington. A spur from the ECML to Newcastle Airport is also planned. North East Connect would be delivered, and local diesel multiple units replaced. RfNE hoped that Northern Connect could include a direct service between Teesside and Tyneside using the Stillington line and the ECML north of Ferryhill, but NR said that no paths were available.

A Ferryhill station would be more viable if it served places off the ECML. Leamside and Stillington would together open up new destinations and connections, including those with Metro on Wearside and south of the Tyne. One option is to re-instate Leamside all the way from Tursdale Junction to Pelaw, where it would join the Durham Coast Line for use by both freight and passenger services. Connecting the Low Fell and Tyne Valley Lines via the Bensham Curve would open up the possibility of a Team Valley station – another RfNE campaign. An alternative would be to re-open only the south end of line, and rejoin the ECML north of Durham.

Following the withdrawal of the last Northern Pacer train on 27 November, Grant Shapps is reported to have said that the North East enjoys brand new trains on the Northern network. But RfNE Branch Chair Keith Simpson commented: "Pacers have gone - but new trains haven't come. The newest on our local routes is 28 years old. We are only ever given other regions' hand-me-downs.

"We don't actually think Northern has enough trains to meet pre-COVID demand. For instance, the first train from Cramlington into Newcastle is already full to standing when it arrives, and doesn't get into the city until 0822. So if you want a seat, you need to travel an hour later. But when we ask Northern for an additional train an hour earlier, or if we suggest making that first train 4 coaches instead of 2, their reply is "we don't have enough rolling stock"!"

As Northern introduced its 100th new train, Chief Operating Officer Tricia Williams trumpeted: "We've now got new trains – electric and diesel – operating in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Merseyside, Derbyshire, West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire".

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

Five years ago, together with the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and other local groups, the Esk Valley Railway Development Company (RDC), Community Rail Partner for the Whitby – Middlesbrough line, persuaded Sirius Minerals to provide £4.5m of funding to improve its infrastructure to enable doubling of the service. A hard hitting report 'Where's the Plan?' by the CRP claims that there has since been almost no progress or proper consultation.

North Yorkshire County Council wants to install token machine signalling that would actually increase journey times, whereas the RDC has established that the more flexible cab-based digital Radio Electronic Token Block system could be delivered within the available funding. The CRP also regrets that the Council has declined to support proposals to apply for additional funding sources, including the DfT's 'Restoring Your Railway' fund, for a more comprehensive upgrade of the line.

Rail services through Pontefract are all too parochial. One of the Leeds - Knottingley services should be extended to Goole (or even Hull) to connect with North Humberside (extending the second would require considerable infrastructure work at Knottingley), and the Huddersfield - Castleford service should run through to Doncaster, with a new station at Askern.

The Sheffield – Pontefract - York service is satisfactory in terms of its end points, but its frequency is totally inadequate - it should be at least two hourly, or preferably hourly. And how about Leeds - Five Towns – Scunthorpe – Grimsby – Cleethorpes? Even a 2-hourly service from West Yorkshire to North Lincolnshire would greatly enhance connectivity across the Region.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

An alliance of nine walking, cycling, public transport and shared mobility groups, including the CBT and CRN have formed the Sustainable Transport Alliance. It seeks to tackle the climate emergency, and ensure "inclusive transport for all".

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The 16th <u>Community Rail Awards</u> celebrated a range of initiatives delivered by community groups, partnerships, and volunteers from across Britain. Many had risen to the challenge of supporting communities through the pandemic, continuing to build links, positivity and awareness between local people and their railway.

The Mid-Cheshire CRP has appointed Sarah Morgan as its new Community Rail Officer. As well as strengthening relations with communities along the line, the CRP is aspiring to DfT accreditation. A Northwich resident asked for support to improve the disabled access at their station, as they cannot travel to Chester by train. Sarah will work with MCRUA and Northwich Town Council on such matters, which are challenging to resolve.

The Bittern Line and Wherry Lines CRPs in Norfolk and North Suffolk have teamed up with NR to promote the safe use of level crossings. In the absence of school visits, NR's community safety manager, Becky Crocker, has produced a video to take her rail safety talks into people's homes. Families are invited to watch it at <u>www.networkrail.co.uk/angliasafety</u>, and then design a poster that could be displayed at Anglia stations.

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

The draft Welsh Budget plans to invest £274.7m in rail and metro, of which £20m will decarbonise transport and boost the funding for active travel. However, Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales claims that over the next 10 years UK Government has committed to spend just £60m on rail improvements in Wales whereas, given a fair share, it should receive over £3bn. He hopes that the Union Connectivity Review will mark a step change in this approach. Meanwhile, <u>Mainline railway enhancement requirements</u> highlights ways in which strategic investment in the north and south Wales mainlines, as part of Metro systems, could help to address some of the issues.

Network North claims that its design for a fully electrified rail network would meet Transport for the North's specifications. It features a new high-speed rail spine between Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds/Sheffield, and a separate freight route linking West and East coast ports. There would be a new "through" station under Manchester Piccadilly, and a cross-city link with a new station in Bradford. Sheffield would have a new 'all lines' hub station, but Leeds would not need new terminus platforms.

A National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) <u>report</u> makes the case for major rail investment across the North and Midlands, and the need for the government to plan for a rolling programme of affordable investments. Improving rail links between cities in the region should be the top priority. However, local authorities in the East Midlands say that deferring most of HS2 2b East until 2050 and beyond would have a "devastating" economic impact on the region. Chesterfield Borough Council has released a <u>Case Study</u> to highlight what it says are HS2 East's "enormous opportunities for the UK economy that will drive growth, but which are currently at risk of being thwarted." On 24 November 2019 at New Rackheath, the Norwich Road level crossing barriers lifted as a Norwich to Sheringham train approached. Two road vehicles crossed ahead of the train, which passed close behind the second vehicle. The <u>RAIB report</u> found that leaf-fall in the atmospheric conditions had contaminated the railhead causing a track circuit failure.

Following the May 2018 timetable debacle, ORR has raised concerns regarding NR's plan to deliver its 2021 timetables significantly quicker than the established timescales. It must provide greater assurance that it has fully considered the risks of such an approach, and that passengers will still be able to plan their journeys with confidence as they return to the railway in greater numbers. NR must also improve the promptness, accuracy and transparency of its capacity analysis, so that operators and ORR can make informed decisions about potential new services for passengers and freight. Further work is also required on asset management and contingency arrangements relating to the introduction of new trains.

The major East Coast Main Line upgrade that was supposed to happen in December 2021 has been deferred to May 2022. A public consultation on the draft timetable will be launched shortly.

The 47th, July 2020, edition of Barry Doe's Rail Operators' map remains current, as proposed changes have been put off at least until March.

NR has submitted planning applications for three new two-platform stations in Scotland, all with step-free access via lifts and a footbridge. On the ECML, Reston will have 70 car parking spaces, land for 40 more, and a new access road, whilst East Linton will accommodate six-carriage trains, with parking for 126 cars. Inverness Airport will have parking for 64 cars and also take six-carriage trains, with no impact on journey times. The new section of double track will increase capacity and resilience between Inverness and Nairn for both passenger and freight services.

NR has refurbished the 456ft long Grade II listed bench at Scarborough station, thought to date from 1883 when the station was constructed, and believed to be one of the longest in the world.

Devon County Council has approved an application for a two-platform station in Exeter on the Plymouth line, close to the Marsh Barton Industrial Estate.

Crossrail has started System Integrated Dynamic Testing, with eight trains on the line rather than four. Complex systems are tested in scenarios as close as possible to operational conditions.

Hitachi and Eversholt Rail have come to an agreement to fit a battery to GWR's IETs, to create a tri-mode electric-diesel-battery train. On non-electrified sections of the route, the batteries will supplement the diesel engines, reducing fuel usage and carbon emissions by over 20%; in stations and urban areas, the train would rely on battery power alone, improving air quality and reducing noise levels to create a more pleasant environment for passengers and people living nearby.

Rail Report Europe 4 says that the EU has designated 2021 "European Year of Rail". A Dutch study has identified five criteria for choice of mode of travel. Availability: is there a train service? Punctuality: the need to increase capacity, remove bottlenecks and modernise signalling. Quality: ease of information and booking; user-friendly stations, and comfortable trains with good facilities. Accessibility: barrier free stations available to all that are easy to reach, and from which to make an onward journey. Prices: value for money tickets that reflect customer demand.

The first freight train has arrived at HS2's construction compound at Calvert in Buckinghamshire. Over the next year, more than 180 such trains operated by DB Cargo and Hanson are set to deliver 1,650 tonnes of aggregate to the site, taking the equivalent of 12,670 HGVs off the road, saving 30,150 tonnes of carbon. Across the whole HS2 project, 15,000 freight trains will haul 10 million tonnes of aggregate, taking the equivalent of 1.5 million HGVs off the UK's road.

DB Cargo UK has successfully trialled the use of Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil (HVO), significantly reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) and nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions. A Class 67 diesel locomotive was put through its paces from idling to full power, with no adverse impact on its performance.

",and finally

...but we hope not. Newcastle City Council has refused planning permission for a new surface coal mine at Dewley Hill, dashing the hopes of Britain's heritage railways, which need affordable coal to continue operating. Steve Oates, CEO of the Heritage Railway Association said: "The decision is a huge disappointment. We argued a strong case at the planning committee. UK-produced coal generates a fraction of the CO₂ emissions created by extracting and then shipping coal half way round the world, and it costs less in money terms. Keeping Britain's heritage railways running with affordable locally-produced coal would secure the future of a sector that sits at the heart of the country's industrial and cultural heritage, and generates millions for the leisure and travel sector." [Even if correct in parochial terms, surely this is a prime example of an application that should be "called in" for a ministerial decision in the national interest? - Ed.]

...but we hope not. Managed on behalf of the DfT by Highways England(!), the Historical Railways Estate is responsible for 3,200 bridges, tunnels and viaducts, some of which carry or span routes earmarked for reopened railways, and extensions to heritage lines. <u>Forbes</u> reports a claim by HRE that 134 of these structures are currently at risk of demolition or infilling, all but extinguishing any hope of reusing lines closed by Beeching. Unfortunately, "permitted development powers" seem to override any planning objection, even if there is one despite the dearth of consultation.

CONSULTATIONS

- ORR: Post Implementation Review of the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations 2006 (ROGS), closes 18 January.
- Welsh Government: <u>New Wales Transport Strategy</u>, closes 25 January
- Greater Anglia: <u>December 2021 Timetable</u>, closes 12 February.

Please advise <u>Roger Blake</u> of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to <u>Roger Blake (Railfuture)</u>, who maintains a <u>List of Events</u> and a <u>List of Key Dates</u> 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.

January

Saturday 16. Rf East Midlands, **Online**, 1430.

Wednesday 20. Friends of the Barton Line Rail User Group, No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes, 1900 (or Online) (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at No 1 Inn and the Sloop at Barton, 2000).
Tuesday 26. 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 30. Rf London & South East Herts & Beds Division, **Online**. 1030 (Also 27 February).

Saturday 30. Rf Yorkshire and North West joint webinar, "Challenging Times", **Online**, 1400.

February

Tuesday 2. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).

Thursday 4. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).

Friday 5. English Regional Transport Association Guildford meeting.

Tuesday 9. 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**).

Saturday 27. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.

Saturday 27. Rf Yorkshire and North West joint webinar, "Freeing Up Castlefield Paths - New Freight Routes Around Manchester", **Online**, 1400.

Further Ahead

■ 4 March. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).

■ 10 March. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)

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

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