



September 2021

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Just as the Government has paused the 'triple lock' on pensions because the rebound from Covid has created an anomaly, so it should also shelve the rail fare increase based on RPI, which would otherwise see a 4.8% rise next January. The whole fare structure should be coming under review as we transition to Great British Railways, with the focus in the short term on attracting passengers back onto public transport.

Roger Smith

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

### Friends of the Far North Line

On 8 August the Far North Line welcomed HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, to Dunrobin Castle Station to unveil a Red Wheel Plaque sponsored by FoFNL and provided by the National Transport Trust. The wording on the plaque is "The Duke of Sutherland's Railway. To boost the local economy, the 3rd Duke planned and financed the railway from Golspie to Helmsdale. Opened 16th May 1871". Alan Ross, NR Director Engineering and Asset Management invited the Prince to unveil the plaque after he had been given a tour of the museum of railway memorabilia in the station by Daniel Brittan-Catlin, its 'Honorary Station Master'. The Prince was extremely interested by the museum and "asked a million questions" - he said that some of his happiest memories as a child were having breakfast in the train on the Deeside Line that "they should never have closed".

### Campaign for North East Rail

[Connect Peterhead](#) believes that the best way to reach the town is via Boddam, by branching from the disused Formartine and Buchan Way at Ellon rather than Maud. This route would allow for competitive travel times with the car, while calling at all of the largest settlements in the area, so a new feasibility study must examine this option.

## South East Northumberland Rail User Group

Northumberland County Council and Northern have been running route familiarisation trains round the Northumberland (Ashington, Blyth and Tyne) Line with invited guests on board. SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett and Committee Member Dave Shaw, representing Rf, travelled on 6 August, together with North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll and Wansbeck MP Ian Lavery. The train ran as far as Bedlington before branching to Morpeth and returning to Newcastle.

SENRUG warmly welcomes the announcement of a new TransPennine Express (TPE) service from December of 5 trains/day each way through Northumberland. More trains will call at Cramlington and Widdrington, and it will bring other improvements in the Scottish Borders. In the longer term, SENRUG would like a semi-fast service through Newcastle from Manchester or Liverpool, running hourly including weekends. Stops would likely be limited to the key market towns of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick, and one station in Scottish Borders.

It would be complemented by realisation of Northumberland CC's "Restoring Your Railways" bid for an hourly, 7 days/week, stopping service serving Pegswood and Acklington, and with capacity for further new or re-opened stations such as Beal and Warkworth; the case for Belford is already developed. To the south, once a through Metro service is running between the Airport and Northumberland Park, SENRUG envisages both a new Benton East station to give a single interchange point between the Airport and Cramlington, Morpeth and North Northumberland, and an extension beyond Newcastle to a new station at Team Valley (Low Fell).

## South East Lancs Rail Action Partnership

The 20th anniversary edition of SELRAP's newsletter outlines where its campaign to see the Skipton to Colne line reopened has come from, where it is at and, crucially, where it is headed. The line could be up and running within 5 years of the decision to proceed. An Advocacy [Report](#) by Arup detailed its social rationale: "A new 12 mile rail corridor will be transformational – forming the North's fourth transPennine link, and supporting levelling-up of the East Lancashire and wider Northern economy".

To reinforce this point, SELRAP has delivered spirit levels to several MPs in constituencies along the route of the line. They symbolise the gross inequality in the Government's investment priorities, as over 90% of spending on new infrastructure is still being pumped into already-well-connected communities of Southern England. Reopening the line between Skipton and Colne will regenerate many of the most marginalised and economically-deprived communities in the UK, including all of the "Red Wall" towns: Pendle, Burnley, Accrington, Shipley and Keighley.

A new SELRAP [video](#) also presses the case, whilst a DfT letter dated 9 June states the current position: "The proposal to reinstate the rail link...sits within the Advanced Proposals workstream of the Restore Your Railways programme. Plans are well advanced for a next stage of Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline 'Develop' work to check whether the business case for this scheme can be strengthened, taking account of the reforms announced to HM Treasury's 'Green Book' guidance, through review of the strategic case, examining the potential for significant capital cost reduction to improve affordability, and review of potential demand. The Minister has endorsed proposals for this work and looks forward to receiving HM Treasury's funding decision shortly."

## Friends of the Barton Line

Abellio East Midlands Railway took over the Barton service in May, but reliability is still abysmal, and likely to continue until the two-car Class 153s are replaced by 156s, when the line will finally lose the tag of being the only one in the country operated solely by trains that do not comply with the Passengers with Reduced Mobility specification. However, one benefit of the change of operator was New Clee station becoming a fully-fledged compulsory stop.

FBL is pressing for the 0658 Cleethorpes – Barton - Cleethorpes service to be re-instated. It is also represented on the Advisory Group for the proposed extension of the Sheffield Midland - Gainsborough Central service to Barton via Brigg, and there is a Restoring Your Railway bid for a Worksop - Habrough - Cleethorpes service. Other proposals include a daily LNER service from London Kings Cross to Cleethorpes via Lincoln, and a TPE service between Cleethorpes and Leeds.

### **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group**

On 24 August, the Group met GWR senior managers and made it very clear that the current level of performance is unacceptable. The changes at Newbury are unreliable, and many direct trains to and from Paddington are cancelled. GWR responded as follows:

- Every day they speak with Hitachi to ascertain the number of trains available. GWR have 93 trains, and need 75 to run a normal service. Since the end of May, Hitachi have only been able to release 65 for certain; some days this can go up to 68. If GWR can get back to 70, Bedwyn will likely have its through trains back.
- However, Hitachi can't give a date for the repairs; they seem to be struggling to find a solution. Being paid on train availability, there is real incentive for them to resolve this.
- GWR have only one Turbo to run the Bedwyn - Newbury shuttle, which leaves the service vulnerable, and rules out any chance of running it on to Reading.
- The through services to Pewsey, Westbury and the West of England are too tightly timed to call additionally at Bedwyn.
- The number of advanced purchase fares hasn't dropped; people may be snapping them up, as they prefer them to season tickets.

Other causes of cancellations and delays are freight train failures, track faults, rail temperatures in hot weather, trespassers, signal failure, level crossing failures, line speed restrictions and lack of train crew. And through services have priority over the Bedwyn service, which can lead to the Turbo being held in the Bedwyn turn-back siding and missing its connection at Newbury. GWR are trying to remove some freight services to improve reliability of the passenger service, but it's a perfect storm making the current Bedwyn service so poor. Ideally the Group wants direct trains to Paddington back, but if that is impossible the shuttle needs to run to Reading instead of Newbury.

Subsequently, the DfT and GWR agreed to make the 0831 off-peak until the timetable change on 12 December, as the normal first off-peak service (0924) is not currently running.

### **RAILFUTURE**

*Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to 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 on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).*

Short-sighted rail companies are shooting themselves in the foot, as slimmer timetables will deter passengers from travelling, leading to a downward spiral. "These proposals should be sending alarm bells to rail users and taxpayers." said Rf Chairman Chris Page. "There's no evidence that leisure travel won't bounce back after Covid; indeed we're already hearing stories of trains crowded with leisure travellers. Yet there will be significant cuts to trains both at off-peak times and peak times on many routes, when compared to the "pre-Covid" timetable. In many cases half the trains are being slashed from the timetable. Many more journeys will now involve a change of train, which will lengthen journey times and make rail less attractive.

"These proposals seem to display a lack of basic understanding of railway economics. Fixed costs in railways are high. The marginal costs of running more trains are relatively low.

“Experience tells us that greater frequency and through journey opportunities generates revenue in excess of the costs of operation. The rail industry needs to control its cost base to deal with the realities of the pandemic, but cutting services will lead to lower rail usage and declining revenue. Railways have to offer a package of travel that melds convenience, price, quality etc in an offering that will get people to use trains and not their cars. Rail industry finances will only be stabilised and restored by growing the revenue line, not lowering quality to cut costs. Have we learned nothing from the spiral of decline of Britain’s railways in the 1960s and 1970s? This is not just about rail users, vital as they are. Taxpayers will end up footing the bill for a railway where declining patronage is propped up by greater and greater subsidies.”

## RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

With the potential closure of the Stocksbridge steelworks, many local residents may need to look for jobs elsewhere. Good transport options are essential, so the opportunity should be taken to return its freight only railway line to passenger use, which would also benefit Oughtibridge and Deepcar. It could be a tram train between the centres of Stocksbridge and Sheffield, or a conventional rail service serving a reopened Sheffield Victoria station, and maybe continuing to Chesterfield via Barrow Hill, or to Retford for East Coast Main Line connections. And if the Government is serious about levelling up, it should re-open the Sheffield - Penistone line for a faster direct service to Huddersfield.

Mike Crowhurst suggests connecting the Askern line west towards Carcroft for a shorter route into the new Island Platform at Doncaster, and combining it with the local Sheffield - Adwick service to create a Leeds – Castleford – Pontefract – Askern – Adwick – Doncaster – Rotherham - Sheffield service that would open up new journey opportunities without needing any new paths through the Doncaster area. Finally, both the electric Leeds - Doncaster service and the alternate Sheffield - Doncaster service (by a reversal) could be extended to Finningley (for the Airport) via the new Island Platform and the existing overpass without any conflict with the ECML

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

The Government has deferred the decision on fares for 2022 until later in the year, hinting that it may be about to change the way the annual fare rise is calculated. CBT says they should be frozen in a bid to encourage people back to public transport, and to help stimulate the economy.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

With ever more members collecting evidence on a growing range of projects, CRN has updated its [Impact recording tool](#) to help users create surveys to gather feedback.

Working with local professional artist, Alastair Nicholson, the 2019/20 ‘Year in Industry’ university students on placement with Northern created 'A Grand Day Out To The Seaside', a lavishly illustrated [story book](#) for young children about a journey from Leeds to Morecambe. A free copy can be obtained by post from Leeds-Morecambe CRP, Bentham Station Building, Station Road, Bentham, Lancaster, LA2 7LF, or picked up from Bentham Station. Meanwhile, with a grant from the Community Engagement Fund of CrossCountry Trains, a new [video](#) ‘We’ve Missed You Too ...’ produced by i-Creation Ltd and based around the theme of City, Countryside and Coast showcases the entire route from Leeds to Lancaster and Morecambe.

Almost two years on from their previous trip to Morecambe, a group of youngsters from Skipton Extended Learning For All (SELFA) charity became the first group assisted by the LMCRP and Northern since the pandemic began. On a trip to Lancaster, they visited Williamson Park butterfly house and mini zoo, and also the Castle, and received copies of 'A Grand Day Out To The Seaside'. A young rail enthusiast in the group was particularly delighted to see the Scarborough Spa Express arrive at Skipton prior to their departure, and to discuss all things railway related.

South Western Railway is committing £265,000 to launch its twelfth CRP on the line between Reading, Ashford and Windsor & Eton Riverside.

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

An EU study found that between 2001 and 2019 the number of night trains had declined, whereas international high speed services had doubled. Seasonal services declined 37%, and some very long day train services had been split into two shorter links. The consultants also looked at 96 airport-to-airport routes, and identified 38 on which the traffic was dense enough to make rail a realistic alternative. Yet 14 of these had lost their night trains during the past 20 years.

Currently it is easier to book a flight between two European capitals than to book a rail journey, so the EU Agency for Railways is organising a 1-hour webinar “Towards a harmonised European Rail Pass.” It will start at 1500 BST on 16 September, and you can register on the ERA [website](#).

LNER services to London Kings Cross from Middlesbrough and Thornaby will start in December. However, it’s back to the drawing board for the East Coast Main Line timetable planned for next May: NR has recommended deferring it to “May 2023 or beyond”. As well as the negative public reaction to the proposed changes, there were doubts about its operational feasibility, and problems both with enhancing the electrical power supply and restoring cracked Azuma trains. Then there is the time needed to renegotiate such a complex timetable with so many operators.

And from 25 October 2021, new open access operator Lumo will run 2 return services/day between London and Edinburgh, calling at Stevenage (some), Newcastle and Morpeth. These are expected to ramp up to 3/day in mid-December and 5/day early next year. The low fares aim to help people switch from coach and air travel to more eco-friendly long-distance rail travel.

Sub-national Transport Body *Transport for the North* reports that the North accounted for 25% of tourism spending in England, with a total spend of £21 billion. The big cities were the most visited, followed by Cumbria and North Yorkshire. The [report](#) by Atkins and Leisure Consultancy Ltd will form part of TfN’s evidence base in setting out future transport needs.

East Lothian Council's planning committee has approved proposals for East Linton station on the East Coast Main Line. It will have 126 car parking spaces, and be fully accessible with lifts and a footbridge connecting the two platforms.

The next phase of Newcastle Central Station’s transformation is expected to start this month. Funded by the North East LEP’s Local Growth Fund, the second phase of the Central Gateway project will see the creation of a new concourse within the station, two new pedestrian/cycle entrances at Neville Street and Central Parkway, and the pedestrianisation of Orchard Street.

The 13 miles of track between Wigan North Western and Lostock Junction near Bolton is to be electrified in a £78m upgrade to complete in 2024/25.

The £2bn Midlands Rail Hub would offer Birmingham Moor Street 10 more trains/hour and 12 million more seats/year overall. Two new paths into the city centre would improve connections to Bromsgrove, Hereford, Worcester and Cheltenham, as well as Leicester, Derby and Nottingham.

NR has connected the new Soham station to the wider signalling network, a key milestone that paves the way for Ipswich – Peterborough trains to call from December.

Harlow Council is to investigate the potential of extending the Central Line to Harlow, whilst business leaders and councillors in Basildon want the District Line extended from Upminster to plug the gap from midnight to 0400 when c2c does not run.

For just £3/day (£2 at weekends and on bank holidays) motorists can avoid the traffic jams on the A38 south of Birmingham by using the new £7.6m, 600 space multi-storey car park adjacent to Longbridge station.

Following the successful trial of new low-bridge technology on its Cambridge buses, Stagecoach will now roll it out to around 4,000 double-deck buses and high coaches across England. Of the 1,714 railway bridge strikes in 2019-20, up to 50 involved buses.

*,,,and finally*

An African Grey parrot missing from his home in Tadworth, Surrey, was found perched on a rough sleeper at London Waterloo station. Safely returned, he is now making train noises and various station announcements.

South Western Railway is also hoping to reunite some soft toys with their rightful owner. This year its lost property team at London Waterloo has looked after 19 found on train seats and station floors across its network. Images of the toys are being shared across social media. If you recognise any of them, get in touch via Twitter (@SW\_Help) and #SWRSLostTeddies, or email [lost.property@swrailway.com](mailto:lost.property@swrailway.com).

## CONSULTATIONS

- **South Western Railway:** [December 2022 Timetable](#), closes 19 September.
- West Sussex County Council: [Draft Transport Plan 2022-36](#), closes 8 October.
- Oxfordshire Plan 2050: [Spatial Growth Options](#), closes 8 October.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: [Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc - Priorities for its Spatial Framework](#), closes 12 October.
- Surrey County Council: [Surrey Transport Plan - LTP4](#), closes 24 October.
- Transport for Wales: [Future Transport Planning](#), closes tbn.

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](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#). Stand-alone lists are preferred, as newsletters may be discarded.

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.**

### September

- Tuesday 21. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1400 .
- Friday 24. Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association AGM, Community Centre, **Bourne End**, Bucks, 1945.
- Saturday 25. Rf East Midlands AGM, **Online**, 1230; Open Meeting, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf Yorkshire, **Sheffield or Online**, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Street, **Norwich** NR2 1EW, 1400.
- Tuesday 28. Levenmouth Rail Campaign AGM, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, normally at Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS).

## October

- Friday 1. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, **Online** (public Conference in Dingwall postponed until June 2022).
- Thursday 7. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Tuesday 12. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Tuesday 12. South East Northumberland RUG, Town Hall, **Morpeth**, 1930.
- Saturday 16. Upper Wensleydale Railway Supporters, The Dales Countryside Museum, **Hawes**, 1130.
- Monday 18. Avocet Line RUG AGM, venue TBA, 1930.
- Wednesday 20. England's Economic Heartland annual conference, **Silverstone**.
- Saturday 30. East Suffolk Travel Association, **Lowestoft station**, 1400.

## Further Ahead

- 17 November. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan inn, **Barton**, 2000, (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at Barton and the No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** 1900)
- 9 December. Community Rail Awards 2021, Guildhall, **Southampton** and **Online**.

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

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