



May 2021

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

RUX may be forwarded, or items reproduced (quoting sources). Anyone may request it as an email attachment, or opt to be notified when posted on the [Railfuture \(Rf\) website](#). There is no charge for either service. Please advise [Railfuture Membership](#) if you no longer wish to receive RUX or the link, or if you know of anyone who would like to be added. \*\* NB Comments on the content should be addressed to [the editor](#), **not** to the email address used for distribution.\*\*

The May timetable sees a welcome increase in services. But with franchises in abeyance, and the Treasury strapped for cash post Covid, it is vital that rail revenues increase to justify both this level of service and the need to further develop the rail network. Use it or lose it!

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

The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) organised an inter-modal freight demonstration at Georgemas on 22 April using the short nuclear waste siding. This limits trains to eight containers, and uses slings from a fixed overhead crane, so the train has to move between each operation. Were there enough traffic in the future to justify the purchase of a [reach stacker](#), the longer NR sidings would be more suitable. The good news is that this summer may see another timber trial, but using high capacity bespoke timber wagons.

### Rail Action Group East of Scotland

Reinstating the Haddington branch could be at the expense of the North Berwick service because of a lack of capacity into Edinburgh Waverley. To resolve this issue, make the ECML more resilient, and reduce journey times from Newcastle, NR proposes lengthening certain Waverley platforms, re-doubling one or both of Calton North & South Tunnels, re-opening the Lochend Loop between Abbeyhill Junction and Craightinny (part of the former Edinburgh Suburban Circle), and reconfiguring Portobello Junction.

Another idea is to quadruple the ECML between Wallyford or Prestonpans and Drem, and eliminate Markle level crossing. However, a new relief line, possibly from near Wallyford to somewhere west of Dunbar, would be less disruptive. It could serve Blindwells new town between Tranent and Longniddry, and include a through station at Haddington just north of the A1. The journey time to Edinburgh would be shorter than on a re-opened branch line, which might compensate for having to divert buses to the northern edge of town.

### **Lakes Line Rail User Group**

Rather than overhead electric/battery bi-modes for the Lakes Line (see last month), David Dundas suggests asking Eversholt to use Alstom's Breeze, a Class 321 hydrogen conversion, as the refuelling time would be far quicker than battery charging, and it has greater range.

### **Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines**

From May there is NO increase in the basic pattern of trains from smaller Rochdale area stations like Smithy Bridge and Castleton. They will continue to be served by only one train an hour with a few extras in the peak whereas Mytholmroyd, a West Yorkshire station, has a basic two trains an hour to Manchester. The reduction at Smithy Bridge and Castleton to hourly enabled Low Moor, another West Yorkshire station, to benefit from through trains to Manchester.

However, the popular DalesRail Sunday service between Blackpool North and Carlisle via Blackburn, Clitheroe and Hellifield returns for the first time since 2019.

### **Lichfield Rail Promotion Group**

LRPG has long campaigned for passenger services on the former South Staffs line between Lichfield and Burton-upon-Trent, to permit travel between Derby, Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield without having to go to Birmingham or Tamworth. The line is maintained and signalled to passenger train standards, but sees only a few empty coaching stock and freight trains, occasional diversions from the main line, and one daily Cross Country service that runs non-stop between Derby and Birmingham. The line runs parallel with the busy A38, and past the National Memorial Arboretum, which has over 400,000 visitors a year with no public transport connection. West Midlands Rail Executive is seeking feasibility funding through the Restoring Your Railway Fund.

### **Friends of the Barton Line**

The FBL Secretary has invited Martin Vickers MP to support its Restoring Your Railway application to redouble the line between New Clee and Cleethorpes. Peter Cookson of Pontefract Civic Society has proposed a new rail service between Leeds and Cleethorpes, and obtained tentative support from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority; Rf is seeking support from North and North East Lincolnshire Councils. The [Brigg Line Rail Group](#) wants a six-day/week service between Sheffield and Cleethorpes.

The Secretary also helped Pete Myers, Northern's Stakeholder Manager, with material for a publication to mark its 24 years of stewardship of the line, and is preparing a collage of events in which Pete had been involved over the past 22 years - FBL is to award him honorary membership, with a parting gift as a memento, and will welcome East Midlands Railway (EMR) shortly after the May changeover.

The Chairman is to ask the DfT under Freedom of Information why the Barton line train service has been suspended for a quarter of a year, and express concern regarding the short opening hours of the Grimsby Town station booking office.

### **Bedford Commuters Association**

The EMR Connect Class 360 electric service from St Pancras to Corby starts in May. As a result of BCA lobbying, trains for Leicester and Nottingham will call at Bedford at 0637 and 0710, as will the 1612 from Nottingham. InterCity trains will also call at Bedford until midday on Sundays, when the Corby service starts. At other times customers for north of Kettering will have a 10min connection there, but with no increase in overall journey times.

Further funding has been obtained from the developer for a new two-platform station at Wixams, south of Bedford. Construction is due to start in 2023 and complete in 2024.

To increase the reliability of Thameslink and EMR journeys, NR's 'first 50 miles project' tackles problematic sections of infrastructure by blending ongoing maintenance with major capital investment. The first two initiatives are additional electrical insulation and pigeon control in the Thameslink Core between St Pancras and Blackfriars, and installing over five miles of armoured signalling cable on the Midland Main Line in the Harpenden area.

In the ongoing [East West Rail consultation](#), the three most important questions for Bedford and Flitwick passengers are the location and layout of the rebuilt stations at Bedford and Bedford St Johns; the development of stations and train services in Marston Vale (Bedford to Bletchley); and the alignment from Bedford to Cambridge, with new stations at St Neots or Tempsford and Cambourne. The project does not include the option of a station in north Bedford.

### **Windsor Lines Passengers Association**

In 1947 there were 4tph round the Kingston loop compared with 2tph today. WLPA has argued for 4tph on the loop at least to Kingston via Twickenham. 2tph and often 4tph to Reading with a good connection to Weybridge is a huge step forward, probably reflecting that people are prepared to commute from further down the line. The through Weybridge service formed by splitting Windsor trains is a loss, but the connection at Staines is good. The through service to Feltham and beyond to Weybridge helps workers on the Great West Road, and provides 4tph round the Hounslow loop.

SWR will not reinstate its Class 442 fleet, which is currently redundant and would need expensive modifications to satisfy the Persons with Reduced Mobility dispensation. But it will retain the 28 Class 458s until 2027, and refurbish them (again!) for mainline use by changing to 2+2 seating, and reverting to four-car units to allow 100mph running.

### **Tonbridge Line Commuters**

Cuts to the Southeastern timetable in February culminated in an extremely sparse off-peak service, and the May timetable sees just a 4-5% step up. TLC did succeed in getting Southeastern to reinstate the 1539 school service from Tonbridge from March 29, and a second hourly off-peak service on the Hastings line from May, but it believes that the proposed level of service will soon be inadequate. GTR has shown a willingness to listen to TLC concerns, and to actively ask its opinions in shaping its timetable. As a result, GTR is continuing to run its full normal service between Tonbridge and Redhill, including half hourly services in the rush hour and at school times.

Regarding Medway Valley Line trains running through to Tonbridge, TLC achieved an online meeting with the rail minister, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, representatives from the DfT and Southeastern, and Tom Tugendhat MP. Southeastern seems determined to stop trains crossing at Tonbridge, but TLC maintains that this has relatively little impact on performance, so terminating at Paddock Wood should be used much more sparingly at times of severe disruption rather than a permanent curtailment.

When Eurostar services start to increase, the international station at Ashford should reopen at the same time. Saving people from having to travel to and from London, would reduce congestion on crowded commuter trains. Ebbsfleet is useful to North-West Kent and to some motorists, but Ashford benefits passengers on or near six different routes: from the Ebbsfleet area; Mid Kent via Maidstone; North-East Kent via Canterbury; East Kent via Dover; Romney Marsh and Sussex via Hastings and South Kent and Surrey via Tonbridge.

### **Avocet Line Rail Users Group**

The movement of further Class 165/6 Turbos from Reading to Bristol/Exeter depends on the progress of converting 19 Class 319s to Class 769 Flex trains. At the time of writing nine have yet to start, two are ongoing and eight have been completed, but some have yet to complete initial testing. The next stage is Fault Free Testing (FFT), but none has happened yet, and GWR staff training will not start until it has been completed successfully.

The NR website has a plan of almost every station in Great Britain. They have recently been updated to a new format that isn't to everyone's liking, but the major issue is the lack of accuracy. After Newcourt opened and Exmouth was rebuilt, ALRUG noted that the maps were out of date. It was told that a new company was redrawing all the maps. The contract with the old one included large charges for any alterations, and didn't allow anyone else to do the work. It was cheaper to renew every map from scratch than make a host of individual changes.

## 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](#).***

Together with more than 15 rail businesses, and industry and campaign groups, Rf has signed an [open letter](#) to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps MP calling for a programme of rail electrification to begin as soon as possible to meet the Government's legally binding Net Zero commitments. A new report, "[Why Rail Electrification?](#)", sets out why, even with the development of clean new technologies like battery and hydrogen, the rail network cannot be decarbonised to the extent required without much more electrification. To achieve Net Zero by 2050, 13,000 single track kilometres – around 450/year – will be needed whereas in 2019-20 only 251stk were electrified.

Freight trains already reduce carbon emissions by 76% compared to road haulage. If more were hauled electrically rather than diesel, carbon emissions could be halved again. Electric locomotives also offer shorter journey times, making rail freight more attractive, which should result in further modal shift from road to rail, reducing road congestion and noise pollution. [Railfreight Solutions](#) has therefore proposed what it believes should be the top ten routes to be electrified in priority order. The strategic aim is to create an Electrified Lattice around three north-south and two east-west spokes; it could be completed in around 12 years.

Transport for the North has proposed a [route](#) for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) between Liverpool and Manchester. Detail is lacking, but it would include the use of HS2 tracks between Manchester Piccadilly and where the route diverges to the west of Manchester Airport. However, Rf considers that the key NPR aim of Liverpool - Manchester in 26mins could not be delivered without significant new infrastructure in Liverpool.

Meanwhile, [Railfuture North East](#) welcomes TfN's outline preferences for NPR, and reviews the ECML aspects. Reinstating the Leamside line would create a 4 track route from NPR to Newcastle. Understandably, TfN has chosen to link NPR and HS2, but a balance has to be struck between more long distance high-speed services and connectivity within the region. The line north from Newcastle to the Scottish border and, in conjunction with Transport Scotland, onwards to Edinburgh, also needs attention as it too will become increasingly congested.

Rail campaigners are underwhelmed by the 15% discount that a new ticket would give part-time commuters. As Rf Director Neil Middleton says: "It sounds good, but...many longer distance travellers who only commute a few days a week won't save any money at all. Traditional season tickets give larger discounts for longer distance commuting, and it could still work out cheaper to get a five-days-a-week season ticket and use it only for three, than to buy these new tickets. What we need is a system of [carnet tickets](#) to better bridge the gap between the cost of the traditional day ticket and the season ticket." And as some workers will still need to travel in daily in peak hours, the traditional season ticket needs to be retained.

Rf has learnt that LNER plans to impose compulsory seat reservations on its trains, and Covid has presented the opportunity to do this sooner than intended. “Compulsory reservations will seriously disadvantage passengers making short journeys” said Rf Director Allison Cosgrove: “The journey from Durham to Newcastle is only 12 minutes for example – and connections are also quite short between Alnmouth, Newcastle, Durham and Darlington, or between Grantham, Newark and Retford. What are the railways for? Public transport is meant to be a public service that is accessible to all who need to use it. The convenience of the travelling public should come first, ahead of the wishes of the rail companies. This idea is misguided, and will serve to drive people away from the railway if they cannot use it on a turn up and go basis.”

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

With lockdown restrictions easing and many people planning UK holidays, this is a critical time for community rail to be gearing up to encourage sustainable, rail-based tourism and leisure travel. On 30 June, CBT will launch its 'Summer Days Out Are Better by Rail' campaign to highlight the best of Britain's community railway lines and stations, and promote hidden gems, local sights, histories and visitor attractions.

The Travel and Tourism Hub at Petersfield Railway Station has reopened, with information for the local area, the surrounding South Downs National Park and further afield. It is open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays between 1000 and 1200 throughout the Spring and Summer, with a view to increasing days and opening hours as the post COVID environment improves.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

A CBT survey showed that cars will continue to be the preferred mode of transport for around half of journeys post-Covid, putting climate targets and a fair economic recovery at risk unless the Government does more to promote public transport and encourage its use. Most worryingly, 20% of UK adults say that currently nothing would encourage them to increase their use of public transport, rising to 29% among those aged 55 and over. The Government still has a long way to go to reverse the damage the pandemic has done to the perceived safety of public transport.

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

The RAIB has published an [Interim Report](#) into the fatal derailment at Carmont, 3mls south of Stonehaven, on 12 August 2020. After a period of intense rainfall, a landslide had blocked the line to the south, so the train involved was returning to Stonehaven, where it would terminate. Everything was played by the book, including a wait until the facing crossover points had been clamped. “As the signaller was not aware of any obstruction on the line [to Stonehaven], railway rules did not require him to instruct the driver to travel at a speed slower than the maximum [75mph] normally permitted” (para 45). Thus the train was travelling at 73mph when it derailed after hitting gravel washed from a drain, then stones and soil eroded from the surrounding ground, and finally the parapet of a bridge. An emergency brake application had no time to reduce its speed significantly before it struck the debris.

A contributory factor may have been the train's crashworthiness in a high-energy accident. In an article in The Scotsman, rail engineer Gareth Dennis hopes that Transport Scotland would now plan to replace its HSTs earlier than the current 2030 target date.

Reopening of the Isle of Wight Line will be delayed until later this year due to late delivery of the new fleet of Vivarail Class 484 trains. Planning and analysis of software changes to enable 3rd rail running did not reveal any problems, but live tests uncovered some serious issues.

NR has had to defer refurbishing the middle tower of the Grade II listed Britannia Bridge that links Anglesey to the North Wales mainland after a pair of peregrine falcons were found to be nesting there. Work has been paused until the young peregrines have fledged later in the year.

As part of a £1.5m improvement scheme, LNER has transformed the station approach at Grantham Station, and added 115 more spaces to the car park.

Work has started on a new two-platform station at Marsh Barton. Part of the Devon Metro rail strategy, it will support economic growth in southwest Exeter, Dawlish and Newton Abbot.

Teignbridge District Council has approved NR's plans to extend the rockfall shelter north of Parsons Tunnel between Dawlish and Holcombe in Devon, on the sole rail link to Plymouth and the southwest. NR hopes to start the year-long construction in August.

Foreign travel for all should restart soon. Airlines are encouraging people to book flights, so the rail industry needs to be gearing up for this market too. The [Association of European Rail Agents](#) has much practical information, and links to the websites of UK travel agents and tour operators with many years experience in international rail travel.

[Research](#) for the Rail Delivery Group has shown the value of the rail freight sector in levelling up the economy and helping the UK reach net-zero carbon emissions. Each year it saves 7m HGV journeys, and delivers £2.5bn in economic and social benefits, with the north of England, Scotland and Wales gaining the most benefit. A new rail freight path can be worth up to £1.5m/year.

Recently launched [Nuclear Transport Solutions](#) specialises in the operational, commercial, engineering, legal, and regulatory expertise that underpins the safe transport of nuclear material. It operates Direct Rail Services (DRS), and also offers bespoke solutions and transport services for customers outside the nuclear sector.

*,,,and finally*

The [National Railway Museum](#) is to reopen from Wednesday 19 May. Visitors will need to book a free timed slot online, wear a facemask (unless exempt) and observe social distancing.

The Severn Valley Railway [YouTube channel](#) shows rolling stock movements from a network of live-stream cameras at key locations.

Built in 1897, Trojan became the oldest working GWR locomotive on 1 May, when it returned to service in steam at the Didcot Railway Centre .

## CONSULTATIONS

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: [Pre-submission Local Plan](#), closes 4 June
- East West Rail Co: [Various aspects of EWR](#) (see above), closes 9 June.

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.**

## May

- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400
- Wednesday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (or Online) (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at Cleethorpes and the Sloop at Barton, 2000 ).
- Saturday 22. Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line AGM, **Online**, 1030.

■ 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**).

## June

■ Tuesday 1. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).

■ Thursday 3. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month except July (mid-month) and August).

■ Thursday 3. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds Division, **Online**, 1930.

■ 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**).

■ Thursday 24. ERTA Great Central Rail Projects, **Online**, 1500.

■ Friday 25. ERTA Brackmills and Northampton Area, **Online**, 1500.

■ Saturday 26. Rf East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke, Church Hall, Stoke Street, **Ipswich** IP2 8DA, 1400.

## Further Ahead

■ July 3. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, **Saxmundham**, 1400.

■ July 5. ERTA Guildford and South East Area, **Online**, 1400.

■ July 14. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)

■ July 17. Rf AGM, Priory Rooms, **Birmingham** (TBC) or **Online**.

■ July 24. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds Division, **St Albans**, 1930.

■ August 20. ERTA Brackmills and Northampton Area, **Online**, 1500.

■ August 26. ERTA Great Central Rail Projects, **Online**, 1500.

■ October 1. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, **Dingwall**, (postponed from 18 June).

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

Contact the editor by e-mail: [ruglink@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ruglink@railfuture.org.uk), or phone: 01462 815992.

<https://twitter.com/Railfuture>    <https://www.facebook.com/Railfuture/>  
<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/railfuture-in-great-britain/30/22a/b59>

*Railfuture Ltd is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634.  
Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7N*

**(NB. for legal correspondence only)**

*All other correspondence to: 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP (NB Change of address)*