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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The £36 billion “saved” by cancelling the Northern leg of HS2 could take a while to appear. Sorting Ely and Haughley Junctions will increase passenger and freight capacity, but unless the West Coast Main Line (WCML) is upgraded, “jam tomorrow” could take on a whole new meaning.

Roger Smith

We start with news from groups around Great Britain. All contributions are gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

Eye watering sums could be spent on the A9 and A96 while the Highland railways languish with less infrastructure than they had in the 19th Century. As railways are now seen as a community service rather than a business venture, the fight for funding has moved to persuading politicians to allocate funds sensibly. To meet its decarbonisation commitment, the Scottish Government would need to electrify around 120 single-track km/year for the next 12 years, so it should take a lead from its Welsh counterpart and completely change the rules applied to spending on roads.

FoFNL is pressing for another Sunday service. Currently just one train each way leaves Wick at around midday and Inverness at 1800. The extra travel generated could offset the additional cost.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

At a Rf event in Edinburgh, Scott Prentice, Head of Business Development at ScotRail said that its December timetable will provide for Dunbar services to call at East Linton station. However, no opening date has yet been set, as construction and commissioning works are still ongoing.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

Tony Baxter, Northern Trains Regional Director East, told a Chamber of Commerce Transport meeting that the journeys customers make had changed, and explained how they buy what types of ticket. Punctuality is now almost 70%, and 3.1m journeys are estimated in 2023/24. Northern plans to replace its ageing Class 15X fleets, but Harrogate will keep the newer Class 170 until 2043.

LNER Commercial Director David Flesher reported two years of passenger growth above pre-pandemic levels resulting in 15% more revenue. East Coast Main Line trains were very busy, with Harrogate Line services growing 15-20%.

A totally new ECML timetable is being planned for December 2024; it will include an earlier direct service from Harrogate to Kings Cross, and a later evening return.

Skipton and East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

The DfT and NR already have a sound business case for the Skipton to Colne project. Yet the list of HS2 compensation transport projects totally ignores East Lancashire. SELRAP Chair Peter Bryson said: “If this Government wants a public transport project tailor-made to level up deprived communities, then Skipton to Colne is it! This project requires a tiny fraction of the funding released by the cancellation of HS2. MPs along the route all fully support this vital project, and they want it delivered quickly. The Government needs to put the money where its mouth is”.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

Scrapping HS2 to Manchester is the end of a long saga in which politicians ignored reality and ploughed on with the scheme first mooted by Andrew Adonis in the dying years of the last Labour Government. A lot of money has been wasted on a scheme that was over-engineered and badly conceived, with very poor connectivity to the existing rail network. It would have strangled many far better regional projects, so while many will mourn its demise Paul will not be one of them.

Fen Line Users Association

FLUA has asked NR consider designating the line north of Ely as a “key route” with minimum service levels during industrial action, as there is no equivalent bus service.

A multi-party group at Westminster launched “Keeping Trade on Track” to push for the upgrade of Ely North Junction, with a follow-up meeting in Cambridge; the local press widely reported the presence of FLUA’s Chair. Its Vice-Chair attended the Campaign for Better Transport’s “Rail Day” at King’s Cross, and GTR’s environmental forum at Luton. FLUA has also had positive meetings with Fen Line station manager Trevor Wood, and with GTR senior management.

King’s Lynn now has through trains to London every half hour from 0440 to 0840, and from London between 1442 and 1939, but has lost its direct service to Liverpool Street. The heavily loaded 1812 Saturday service out of King’s Cross once had 448 seats on 2 x Class 387s, or 3 as far as Cambridge. Now the 8-coach Class 700 unit has only 427 seats – but with standing room for a further 719!

East Suffolk Travel Association

First Bus has extended the X41 to provide an hourly service between Norwich and Halesworth; the shuttle bus between there and Southwold runs more frequently, and BorderBus has extended its Aldeburgh to Halesworth service to Beccles. All these services run via Norwich Road Bridge close to Halesworth railway station, although none operates on a Sunday.

Bedford Commuters Association

GTR has responded to BCA’s request for a breakdown of ticket sales by type at its two stations. For the period January to March 2022, the Bedford ticket office sold 35.5% and Flitwick 25.7%, many more than the 10% cited in the closure consultation document.

The level of train cancellations and “skip-stopping” affecting Flitwick is a concern, with gaps of up to an hour and a half in the early evening service. However, its new transport interchange has now opened, as the Issues raised by the bus companies have all been resolved.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

BTPG is following up an issue with GWR where a passenger was fined £91 at Paddington when the ticket machine at Bedwyn was broken, and his short-formed direct Paddington train was packed, so he couldn’t purchase a ticket on-board.

Among the topics discussed with senior GWR managers in September were poor performance and passengers getting wrong information. Door failures are a major problem with IETs; Hitachi is working on installing upgrades. When things do go wrong and Control Centre staff are aware of the situation, there is surprisingly little integration with signallers, platform and train staff, drivers, and the Customer Information System.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

The Avocet Line has more trains per day than ever but its service suffers problems. Working with GWR and Devon CC, ALRUG has achieved additional trains on Sundays and recently half-hourly into the evenings, so would be sad to lose services through Government cuts, but given the uncertainty in the rail industry, the time is not right to produce a new Manifesto.

GWR's diesel units are all reaching the end of their useful life; it was the only operator not to receive new ones post BR. Operation Churchward is looking at its future rolling stock needs, but even if DfT and Treasury agree, it is doubtful whether any could be in service much before 2028. So, is there any hope of cascades from elsewhere in the meantime? It is reported that two Transport for Wales Class 150 units that hit a mini digger on the Marches line in May 2022 are now under repair. So given that TfW has managed without them for over a year and has new rolling stock coming on stream, GWR's need is the greater. In due course TfW will shed all its 150s.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to its 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](#).

NEWS

[Only Phase 1 of the HS2 project now survives](#), and Euston – Old Oak Common is dependent on additional funding from private sources. Rf Chairman Chris Page comments: "Opportunities missed from the replacement package of schemes are quadrupling the WCML at Shugborough and between Crewe and Preston to deliver some of the capacity that HS2 and the Golborne link would have brought, and electrification [infills](#) to enable 95% of freight to be electrically hauled". Rf will maintain dialogue with stakeholders, and provide updates based on facts as they emerge, but is not joining in the standing ovation.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

Stephen Chaytow of Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership (MEMRAP) will update the Rf Yorkshire meeting on 21 October on progress to restore the Peaks and Dales line between the Matlock branch and Chinley via Buxton and/or Peak Forest, and possibly a central station at Chapel-en-le-Frith. A direct Derby - Manchester rail link from the East Midlands to the North West would provide environmentally friendly access to the Peak District national park, and add freight capacity from the Buxton/Peak Forest quarries, relieving the congested Hope Valley Line.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority's new draft rail strategy needs political and business support at every level. The Harrogate and Calder Valley lines and the Dearne Valley link to Sheffield should form the first tier of a scheme to electrify every route in the county. Service development ideas around Pontefract include half-hourly trains to Leeds via both Wakefield and Castleford, and proper services from Leeds - Goole, and on the Sheffield - York line through Pontefract Baghill. The Huddersfield - Wakefield - Castleford service should be at least hourly and extend to York and Manchester (as in TPE's partial December plans).

On the Calder Valley line, Brighouse also suffers from having two distinct routes. Bradford - Huddersfield, and Leeds - Manchester - Wigan need their service frequency at least doubled, and corridors such as Bradford - Huddersfield - Manchester and Bradford - Wakefield developed, whilst the Sheffield - Barnsley - Halifax - Bradford service proposed by Greengauge 21 could also serve Elland, Mirfield and a railhead at Horbury (for Ossett), with journey times from Sheffield to Brighouse in about 50mins and Bradford in 75.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

The task of reviewing over half a million responses to the proposed rail ticket office closures has led to an unprecedented workload. Concerns were raised around accessibility, safety and security, issues with ticket machines and how stations would be staffed. After analysing the findings of the consultation, TF and London TravelWatch will publish their responses later this month.

With discussions on replacing NR's wide-ranging Passenger Survey ongoing, TF's on Rail Passenger Satisfaction continues. The latest performance ranking among different operators and NR regions shows some improvement, but with much more to be done on day-to-day reliability.

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

In January, ORR asked TOCs to notify passengers who bought their tickets online when trains are changed or cancelled more than 48 hours before travel. Most have implemented the new system, but notifications often lack the information that those passengers need, so ORR has set out its [expectations](#) to ensure that their rights and available options are clearly set out.

In an out of court settlement, almost £1m in damages has been awarded against NR to some of those affected by the derailment in August 2020 of an Aberdeen to Glasgow train returning to Stonehaven after hitting a landslide following heavy rain. In an earlier hearing, NR had admitted a failure to inspect an incorrectly installed drainage system, and advising the driver that everything was fine for normal speed.

NR is warning that overhead wiring on the Glasgow - Barrhead line is now live for final tests before the introduction of electric trains in December. Its [Safety Education](#) website provides resources aimed at children in various age groups.

As part of a six-month trial funded by the Scottish Government until the end of March, ScotRail has withdrawn peak-time fares from routes across Scotland but also super off-peak day returns, so the fare for some journeys has halved but others have increased.

Carousel Logistics and Varamis Rail have launched an all-electric express cargo route between Birmingham and Glasgow. Converted passenger trains travelling at up to 100mph will connect the two cities in around four hours, and save about 1,300 tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

NR is investing £3.8m to secure the future of the Sankey viaduct in Newton-le-Willows ahead of its 200th anniversary. Designed by railway pioneer George Stephenson, it is Grade I listed, as when it opened in 1830, it was the first major railway viaduct in the world, and Manchester to Liverpool was the first intercity passenger route with a regular timetable.

In a novel partnership, NR will offer the Severn Valley Railway professional skills, advice and redundant material, while the SVR will help train NR staff to operate and maintain old technology such as semaphore signalling and lever frame signal boxes that is still in use in the area.

NR is making six Wales and Borders stations fully accessible. Cwmbran, Llanelli, Abergavenny, Flint and Newtown will get new footbridges with lifts, while Ludlow station will see a lift added to its existing footbridge. Work is ongoing at Cwmbran, Llanelli and Ludlow, and is due to start later this year at Abergavenny, Flint and Newtown.

The West Midlands Railway Executive has revised its Rail Investment Strategy. Projects currently underway include three new stations on Birmingham's Camp Hill Line, two between Walsall and Wolverhampton, and plans for another at Aldridge. Mid- to long-term developments include:

- Further electrification across the network to remove diesel trains
- More services created through the Midlands Rail Hub
- Improved Birmingham - Rugby services using additional capacity on the WCML created by London - Birmingham passengers moving to HS2
- A Burton - Lichfield service calling at Alrewas
- A new line between Lichfield and Walsall, and on through Central Birmingham

London Northwestern Railway and NR have tested a Class 150 DMU on the Marston Vale Line between Bedford and Bletchley to ensure its tracks and signals are ready for the Class 230 replacement. The unsatisfactory bus service that has operated since the collapse of Vivarail last December will continue until November; LNR will confirm the exact date and publish its new timetable nearer the time as it continues to 'pass out' drivers on the Class 150s.

The third England's Economic Heartland [Connectivity Study](#) identifies investment opportunities to improve the transport system between Swindon, Didcot and Oxford that it can seek to progress with its local authority partners. Recommendations include: reinstating an Oxford – Swindon - Bristol rail service, including East West Rail; the potential for a station at Grove for Wantage; increased capacity on the Cherwell Line between Oxford and Didcot; safeguarding rail freight terminals, and enhancing the one in Swindon.

The Ebbw Vale line will close from 15 November to 3 December as NR completes a £70m upgrade. From December, it will have an hourly service to Newport as well as to Cardiff, so passengers will no longer have to double back to travel towards Bristol, London or Manchester. The line reopened in 2008 after being closed for 40 years, saw Pye Corner station open in 2014, and in 2015 was extended from Ebbw Vale Parkway to Ebbw Vale Town.

On behalf of Essex CC and Chelmsford City Council, NR has let a £124m contract to construct Chelmsford's Beaulieu station, which is due to open in 2025.

Junction4pallets and Freightliner have opened the rail freight terminal at Bedworth near Coventry, a strategic site in the heart of the English Midlands, after converting the former oil depot. And NR has connected the SEGRO freight interchange beside M1 Junction 15 in Northampton to the WCML. When it opens next year, four or more trains/day will each take up to 76 HGVs off the road, a much greener way to transport goods around the country.

Tata is to build a battery plant for future generations of road vehicles at Puriton near Bridgwater on the site of a former Royal Ordnance factory. It still has a rail connection to the Bristol - Exeter line, although the bridge over the M5 motorway may need to be replaced to restore passenger and freight services. The main line also serves Cornwall, where considerable deposits of lithium, a vital ingredient of battery manufacture, are located at Imerys' china clay mines near St Austell.

...and finally

Northern re-recorded the names of 34 of its railway stations, but some were still wrong, so it appealed for local residents to help get them right. Station announcer Laura Palmer said people were "rightly passionate" about where they lived.

In November 1854, a train made its maiden journey from Waterloo station into the Surrey countryside. But the Necropolis Railway carried no cases and trunks, just mourners and coffins bound for Brookwood Cemetery. The population of London had grown to 2.5 million, so although home to hundreds of churchyards, it was running out of space to bury the dead.

CONSULTATIONS

- ScotRail: [Fife and the Tay Cities Timetable](#), closes 22 October.
- West Oxfordshire DC: [Local Plan 2041 - ideas and objectives](#), closes 25 October.
- Medway Council: [Medway Local Plan 2040](#), closes 31 October.
- Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council [Strategic Transport Priorities](#), closes 31 October.
- Torridge District Council: [Draft Strategic Plan 2023-28](#), closes 14 November.

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

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Rail Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

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

October

- Saturday 21. Connect Bude AGM. Falcon Hotel, Breakwater Road, **Bude**, Cornwall, EX23 8SD, 1100.
- Saturday 21. Rf Yorkshire, Owen Building, Sheffield Hallam University, **Sheffield**, S1 2LX, 1300.
- Saturday 21. Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association AGM, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ, 1330.
- Thursday 26. South East Northumberland RUG, Town Hall, Market Place, **Morpeth**, Northumberland, NE61 1LZ, 1930.
- Saturday 28. Campaign for Borders Rail, Hawick High School, Buccleuch Road, **Hawick**, Scottish Borders, TD9 0EG, 1230.
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830 (Also 12 December).
- Tuesday 31. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 5 December).

November

- Wednesday 1. England's Economic Heartland, Guildhall, **Cambridge**.
- Thursday 2. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (And on the first Thursday of every month).
- Saturday 4. Lakes Line RUG AGM, Stonecross Manor Hotel, Milnthorpe Road, **Kendal**, LA9 5HP, 1340.
- Saturday 4. Fen Line Users Association AGM, Signal Box Community Centre, 82 Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB, 1400.
- Wednesday 8. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.
- Monday 13. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second of alternate months).
- Tuesday 14. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).
- Tuesday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 11 December)
- Wednesday 15. Friends of the Barton Line No 1 Inn, White Swan, **Barton** 1900.
- Saturday 18. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf Yorkshire and North West, Square Chapel Arts Centre, **Halifax**, HX1 1QG, 1430.

Further Ahead

■ 2 December. Rf East Anglia, Signal Box Community Centre, 82 Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB (TBC), 1400.

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

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