



November 2023

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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I can but echo Rf: the huge response to ticket office closure proposals and its analysis by Travel Focus and London TravelWatch contain a wealth of information about the help prospective passengers need to travel by train. This data must inform future railway planning.

Roger Smith

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

### Friends of the West Highland Lines

In June, Scotrail's Highland Explorer active travel carriages won the Scottish Transport Award for Excellence in Transport Design. The former Class 153 units have space for 20 cycles and bulky sports gear, and an e-bike charging socket. Maps on each table describe the route, and QR codes suggest places to visit. The coaches were introduced in 2021 on the Glasgow – Oban route, and from early this year have also run on the lines to Fort William and Mallaig.

McKinlay Kidd's [Slowly Along the West Highland Line](#) topped Wanderlust's list of the world's best tour operator itineraries by rail. As well as Oban and Mallaig, the tour features the wilderness of Rannoch Moor, the remote Knoydart Peninsula, a private tour of the Isle of Skye, and a trip in first class on the steam-hauled Jacobite across the iconic Glenfinnan Viaduct.

### Furness Line Action Group

The Network North document accompanying the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham states "The Energy Coast Line between Carlisle, Workington and Barrow will be upgraded, improving capacity and journey times, enabling trains every 30 minutes between Carlisle, Workington and Whitehaven...This could support the creation of over 18,000 jobs". Barrow and Furness MP Simon Fell commented "this crucially important line links Moorside, which would generate up to 7% of the UK's electricity, to Barrow, home of the UK's submarine enterprise. Upgrading this line will allow over 172 million tonnes of freight to be taken off our roads."

But these are the same figures as cited in Cumbria LEP's 2018 strategy - before the new Moorside power station was scrapped! So unless the go-ahead is given to a Clean Energy Hub of a similar size to the original massive Moorside plant, these figures and the cost/benefit analysis of the Cumbrian Coast upgrade will all have to be reworked before any commitment can be made.

## **Ribble Valley Rail**

The DfT instructed Northern to cancel DalesRail this summer because of its appalling performance record, and improve the service before running it again. But despite Northern agreeing to train more crews, and a promise to look at its operation and revamp, an announcement as to its reintroduction is still awaited.

Working with Community Rail Lancashire, RVR and its CRP, Ribble Valley Borough Council made a Restoring Your Railway bid for a regular service between Clitheroe and Hellifield to re-establish a rail link between Manchester and Lancashire to Skipton, Settle & Carlisle, and North and West Yorkshire. Sponsored by Ribble Valley MP Nigel Evans, it was among the first ten to be accepted, but although DfT said its business case was valid and acceptable, the scheme could only go ahead with external funding.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement that the money saved by cancelling the HS2 project north of Birmingham would be directed to transport schemes in the North of England, Cllr Stephen Atkinson and Nicola Hopkins (RVBC's Director of Economic Development and Planning) met Transport Minister Huw Merriman's advisor, Nigel Evans MP, and representatives of Lancashire and North Yorkshire CCs to show how re-opening the link could benefit the Ribble Valley and East Lancashire, and support access to the Dales, Manchester and Clitheroe.

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

The Littleborough ticket office has copies of the new Guide to the Calder Valley Line CRP and the Pocket Guide to locations and attractions. Machines cannot hand out booklets! The CRP is going from strength to strength, greatly helped art by the staffed ticket offices at its five main stations.

## **English Regional Transport Association**

The threat to reinstating the line from Llangollen to Ruabon that closed in 1981 has increased because developers plan to block off the east side of Llangollen Bridge, where the railway currently ends. They claim that the Bishop's Walk housing estate already blocks the route, but it doesn't. At least a 6-metre-wide strip of land at trackbed level needs to be kept clear along the back of the riverside wall through the full length of the Four Great Highways scheme footprint.

## **Shrewsbury – Chester Rail User Group**

Regarding the Avocet Line item in last month's RUX, Tfw has only "managed" without the two Class 150 units damaged at Craven Arms by hiring a pair from Northern – but has still suffered a shortage of stock due to [problems with Class 175 units](#), and delays in the introduction of new stock, particularly the Class 197 DMUs, although [Tfw disputes](#) this.

## **Friends of the Barton Line**

Reliability on the Barton line has remained much the same, but its frequent stopping pattern combined with the poor acceleration of Class 170 units at low speeds, makes it hard for them to keep to time. Recovery is then constrained by the short layover at either end of the route. FBL has communicated with EMR over the Customer Information announcements on the 170s, on having a print run of the Barton line timetable to distribute to homes along the line, and on how to celebrate next year's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barton line opening.

In 2024, the national rail timetable will change on 2 June rather than the third Sunday in May.

## **Windsor Lines Passengers Association**

WLPA aspires to a reliable, seven-day week, clock-face timetable on all of its routes, with the pre-Covid level of service reinstated or bettered. As a priority, the off-peak and weekend Kingston and Weybridge services should be recast to provide a 15min stopping service between Waterloo and Barnes.

Will the Class 701 Arterios enter service before Christmas? Over 800 drivers have to be trained. The 5-car Class 458s are being reduced to 4 cars - as they were for Gatwick Express! - for use on the main lines to Weymouth and Portsmouth; the first 458/4 has been delivered. All of the Class 707s have now gone to Southeastern.

At the National Rail Awards in London in September, Staines was named Medium Station of the Year, and is the 100th SWR station to have been adopted by a local group under the CRP initiative. The other adopted WLPA stations are: Windsor and Eton Riverside, Winnersh Triangle, Winnersh, Wokingham, Bracknell, Ascot, Sunningdale, Longcross, Virginia Water, Egham, Ashford, Feltham, Brentford, St Margarets, Richmond, Barnes and Putney.

## 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

Following the withdrawal of proposals for ticket office closures, [Rf Director Neil Middleton](#) is concerned about what may happen next: "We hope that the Government will not now instruct that money is to be taken from elsewhere on the railway to fund the cost of continuing with the current ticket office arrangements. It would be a Pyrrhic victory for passengers and campaigners".

Neil has also appended a comment to his [article](#) on saving the One Day Travelcard, welcoming the announcement of its retention - albeit with a 3% rise over and above next year's fare increase: "Naturally, the one-off price increase is unwanted, but is a far better option than abolishing this well known and simple ticket, the loss of which would have particularly penalised families living around London".

The Rf Board has agreed that its key campaign focus should be for a national railway capable of delivering a reliable cheap product that people will want to buy.

- Government cost cutting will worsen its balance sheet. Pursuing revenue growth will bring wider economic benefits.
- GBR is needed to ensure that all parties pursue common goals; it must work with regional and local stakeholders to make the best use of the network.
- Rf is preparing position papers on the need to retain station staff for customer support and on fares reform, and will ask TOCs if station estates could have a wider social use.
- Rf will respond to the decision to cancel HS2 Phase 2 at two levels: changing the perception and future of railways in Britain, and the criteria for how the money supposedly released should be spent. There is a strong case for more electrification.
- Rail investment should also support a thriving economy in the city-regions, promote social inclusion, increase the market for leisure travel, and relieve pinch points that prevent the growth of trunk freight traffic.
- Modal shift from road to rail, especially of freight, can contribute to decarbonisation.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

With DfT support, CRN's Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund is open to station groups until 1700 on 30 November, or until it has all been allocated. Grants can fund initiatives to improve and develop links between rail and other sustainable modes (buses, community transport, active travel and shared mobility schemes).

DfT has launched the annual business planning process with a request to train operators in England to engage with community rail and draw on its input for an initial draft by the first week of December. CRN has been liaising with the DfT on this, given its importance in ensuring that community rail has the support it needs in 2024-25 to enable it to fulfil its role of giving communities a voice.

Hampshire CRP is seeking two new CRP Officers, one for itself and another for the Three Rivers and Wey Valley CRP. Mark Miller (07900 103296) would welcome expressions of interest in the roles by 1 December.

## TRANSPORT FOCUS

The 750,000 responses that TF and London TravelWatch received to the consultation on ticket office closures contained many powerful concerns, especially from the disabled. Although the proposals did improve considerably during the discussions with train companies, too many issues remained insufficiently addressed, so [TF objected](#) to all of the potential changes. Announcing the outcome, Transport Secretary Mark Harper said that the Government has asked train companies to withdraw their proposals.

Jacqueline Starr, Chief Executive of the [Rail Delivery Group](#) said: "While these plans won't now be taken forward, we will continue to look at other ways to improve passenger experience while delivering value for the taxpayer. Our priority remains to secure a vibrant long-term future for the industry and all those who work in it."

TF has always seen the potential merit in re-deploying ticket office staff at some stations to be more visible and accessible on platforms. This process and the wealth of information, debate and detail now in the public domain has strongly advanced how this could be done in ways that might command public confidence.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Transport for London (TfL), train operators and the Government have agreed a deal to save the Day Travelcard – bringing welcome relief to the millions who rely on it. The CBT campaign was integral to ensuring its continuing acceptance.

Rail fares are a mess; it's hard to know if you're getting a good deal. A [CBT report](#) found some mind-boggling inconsistencies: the cost per mile for travelling with an 'anytime day return' ticket varies from 15p to 62p, while for some journeys, peak-time travel costs 6% more than off-peak travel, but for other journeys, it costs 132% more! CBT offers the following solutions:

- Guarantee that regulated rail fares do not rise faster than the cost of running a car
- Commit to a Best Price Guarantee, so that the best-value fare is prominently offered wherever you buy your ticket
- Make it possible to book train tickets more than 12 weeks in advance
- Run regional trials of low-cost public transport passes, inspired by Germany's 49-euro-a-month Deutschland-Ticket.

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

Regarding the proposed ticket office closures, MPs had "legitimate concerns" whether some passengers would still be able to access the support they needed. Transport Committee Chairman Iain Stewart said: "At a minimum, changes this radical should be carefully piloted in limited areas, and evaluated for their effect on all passengers before being rolled out. This would allow for alternative proposals, which at present are too vague, to be properly understood."

Transport for Wales has been awarded an extra £125m of Welsh Government funding to plug the gap between actual revenue from ticket sales and what it was expecting. CEO James Price said: "It's not that we have seen a reduction in passenger numbers; what we haven't seen is the strong growth that was predicted through the pandemic period, so we are roughly £100m short in farebox revenue compared to where we should be. That's a real challenge for us."

The Welsh Government has axed a project to improve rail travel after major events in Cardiff by stabling additional trains on a mile-long line near the Llanwern steelworks. However, plans for new commuter stations around Newport and Cardiff, including at Llanwern, are going ahead.

After North East Bedfordshire MP Richard Fuller drew its attention to a benefit/cost ratio of just 0.26-0.36 in the business case for East West Rail, the National Audit Office is examining DfT's assessment of the economic and strategic case for the project, and how the context for it has changed over time. NAO has scheduled its report for this winter.

ORR has confirmed NR's £43.1bn funding plans for Control Period 7 (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2029). NR plans to detail its plans for operating maintaining and renewing the network in CP7 next March, at the end of CP6. Enhancements are funded separately on a case-by-case basis.

NR has contracted to build Cambridge South station and modify its southern approach including Shepreth junction. Whereas Liverpool Street trains can run through at 90mph, King's Cross trains have to slow to 30mph. Realigning the curve and moving the pointwork will raise this to 50 mph.

Until the end of the year, Avanti West Coast is reducing its Saturday service between London and Manchester from around 50 trains/day to just 30. A failure to keep cancellations below its contracted level could lead to a TOC being fined or even losing the contract. But if ministers agree to temporarily reduced services known as "short-term planning arrangements", the cancellations do not appear in official statistics.

England's Economic Heartland has set out 83 [Rail Strategic Objectives](#) to boost passenger and freight services on the region's seven main lines (including EWR) in the short, medium and long term, unlocking economic opportunities and offering a realistic alternative to cars and lorries. EEH will pursue these initiatives with the sector, including the Wider South East Rail Partnership, an alliance with GBR, NR, Transport East, Transport for the South East, and Transport for London.

Almost a year after the Class 230 units were withdrawn from the Marston Vale Line when Vivarail went into administration, weekday morning and afternoon peak services between Bedford and Bletchley will resume from 20 November, with bus replacement continuing at other times. A full timetable should return early next year.

[The BBC reports](#) that Hertfordshire could see two new train stations: at Park Plaza North between Turkey Street and Theobalds Grove on the London Overground, and at Turnford on the Bishop's Stortford line. Broxbourne Borough Council has agreed to tighten its planning policies to safeguard the sites [subject to a consultation](#).

With cross-party support from London Councils, TfL is refreshing its business case to [extend the Bakerloo Line](#) from Elephant and Castle to Lewisham via new stations at Burgess Park, Old Kent Road and New Cross Gate. It is also considering a further extension to Beckenham and Hayes by taking over the NR line to Hayes.

A new look Gatwick Airport station with a second concourse and airport entrance is set to open to passengers on November 21st. Eight new escalators and five new lifts will greatly improve accessibility. Along with four new stairways and widened platforms, they will relieve congestion and help passengers move between the train station and the airport more quickly and easily.

The Swanage Railway Trust has launched an [appeal](#) to raise £450,000 to help save the Dorset heritage line against a challenging background of rising operating costs and fewer passengers. And the Swanage Railway Company, which runs the trains on behalf of the Trust, aims to reduce its operating costs by £350,000 while also working on an initiative to attract more visitors to the Isle of Purbeck during 2024.

### *...and finally*

Although she has a loving home, a ginger cat called Nala heads for Stevenage station and perches on a ticket gate morning and evening as "she knows what time the commuters will be there". Station manager Shaun Smith commented: "She's breaking down barriers by making people smile and starting cheerful conversations between staff and customers, helping our team and our tenants at the station feel part of the local community."

## CONSULTATIONS

- Transport for Wales: [New Stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction](#). Closes 14 January.

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.

### November

- Saturday 18. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Monday 20. Bedford Commuters Association AGM, RAFA Club, 93 Ashburnham Road, **Bedford** MK40 1EA, 1930.
- Thursday 23. Rf Honorary President Christian Wolmar, St. Barnabas Church, St Barnabas Street, Jericho, Oxford, OX2 6BG, 1830.
- Saturday 25. Rf Yorkshire and North West, Square Chapel Arts Centre, **Halifax**, HX1 1QG, 1430.

### December

- Saturday 2. Rf East Anglia, Signal Box Community Centre, 82 Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB (TBC), 1400.
- Tuesday 5. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group: Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930.
- Thursday 7, Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800. (And on the first Thursday of every month).
- Monday 11. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930.
- Tuesday 12 **TBC**. Rf East Midlands, Canal House, 48-52 Canal Street, **Nottingham** NG1 7EH, 1200.
- Tuesday 12. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).

### Further Ahead

- 8 January. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second Monday of alternate months).

- 10 January. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900.
- 11 January. Rf London & South East , Sussex & Coastway division, John Harvey Tavern, Bear Yard, off Cliffe High Street, **Lewes**, East Sussex, BN7 2AN (**TBC**), 1800.
- 17 January. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, Farringdon, **London** EC1M 6EL. 1900.

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