



January 2024

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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It has not been a Happy New Year for Network Rail (NR) or the train operating companies, with many lines across the country closed due to flooding. While we should mitigate the more frequent extremes of rain, wind and temperature as best we can, eg by modal shift of freight from road to rail, the bottom line is that the network has to be made more resilient.

Roger Smith

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

### Lakes Line Rail User Group

“High Speed Gone!” was the headline on November’s ‘Modern Railways’, which was not alone in lamenting the sudden decision to abandon the northern section of HS2. The money ‘saved’ is to be spent on other projects, by no means all of them railway ones nor all in the North. The only local project is the Kendal Northern relief road; no mention of the well-researched plan for a dynamic passing loop on the Lakes Line to increase its capacity. So LLRUG and fellow organisations such as the CRP and local councils will just have to keep on campaigning.

The Lakes Day Ranger ticket is the ideal introduction to the southern Lake District for the newcomer, and a refresher if you already know the area. It offers train travel from neighbouring stations, unlimited travel on Stagecoach buses in Cumbria, and a half lake cruise with Windermere Lake Cruises. It’s available at staffed stations, on the buses or from Windermere Lake Cruises.

LLRUG will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with tea and birthday cake at the Stonecross Manor Hotel on Milnthorpe Road, Kendal at 3pm on 29 February.

### Chesham & District Transport Users’ Group

As part of TfL’s Four Lines Modernisation (4LM) Programme, new signalling on the District Line to Upminster was completed in March 2023; work on the four Metropolitan & Jubilee Line tracks between Finchley Road and Wembley Park, with connections to the depot at Neasden should end late 2024, and there will be closures for testing on dates to be fixed. The more reliable signalling will also allow higher speeds and more trains, up from 22 to 28 per hour on that section. The Metropolitan Line to Moor Park should be completed in 2025, followed by its northern reaches, and finally the Uxbridge branch.

## 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](#).*



### **RUG Awards 2024 - call for nominations expires Easter Saturday, 30 March (NB the earlier date!)**

The 2024 RUG Awards (and for organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships) will again be presented after the national AGM, to be held this year in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July.

Be in it to win it by submitting your nominations by Easter Saturday. Details of how to enter are on Rf's [website](#). There are six awards open for nominations, four of which have been named in honour of past members and their dedication to the cause of rail development campaigning:

- The Adrian Shooter award for best website
- The Clara Zilahi award for best campaigner
- The Oliver Lovell award for best new group
- The Paul Abell award for best newsletter
- Awards for best social media and best campaign.

The Judges' Special Award is made at the sole discretion of the panel of Rf Vice-Presidents who will judge the nominations - in some cases after paying the sponsor a visit!

Following the AGM business in the morning, and the presentation of the awards in the afternoon, the winners of the six Gold Awards and the Judges' Special Award will be invited to tell their stories - with any tears of pain as well as of joy.

## NEWS

Regulated train fares in England will rise by 4.9% from 3 March 2024. Rf Director Neil Middleton said: "It has to be a very lukewarm welcome to the announcement. Yes, that's a lot less than they could have been (the July 2023 RPI rate of 9%), but it's still 1% more than this month's CPI of 3.9%. In addition to simply increasing prices because of inflation, the Government could have looked after passengers by actually committing to fares reform – the current maze of rail fares is seriously off-putting to intending passengers, and thus a brake on rail revenue."

The Government's rail freight growth target is "nothing to celebrate" said Rf Freight Director Owen O'Neill. "75% over 26 years is only 2.2% per year. Over the last 40 years, even with the recent turmoil, GDP growth has averaged 2.0% per year. The main corridor for moving passengers from London to Crewe is also [that] for freight. Dumping HS2 trains onto the existing network will add more traffic to an existing set of bottlenecks, with a strong risk that freight will get squeezed out around the edges. This will result in even less freight capacity than today on our critical route for moving intermodal traffic, let alone having capacity for even this lacklustre growth target."

## RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

A trip to York by TransPennine Express (TPE) is now possible from every Colne Valley station. Manchester Piccadilly is the other terminus, giving Wakefield direct trains across the Pennines for the first time in many years. However, the frequency of this service needs to be raised to at least hourly, as it replaces Northern's Huddersfield - Castleford shuttle. A new platform at Castleford allows the York trains to call from either direction and, potentially, for additional trains serving the "Five Towns" area around Wakefield.

A new passing loop between Bamford and Hathersage that completes 2.5mils of new track on the Hope Valley line will become operational when signalling work ends, while a second platform at Dore & Totley station removes a notorious bottleneck. A more robust timetable could include a third fast train per hour between Manchester and Sheffield that could be provided without the need for an additional path through Piccadilly station by diverting some TPE Edinburgh/Glasgow – Manchester Airport trains. It would also open up new journey opportunities along the strategic corridor from Cumbria and Lancashire to Sheffield.

A £48m levelling-up grant will allow the service frequency on the Penistone Line to be doubled to half-hourly, and line speeds increased to reduce journey times, transforming a route that has been pared to the bone since 1989. Praise is due to MPs Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) and Miriam Coates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) for co-sponsoring Kirklees Council's bid, and garnering support across the political spectrum along the line. And the funding approval to reopen the Stocksbridge line must also embrace the Deepcar - Penistone gap on the old Woodhead route to capitalise on the population and potential of the long-neglected upper Don Valley.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is proud of all that the movement achieved in 2023, a busy but challenging year of events, activities, reports, and meetings with decision makers and partners that shone a light on the role community rail plays in empowering communities and enabling inclusive, sustainable travel. It will continue to champion its members' work, and ensure that their voice is heard.

## TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF needs to know from the public where it can have the greatest impact. [Latest research](#) showed that toilets came in for criticism, both on trains and at the majority of stations; many passengers said they would rather 'hold it' than use such facilities. While they are unlikely ever to attract passengers to the railway, well presented and clean smelling toilets create a good impression that counteracts the expectation of poor-quality facilities.

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

Richard Hines, will succeed Ian Prosser CBE as HM Chief Inspector of Railways as well as Head of HM Railway Inspectorate, an integral part of ORR since 2006. He currently leads the team of non-mainline health and safety inspectors, and oversees its Channel Tunnel responsibilities.

ORR has written to seven third-party ticket retailers, highlighting its concerns with 'drip pricing' - when fees additional to the initial price are revealed later in the sales process - and asking for details on how they will address the findings.

West Coast Railways (WCR) has lost a High Court appeal over ORR's demand for central locking to be fitted to the carriage doors on the Jacobite, which operates on the West Highland Line from Fort William to Mallaig. They claimed that implementing the new measures could cost £7m. ORR said it did not wish to see heritage train operators go out of business, but it wanted to ensure they meet minimum safety standards.

A £5m project is underway to upgrade the retail provision at Glasgow Central station. However, the work will also see the end of payphones at the station, with the removal of the telephone booths on the concourse. *[But payphones are an essential amenity for those without a mobile phone or whose phone has died. They should be retained and accept cards with a credit limit like 'pay at the pump' at petrol stations – Ed.]*

FirstGroup has made an [initial application](#) to the ORR for a new open access rail service to Sheffield from London King's Cross. Two return journeys a day would call at Retford, Worksop, and Woodhouse. It would be the first regular service to Sheffield via the ECML since 1968, while Worksop would have direct London trains for the first time in decades.

A [planning application](#) has been submitted for 39 flats on a disused plot adjacent to Corby Station. Corby rail user and campaigner David Fursdon said: "We need more car parking spaces to support the rise in passenger numbers; this year it has become a real issue and needs a solution fast. Secondly, many rail users say they support a northbound rail service, and I hope the surge in people using the station [402,244 in 2022/23, a quarter more than in the year leading up to the pandemic] will back up their request and be heard. Finally, the station opening hours have been on a part-time arrangement since it reopened in 2009. It's time to review the staffing level and offer a more sociable longer opening. It will help grow usage even further."

England's Economic Heartland and the East West Main Line Partnership welcomed NAO's conclusion that improved communication and joint working between central government and local bodies are needed to achieve the project's long-term goals: unlocking locations for sustainable growth while ensuring communities and businesses that contribute so much to the UK economy continue to flourish. The message from global companies thinking of investing in the region is simple: "EWR just makes sense, get it built." If an appraisal process cannot adequately capture the benefits of a project that links three of the UK's most dynamic and fast growing cities in a region world-renowned for expertise in science and technology, and where there is already significant housing growth but poor east-west connectivity is limiting its economic potential – then perhaps it is the process rather than the project that the NAO should be investigating.

Universal Studios has acquired 480 acres of the former brickworks at Stewartby in Bedfordshire, and is "exploring the feasibility" of building a [theme park and resort](#). Over half the UK population lives within two hours of the site, which was chosen for its connectivity: within reach of London, close to Luton Airport, and on either side of Kempston Hardwick station, a 10min journey from Bedford Midland on the Marston Vale Line, which will eventually form part of East West Rail. The new Wixams station on the Thameslink Line to Bedford would be on the other side of the site.

London Liverpool Street has replaced Waterloo as the most used railway station in Great Britain. The opening of the Elizabeth line was a principal contributing factor in the almost 80.4 million entries and exits between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, up around 50 million. Outside of London, Birmingham New Street was the most used station with 30.7 million entries and exits.

Streatham station now has step-free access, with Shortlands near Bromley to follow.

The Cornwall CC cabinet has agreed to provisionally accept the offer of £50m Levelling Up Funding towards a £56.8m [Mid Cornwall Metro](#). An hourly coast-to-coast service linking Newquay, Par, St Austell, Truro, Penryn and Falmouth will transform transport across the county.

### ***...and finally***

A charity photoshoot at NR's Holgate Engineering Works in York raised £3,000 in support of the Martin House Children's Hospice. At the end of the Rail Head Treatment season, volunteers from across the rail industry spruced up five Class 37 diesel locomotives that were then lit so that some 70 photographers, each of whom made a donation to attend the event, could capture atmospheric images under the moonlight.

## CONSULTATIONS

- Bristol City Council: [Draft Local Plan to 2040](#), Closes 26 January
- Urban Transport Group: [Rail & Urban Transport Review](#), 26 January
- York City Council: [Big Transport Conversation for its new Local Transport Plan](#), Closes 4 February
- Peninsula Transport: [Draft Transport Strategy - Strategic Transport Priorities to 2050](#) Closes 5 February
- Lewes District Council: [Local Plan, Spatial Strategy and Policy Directions](#). Closes 8 February
- East Sussex County Council: [Local Transport Plan 4 \(2024-2050\)](#). Closes 25 February

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.

### January

■ Wednesday.17. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, EC1M 6EL, 1900.

### February

■ Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.

■ Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Eastern division. **Online**, 1900 (Also the first Thursday of every month).

■ Tuesday 13. STORM Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400. (Also the second Tuesday of every month).

■ Tuesday 13. Rf Yorkshire Webinar: Prospects For The Railway To 2030, **Online**, 1900. (Also an AGM on Saturday 27 April in Leeds, TBC)

■ Tuesday 13. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, 1930 (Also 14 March).

■ Tuesday 13. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 2 April).

■ Saturday 17. Rf London & South East regional branch, Kent division, 1400.

■ Saturday 24. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St. John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ. 1400.

■ Tuesday 27. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830.

### Further Ahead

■ 11 March. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (And on the second Monday of alternate months).

■ 20 March. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan at **Barton** interchange, 1800.

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

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