



August 2024

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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A National Audit Office (NAO) [update](#) (Paras 4.19-4.21) found that HS2 trains travelling to Manchester on existing tracks could reduce capacity north of Birmingham by 17%, so the Government may need to manage demand by “incentivising people to travel at different times or not to travel by rail...Improving or adding infrastructure may be expensive and disruptive”. You could not make it up!

Roger Smith

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

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

SENRUG is disappointed that the target date for the first phase of the Northumberland Line from Ashington to Newcastle to open is now December, although the project team hopes to get ahead of this. With confirmation of an earlier start, people could plan to visit Christmas markets. When the line does finally open, it will mark the culmination of almost 20 years campaigning by SENRUG.

Furness Line Action Group

On 22 March, the 0518 Preston to Barrow encountered a void beneath the track as it approached Grange-over-Sands. The front 3-car unit derailed and struck the embankment retaining wall, but remained upright. The rear unit stayed on the rails. The four staff and four passengers were safely evacuated. Recovery of the train and repair of the embankment and track took 8,112 manhours. 195104 was re-railed on 26 March, and on 2 April 195113 towed both the stranded units to Ulverston yard. Normal services resumed on 22 April.

During the closure, an “all-stations” bus service ran between Barrow and Lancaster, but was inconsistent. Only some of the buses called at Kents Bank, and coach drivers were stopping at three different places in Carnforth. FLAG asked why shuttle services could not have run between Barrow and Grange, and Lancaster and Arnside, but there were various reasons. The crossover to enable trains from Barrow to reverse at Grange was too close to the worksite, and rail delivery trains needed to reach this from either direction. The opportunity was also taken to remove the 20mph speed restriction at the Barrow end of Dalton Tunnel, and to repair a culvert at Silverdale.

Single line working to Arnside would break the turnaround at Lancaster, while the extra stock/staff required and complexity of running extra services at either end would put at risk the reliability of Barrow – Carlisle, and Manchester Airport - Windermere services.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

*In a joint RUG and CRP survey, a team of 26 volunteers counted just over 2,000 passengers on each of two days, more than last year, and recorded over 1,000 interviews. A full report will be shared with Northern, local councils, and businesses that are part of the CRP.

Avanti has yet to restore some Glasgow - Birmingham services, depleting Oxenholme connections to destinations other than London. TPE has restored all but the 1900-ish departures between Manchester Airport and Glasgow, as well as full extensions of the three Liverpool trains plus the early morning starter from Oxenholme (0628) and evening terminator (2130) that departs for Preston sidings at 2152 with no passengers – or fare revenue!

Once any teething troubles have been sorted, new trains should be more reliable than their predecessors. But according to “Modern Railways”, Class 195 diesels average 4,850 miles between ‘technical incident’, less than the 6,600 miles or so with Northern’s Class 156s that they replaced. A technical fault on survey Saturday meant one return trip was lost and another delayed, and a week later ‘a problem with the train’ cost three return services from Oxenholme, and the 1029 to the Airport. It doesn’t encourage use of the line.

Supported by Community Rail Cumbria and LLRUG, Northern produces an excellent 120-page Guide to Train Services, Coast, Lakes, Dales & Fells, including Stagecoach bus services for the Central Lakes area. But it is very scarce: any copies that LLRUG has to offer are snapped up, and they are equally welcomed by businesses such as hotels, newsagents and cafes.

**Railfuture’s guidance document on how to conduct passenger counts can be found [here](#).*

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Passenger numbers on the Saturday Yorkshire Dales Explorer from Rochdale to Ribbleshead continue to build. The morning train has never had fewer than 70 travelling north of Clitheroe, with over 80 on 27 July, 113 on 3 August, and more joining at Hellifield and Settle.

Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, aims to expand its Bee Network into a London-style transport system, with fully contactless tap-in and tap-out payments by next March, and an underground network by 2050. With new stations at Cheadle and Golborne, many Overground lines will be taken over by 2028: Rochdale, Wigan via Bolton, Atherton and Golborne; Manchester Airport; Alderley Edge; Buxton via Stockport; Glossop and Hadfield; Rose Hill and Marple via Guide Bridge, and Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge. However, a retired industry insider claims that an Oldham - Rochdale – Heywood - Bury tram-train would need to "cross over" onto the Calder Valley line, which would impact its services.

Lumo plans to use new 125mph battery-electric trains on its Rochdale – London Euston service via Manchester Victoria, Eccles, Newton-le-Willows and Warrington Bank Quay starting in 2027. Five services daily would depart Rochdale at 0803, 1102, 1403, 1604 and 1805, with a sixth starting and terminating at Manchester Victoria.

Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group

A traveller meant to go from North Camp (between Reading and Guildford) to Attleborough in Norfolk via Reading and Paddington, but the clerk in the North Camp ticket office told her there was disruption on that route, and advised instead to go in the opposite direction to Gatwick Airport, then direct to Cambridge and on to Attleborough. This worked well apart from a missed connection at Cambridge. So a knowledgeable member of staff in a ticket office was able to help her avoid the disruption in her planned route.

For her return, the NR journey planner offered changes at Cambridge, Farringdon, Paddington (via the Underground, not the Elizabeth Line) and Reading. But by staying on the Cambridge train to Gatwick Airport, she was able to arrive at North Camp only two minutes later than if she had changed twice in London and also at Reading. Don't just go online for the best travel options!

If approved, LNER's proposed new timetable from 2025 would cut Norwich and Thetford journeys to Edinburgh and principal intermediate stations by up to 30 minutes. Cambridge passengers would enjoy better links with Leeds, but journeys to York and beyond would be slower or involve two changes. March would experience both losses and gains, with about 8 trains/day from Kings Cross in 80 minutes.

British Regional Transport Association

To de-clutter our roads, joined-up thinking regarding local rail solutions and re-railing should herald timely action. However, the demand for feasibility studies costing upwards of £100,000 to get started and then for excruciating business cases deters lay people and campaigners. And unless someone somewhere comes up with the money in a time of austerity, the projects never happen. The Government treats the capital expenditure needed on a purely commercial basis, not as a public, environmental and general leadership matter. To renationalise or not is academic when 'this is what we will do...' should be at the fore.

The half-mile long Wortley Curve that connects Bradford and Wakefield bypassing Leeds City station closed in 1985. When BRTA learned that the land was up for auction, it wrote to the PM, the Mayor of West Yorkshire, leaders of Bradford and Leeds councils and local MP Rachael Reeves. All bar the PM replied positively. Subsequently, NR confirmed to BRTA that it was the buyer: "Plans for the future usage of the site continue to be discussed internally and with stakeholders."

Tunbridge Wells & District Rail Travellers' Association

TW now benefits from better spacing of services in the morning peak, three more between 0900 and 1030, and some longer trains. The return of the TW starters on Saturdays is also welcome, but why only between 0919 and 1219 rather than all day? Later this year, Class 377 trains may replace the ageing Class 465/6 Networkers on the TW line.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

BTPG continues to campaign to reinstate through IET services every hour. One glimmer of hope is that GWR looks to be taking on 27 Class 175 trains that could replace the displaced IETs. If possible, rather than cancel a nine or ten-car IET service, it substitutes a Turbo or a five-car IET, but this does lead to overcrowding. A new GWR Executive team member has been tasked with getting Hitachi (who maintain the IET fleet) to deliver the right number of trains every day.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

For years, breakdowns on the Exeter - Exmouth Line have led to overcrowded two-carriage trains. On Saturday 11 May, short-formed trains and signalling problems combined with high demand due to a fine day for the beach, Exeter Pride and rugby at Sandy Park overwhelmed both the trains and the 57 bus. GWR information screens showed all sorts of random information including the old chestnut of southbound trains cancelled but the returning service 'on time'.

Passenger information during disruption (PIDD) hasn't improved since the industry published a code of practice in 2014. Avocet Line control is in Swindon, and during problems PIDD isn't its highest priority. ALRUG will press GWR to remedy this. And incorrect information on trains regarding stopping patterns leaves passengers at best irritated and at worst panicking, as they think they're on the wrong train. It is a national problem, but one that ALRUG has been told no one is trying to solve! Unbelievable!

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members and groups to add weight to its campaigns. Join [here](#) by selecting the appropriate category from the "Membership Types" menu. Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).



For the [RUG Awards 2024](#) there were seven nominations in four categories from five groups across four of Rf's 14 branches in Britain. Rf VP Paul McLennan MSP made the following presentations:

- The Adrian Shooter award for best website:
 - Gold Award: Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group
 - Commendations: South East Northumberland RUG and Stourbridge Line User Group
- The Clara Zilahi award for best campaigner:
 - Gold Award: Simon Walton, ex-Chair, Campaign for Borders Rail
- The Paul Abell award for best newsletter:
 - Gold Award: South East Northumberland RUG
 - Silver Award: Stourbridge Line User Group
- Best Campaign:
 - Gold Award: Campaign for North East Rail, Scotland.

The Judges' Special Award went to the Levenmouth Rail Campaign, to celebrate the re-opening of the line.

The Rf Member of the Year Award for 2023 was made to Ann Hindley, who has served on the Passenger Group. She campaigns for services and facilities around Doncaster, highlighting the difficulties for people if parking ticket machines do not take cash, or they lack a smartphone. Ann has also taken her concerns regarding women travelling alone to the highest possible level. Congratulations to all the winners.

NEWS

In voting for change, people expect to see a rapid improvement in rail. The King's Speech included legislation to create Great British Railways (GBR). DfT should let the Shadow GBR get on and do its job, and focus on delivery, not process. Chris Page and Neil Middleton have [set out](#) what the new Transport Secretary and Rail Minister need to achieve during their first 100 days, and the GBR CEO designate by the end of 2024.

Rf Policy Director Ian Brown has [reviewed](#) the King's Speech and statements to Parliament. The High Speed (Crewe to Manchester) Bill should enable a high-speed Liverpool to Manchester route via Manchester Airport, but how to cross the city is still under discussion. Announcements are expected on filling the gap between Handsacre and Crewe, and on the HS2 station at Euston.

However, Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, has closed the Restoring Your Railway (RYR) fund. Rf Vice-Chair Neil Middleton commented: "This is very disappointing news. Bringing back a rail station promotes social mobility and tackles regional inequality. We hope to hear that many RYR bids will still happen, albeit with new funding arrangements."

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

In a [statement](#) that placed buses and rail front and centre, Transport Secretary Louise Haigh promised to 'move fast and fix things'. Setting a target for modal shift from cars and planes to greener modes would be a great place to start. Then make rail fares simpler and more affordable. Reverse the cut in domestic Air Passenger Duty, and tax domestic aviation fuel. Flying within mainland Britain should be taxed in a way that reflects its impact on the climate, and people should be helped to choose rail instead.

After nearly 30-years, Royal Mail is retiring its Class 325 electric trains, but will not replace them. Instead, it will use a mix of commercial train services, its extensive road network, and limited air transit. However, the super hub at the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) will continue to operate. CBT is [campaigning](#) for Royal Mail Chairman Keith Williams to work with the Government to increase the amount of mail delivered by train, and send a bold message that freight belongs on rail.

CBT is to campaign for the Government to create an International Rail Strategy, and invest in improving international rail infrastructure and affordability.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN was encouraged to see public transport feature so prominently in the King's Speech. The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill reflects the vital role transport plays in creating a more equitable, greener future, and tackling the climate crisis. CRN will work closely with the new administration to ensure the voice of community rail is heard.

[The Railway Children Charity's](#) 'safeguarding on transport' course gives those working within rail an understanding of the issues affecting our transport network, as well as the tools and confidence to identify vulnerability and take appropriate action.

For a sixth year, Northern's year-in-industry students have undertaken a community project along the Bentham Line. This year's topic was biodiversity. Together with Brian Howarth from the Leeds-Morecambe CRP, they established insect habitats and pollinator patches to enhance wildlife at three primary schools and stations. They also developed lesson plans on caring for the environment in the local community.

Scenic Rail Britain will deliver this year's Days Out by Rail tourism and leisure campaign from 14 October to 3 November. CRN members can promote the use of their rail lines and station for greener days out, short breaks and longer stays.

At CRN's AGM to be held online on 5 November, there will be a vote on a proposal to pursue charitable status.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

The transport industry needs to focus on what people really want and get the basics right. For rail, this is a punctual and reliable railway that delivers on the timetable at an acceptable price. In the most deprived areas almost one in three transactions are still made with cash, highlighting the need to ensure the railway is accessible to all. So in developing its retail strategy, GBR should:

- Maintain cash as a payment option at stations where it is already
- At stations that only accept card payments, allow shops such as supermarkets, newsagents and post offices to sell rail tickets
- Simplify fares to encourage buying online or using Pay As You Go.

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

The Transport Secretary has voiced "serious concerns" about rail operator CrossCountry, and threatened to act if things do not improve. In July, the operator announced a slimmed-down timetable running from 10 August to 9 November. It said it was needed to address a backlog of driver training, fuelled by recent industrial action. Ms Haigh said this was not satisfactory: "Put simply, the only reason I accepted your proposal was to give passengers more certainty on which services will run."

ORR's [Annual Assessment of NR 2023-24](#) found that its regional improvement plans have largely stabilised performance barring the effects of a severe autumn and winter. However, the performance of Wales & Western was found to be in breach of its network licence. NR must produce a robust plan to remedy this by 31 August 2024, or face a £3m fine.

The building and canopies on Platform One at Troon station that were destroyed in a July 2021 fire have been rebuilt with a ticket office, toilets and waiting area, as well as a Changing Places facility. These have additional equipment for the disabled such as hoists, adult sized changing benches and space for carers.

As part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU), the Grade I Huddersfield station is being transformed, with new and longer platforms to increase its capacity, but the trainshed roof across the platforms and tracks, one of the few remaining examples of 'Euston Roof', is being preserved.

Applications are now being accepted for grants of £1000 - £5000 from the TRU community fund; those for medium grants (£5000 - £20,000) open on 19 August. They are available to community groups, schools and charities within 5 miles of the core TRU route and its key diversionary routes. Follow this [link](#) to find more details and apply for a grant.

From December, journeys to Manchester and Holyhead from Cardiff will be faster as NR has removed 38 of the 40 speed restrictions from the Marches line between Newport and Shrewsbury.

NR is renewing over a mile of track between Woodbridge and Westerfield junction to improve passenger journeys and prepare the East Suffolk line for more freight traffic including, in the future, trains serving the Sizewell C construction project.

Former NR and shadow GBR Chairman Lord Hendy, the new Minister of State for Rail, is to discuss with NR the long overdue revamp of Ely junction. The improvements were announced last October, but funding and timescales remain uncertain. The DfT said transport ministers recognised "the benefits the scheme could bring" both for freight and passenger services in East Anglia.

A North Northamptonshire [Government Towns Fund](#) project will provide a safer route for pedestrians and cyclists between Corby town centre and the train station.

EMR does not seem to have enough spare Class 360 units. During the refurbishment programme reported in June, 4-car services rather than the normal 8 are jammed with people and luggage.

The [Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster Board](#) says that the region could benefit the UK by as much as £50bn per year by 2030, but "It is first essential to join Oxford, Cambridge...with East West Rail (EWR), as that is the only way to create the critical mass necessary for the region and the UK to compete globally". The reopened and electrified Corby line is a strong case study in the power of rail infrastructure investment to transform local economies and help regenerate towns and cities.

Think tank UKDayOne proposes a [Tempsford New Town](#) with homes for up to 350,000 people at the intersection of ECML and EWR. With improvements to the ECML and completion of the EWR, it could be the best-connected greenfield site in Britain. A city of that size would generate enough to 'fix' the Welwyn bottleneck with a second viaduct. A hybrid bill in Parliament would bypass the convoluted process for gaining a Development Consent Order.

The statutory consultation on EWR planned for late June was paused for the General Election. The company is now working with the new Ministers on the next steps for the project.

A £62.6m two-platform station at Wixams on the Midland Main Line south of Bedford could open in late 2026, but would not be big enough if Universal Studios proceed with a nearby theme park. The Chief Executives and political leaders of six local councils have "collectively endorsed" the plans, and Lisa Nandy, the new Culture Secretary said that her officials were working closely with NBCUniversal to...facilitate the deliverability of the project.

GTR is installing over 6,000 solar panels on its depots in Bedford, London and Sussex. The Science Based Targets initiative has validated GTR's aim to decarbonise and reach net-zero by 2050.

On Sunday 25 August, a Class 180 train and NR's New Measurement Train (the Flying Banana) will test the European Train Control System (ETCS) at high speed between Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin prior to trains using digital signalling on this route from late 2025. LNER, Lumo, Grand Central and GTR will run rail replacement coaches. However, two Hull Trains services in each direction will run via Chesterfield into and out of London St Pancras.

The Elizabeth Line is one of six nominees for the 2024 Riba Stirling prize for architecture, awarded to the architect of a building judged the most significant, based on a range of criteria including design vision, innovation and originality. For this year's award, projects must have been brought into use between October 2020 and December 2022.

Situated between Ramsgate and Minster, Thanet Parkway, the first new station in Kent for almost a decade, is now a year old. High-speed services run to London St Pancras International in a little over an hour, while main line services run to Charing Cross. Footfall has increased from just over 6,000 per month to an average of 8,500.

Dorset Council and Western Gateway STB are funding a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) to investigate the feasibility of an hourly all stations Wareham – Brockenhurst service, infrastructure changes around Bournemouth, and a more even Waterloo - Weymouth service. Back in 2010, Dorset LEP, and the BCP and Dorset Councils mooted the idea of a Dorset Metro by 2040, with Boscombe station reopened and a new Talbot Heath station, while a 2021 NR Connectivity Strategic Study mooted new connections to Bournemouth Airport, Ferndown and Ringwood.

Over the next five years, NR Wales and Western region plans to grow freight capacity by 7%. At a site in West Drayton, it has revived an old rail siding on a freight yard adjacent to the Ashville Group's aggregate base. The new track layout will enable trains to complete a 'run round' on site.

...and finally

Ozzy, the star of the 2022 Commonwealth Games celebrated his first anniversary at Birmingham New Street station on 26 July. He was unveiled by cast members of the Games opening ceremony, and the wife and sister of Black Sabbath lead singer Ozzy Osbourne, after whom the bull was named following a public vote. NR and the West Midlands Combined Authority worked with Artem Special Effects, Ozzy's creators, and the Games organisers to keep him in Birmingham.

CONSULTATIONS

- Medway Council: [draft Local Plan 2041](#), closes 8 September.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: [National Planning Policy Framework](#), closes 24 September.
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority: [West Yorkshire Mass Transit Phase One](#), closes 30 September.
- Kent County Council: [Striking the Balance - draft Local Transport Plan 5](#), closes 8 October.

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.

August

- Saturday 17. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400.

September

- Thursday 5. Rf North West, **Blackpool**, venue tbc, 1300 (Also 16 November).
- Thursday 5. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Saturday 7. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, Kings Cross Station, **London** (Also 9 October, Online).
- Monday 9. Ribble Valley Rail, The New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1900 (Also the second Monday of alternate months).
- Wednesday 11. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900 (Also the second Wednesday of alternate months).
- Tuesday 17. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP. 19.30 (Also 29 October).
- Thursday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900.
- Thursday 19. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900.
- Tuesday 24. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 28. Rf East Anglia, Friends' Meeting House, 5 Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400 (Also 7 December in Cambridge).

Further Ahead

- 8 October. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Rail Lines Group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- 12 October, Joint Rf Yorkshire/East Midlands/Lincolnshire branches, Hallam University, **Sheffield**, 1300
- 2 November 2024. Fen Line Users Association AGM, the Library, 6 The Cloisters, **Ely**, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4ZH.

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

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