



March 2025

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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[Contactless payment](#) is being rolled out at more and more stations. But in the London area, it comes with three big flaws: your (more expensive) railcard discount isn't applied; at some stations, but not all, cheaper weekend fares are not available; and it is not suitable for families. So its use is not in the interest of those who would gain the most benefit. This is a nonsensical situation that MPs should address as a matter of urgency.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines

Following platform extensions at every WHL station between Helensburgh and Crianlarich, and at Bridge of Orchy, Tulloch and Roy Bridge, ScotRail plan to run longer trains from the end of March. The 1222 from Glasgow Queen Street will be seven coaches as far as Crianlarich and five to Fort William, with the 1605 from Mallaig the same pattern in reverse. A £3.5m project to refurbish Awe viaduct on the Oban branch of the WHL south of Taynuilt has also been completed.

Confirming its commitment to rail, Advance British Aluminium, the only mass producer in the UK, is leasing 20 JPA powder tank wagons from VTG Rail UK. Due to come into use by June, they will carry alumina from the port of Blyth (Northumberland) to its plant in Fort William.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

From mid-May, a second train per hour is planned for the Leven line, with services to Edinburgh alternating between the western Fife circle (Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath) and eastern (Kirkcaldy, Burntisland).

Fife Council's Cabinet Committee has approved plans for a new, fully accessible shared path network alongside the River Leven to connect the rail stations at Leven and Cameron Bridge. The River Park Routes element of the wider Levenmouth Connectivity Project will be progressed at an estimated cost of £6.118 million.

Ribble Valley Rail

As previously reported, Northern has opened negotiations with a number of suppliers for a new fleet to be delivered from 2030. Features include:

- Reliability – a target of 35,000 miles before needing reactive maintenance
- Fit for purpose – more accessible, and designed for comfort, connectivity and safety
- Flexible – compatibility across the various types of unit allowing operational familiarity for staff
- Modern – incorporating the latest ETCS digital signalling, remote condition monitoring, clean power and high quality on-board features that customers expect.

The 3-car trains for the Ribble Valley line will use hybrid power, a combination of batteries and “clean” diesel fuel (possibly biofuel).

The efforts of RVR and its partners to establish the Yorkshire Dales Explorer service last year are being recognized nationally, both as a successful service introduction, and as an example of local authorities, the rail industry and bodies including the Lancashire Rail Ramblers, Settle-Carlisle Friends and Development Co. and RVR working together to achieve the new service.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

The Transport Secretary has confirmed to ORR her [policy position](#) regarding Open Access. According to the Railway Herald, recent applications from Lumo and Virgin to run services to Rochdale would not generate enough business. The Wrexham and Shropshire service was the only proposal to satisfy the ORR.

Friends of the Barton Line

EMR services will see significant changes from December 2025. In north Lincolnshire it will:

- Replace the Grimsby - Leicester service with a 2-hourly Cleethorpes - Matlock service calling at New Clee and Grimsby Docks, to restore a direct service to Derby and improve connections at Lincoln for Newark North Gate, Grantham, Peterborough and Kings Cross
- Retime Barton Line trains to improve TPE connections at Habrough. To increase their turnaround times and aid their recovery from delays, only the first service would call at Grimsby Docks and New Clee. FBL has asked for the 1712 Cleethorpes - Barton service to call at these stations as well to accommodate the Grimsby Town supporters and New Holland commuters
- Run the last Cleethorpes - Barton service and its return slightly earlier so the last Matlock - Cleethorpes service can maintain a connection from London at Lincoln.

FBL has had second thoughts about not joining the CRN. The Barton Cleethorpes CRP has kindly offered to pay the first year's subscription.

British Regional Transport Association

BRTA envisages rail development across GB. Among the schemes that it seeks to promote are:

- Orbital rail links with parkway stations for Manchester, Birmingham and London
- Carmarthen to Bangor
- Bridgnorth - Shrewsbury
- The Great Central Railway Corridor
- Northampton to Market Harborough
- Cambridge – Haverhill – Sudbury
- Stansted Airport - Braintree
- Stratford upon Avon – Long Marston, Evesham and Worcester, and also to Cheltenham
- Guildford – Cranleigh – Horsham, and an Arundel curve to East Sussex.

Local councils, regional bodies and central Government might reasonably be expected to pick up on these opportunities and lead from the front. Instead, BRTA hopes to develop them with key bodies and individuals.

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](#).

NEWS

On 2 March most rail fares rose by 4.6%. "The only thing reliable about Britain's trains is that they'll become less affordable every year" said Bruce Williamson for Rf. "We had hoped that a new Government would mean a change of policy, but no - passengers are still being punished for going green. This policy will continue to drive passengers away from environmentally friendly rail, and make our polluted and congested roads even worse. If they can find the money to freeze fuel duty for motorists, they can afford to freeze rail fares too."

At the second annual convention of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance in Barnstaple, 24 partner and stakeholder organisations sought how to modernise the Tarka line, and then extend it to Bideford. Rf Director Roger Blake, who convened the meeting, commented: "The line is so popular that it's usually standing room only, including on weekends. We must find ways to increase capacity so that everyone can get a seat."

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

As footfall at Cambridge continues to grow, its stations will require more facilities such as toilets, something lacking from any of the East West Rail literature or displays. And an eastern exit from Cambridge would ease the passenger flow, cut door-to-door journey times and so make the railway more attractive. EWR staff got this feedback loud and clear; let's hope they act upon it.

The new ECML timetable from December greatly improves GTR's peak Cambridge – London services. Splitting the stopping service departure points between Cambridge and Letchworth is a masterstroke. After Hitchin, the Cambridge train runs fast to Welwyn North and Kings Cross, so Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth get much quicker journeys to London, while passengers for Stevenage have a wait of just four minutes at Hitchin.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

The Government is consulting on its plans to reform the railways and bring them back under public control. But what does it all mean for passengers and when can we expect to see things changing? CBT has created a [rail reform explainer](#). In its response, CBT urges measures to make rail travel more accessible, affordable and reliable, and thus encourage more people to use the train, reducing congestion and carbon emissions.

Paul Tuohy is stepping down from his role as Chief Executive of CBT to be replaced by Ben Plowden.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

In a bid to hold operators to account, over 1,700 stations in England now show the latest train cancellation and delay data, either on a digital board or via a QR code. Welcoming the initiative, TF Director Natasha Grice said that the increased transparency would help to rebuild trust in the railway. David Fursdon is particularly annoyed by EMR terminating London – Corby trains at Kettering, so both its passengers and those waiting for the return service at Corby have a half-hour wait for the next Connect service.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN is working with Community Rail Lancashire, CRPs in Gloucestershire & Oxfordshire, and the RNIB on a Motability Foundation project to improve the disability training of rail staff. 'On track for inclusive train travel: a model for engaging disabled people with rail workforce culture change' will help staff communicate with and assist them more effectively, to make rail travel more accessible and inclusive.

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

As part of Railway 200, an exhibition train named [Inspiration](#) will visit 60 locations spread across every GB region over 12 months, starting on 27 June at the Severn Valley Railway. It will have a 'Railway Firsts' coach, a 'Wonderlab on Wheels' with a range of interactive exhibits, and 'Your Railway Future', to showcase the many career paths in rail, while a 'Partner Zone' will offer free, flexible exhibition space.

Also for Railway 200, a new teacher and parent [toolkit](#) aims to inspire young people to consider a career in the railway. Serving Key Stages 1-4 and post-16 age groups, over 30 different learning resources cover history, maths, science, design, technology, environment and safety with games and puzzles, printable worksheets, lesson plans, short films, and career profiles. Previously, this range of educational content would have entailed a visit to over 20 websites.

And a Government contribution of £15m to the National Railway Museum's masterplan and Central Hall project will help preserve its collections, increase visitor numbers, and expand the estate, encouraging the next generation to engage with the railways' past, present and future.

In February ORR said that it was not satisfied that NR is doing all that it should to meet its own standards of recording and monitoring assets such as tracks, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, signalling, embankments, and vegetation management. The letter set out the necessary steps, and notes that NR is taking the matter seriously.

England's Economic Heartland's [submission](#) to the Government Spending Review sets out transport improvements in the 'Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor'. Enhanced connectivity is key to realising its economic growth potential; to unlock a more integrated transport system for both people and goods, existing investment must have the maximum impact.

A man has been jailed for 8 months for trespassing on the South West Main Line, plus a further 10 months for driving offences. Pursued by police, he ran across four live tracks, forcing one train to make an emergency stop, and causing the power to be switched off. As Waterloo station became overcrowded, suburban services had to be terminated at Clapham Junction. In total, 921 services were impacted, with 358 cancelled completely and 81 more in part; the 13,178 minutes of delays cost £1.2m.

Work has begun on Okehampton Interchange, a new station close to the A30. It will build on the success of the Dartmoor Line, which had over 250,000 passengers in the 12 months after it reopened in 2021, exceeding all expectations – *as usual (Ed.)*

By next March, Siemens Mobility will have fitted ETCS to the first nine of DB Cargo's Class 66 locomotives. Eventually, the whole fleet will have it as digital signalling is rolled out across the UK.

...and finally

A train-loving lad from Walsall had a birthday treat at the Birmingham Rail Operating Centre, the signalling hub for the West Midlands. [Zachary Smith](#), who suffers from autism and cystic fibrosis, had the time of his life learning how NR signals trains through one of the country's busiest sections of railway. After a go in a signalling simulator, a birthday announcement welcomed him to Birmingham New Street station for a behind the scenes tour.

At 1930 on 28 March at Gretton Village Hall, John Hillier will recount the history and local impact of the Welland Viaduct at Harringworth north of Corby.

CONSULTATIONS

- Medway Council: [Hoo Peninsula Community Infrastructure Framework](#), closes 18 March
- DfT: [Rail Sector Transformation Programme](#), closes 15 April.

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.

March

- Saturday 15. Rf Lincolnshire AGM, St. Mary le Wigford Church Hall, **Lincoln**, LN5 7EQ, 1230.
- Saturday 15. Ribble Valley Rail AGM, Trinity Church Hall, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, 1400.
- Wednesday 19. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton** interchange, 1800
(Also 15 May at the No1 Inn, Cleethorpes at 1900, and AGM at the White Swan on 16 July).
- Thursday 20. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway division, **Online**, 1800
(Also 1 May in person).
- Thursday 20. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 15 May).
- Tuesday 25. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS (TBC) and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 29. Rf Yorkshire, Quaker Meeting House, Friargate, **York**, YO1 9RL, 1300
(Also 10 May in Leeds (AGM)).

April

- Tuesday 1. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Chesham Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 13 May).
- Friday 4. Friends of the West Highland Lines AGM, Commodore Inn, 112-117 West Clyde Street, **Helensburgh**, G84 8ES.
- Tuesday 8. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400.
- Wednesday 9. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Online**, (Also 17 May in St Albans).
- Saturday 12. Rf London & South East AGM, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, **London**, EC1Y 1AU, 1100.
- Saturday 12. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station 1400.

Further Ahead

- 10 May. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, **Lowestoft**.
- 12 May. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900
- 14 May. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.
- 15 May. Rf East Anglia (joint conference), **Peterborough** Museum, (Also 21 June in Ipswich).
- 4 July. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Norseman Hotel, **Wick**, 1200.
- 5 July. Rf AGM, **Newcastle**.

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

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