



June 2025

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Out with the old, the longest direct rail service in the UK, in with the new: on-board wi-fi in the Scottish Highlands, and nationalisation in the South, However, for the most part given the state of the UK economy, it will be a case of making the best of what we already have.

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the Far North Line

The 2008 Strategic Transport Projects Review featured suggestions in the 2006 Highland Rail Room for Growth study and promises were made, but 19 years later very little has been done. The track is being maintained, but there is no new infrastructure. Railway services remain in a time warp, with no sign of replacement for the Class 158 rolling stock.

John Erskine, an avid rail supporter who works in the office of Rhoda Grant MSP commented: "We cannot build a reliable and modern Highland Rail Service on outdated infrastructure that was never designed for today's needs. The Delmore Loop would address one of the most serious capacity issues on the network and help unlock the potential of rail across the north. Yes, it comes at a significant cost, but is an essential investment in regional transport...It's time for the Highlands to get our fair share".

ScotRail has launched a six-month trial to provide satellite-powered Wi-Fi on six of its Class 158 trains running from Inverness to Wick, Thurso, Kyle of Lochalsh, and Aberdeen. If successful, the technology could be rolled out across its remaining Class 158's to cover other rural lines including the West Highlands, Stranraer, Dumfries and the Borders. It will also help to influence the procurement of new trains.

Mid-Anglia Rail Passengers Association

MARPA will continue to lobby Greater Anglia for an improved Cambridge - Ipswich service with a later final train from Cambridge, more services stopping at Kennett, and shorter journey times to reflect the superior performance of the new train fleet.

To relieve congestion at Cambridge station, MARPA endorses the idea of East West Rail trains continuing to Cambridge North, and to Newmarket via a new station at Cambridge East with that line redoubled and electrified. It would facilitate a more frequent and faster service to Ipswich, and make the Newmarket West Curve viable to enable through trains from Ely via Soham.

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 25 May, South Western Railway was transferred into public ownership, with C2C to follow on 20 July and Greater Anglia on 12 October. SWR emailed its customers saying: "Although the legal operator is changing, your experience won't. You'll continue to see the same branding, same services, and the same teams running your trains".

However, Rf Director and Wessex Branch Chair Mike Southgate, who has worked with both SWR and its predecessor SWT, said passengers want better services not more of the same: "We recognise the financial challenges the railway faces, but there are also huge opportunities, and much more needs to happen if public rather than private ownership is to be the success we all hope for. The Government has set out its vision for the legislative framework for the new world and talked about the importance of Great British Railways (GBR). But that isn't going to happen for some time. So, we look for action before then to tackle topics like workforce terms and conditions, improving customer service, and a lot more.

"There are some marginal improvements that could be introduced quite quickly to demonstrate that change is possible, such as following other operators and reinstating the main and suburban lines off-peak services cut during the pandemic; also to finally resolve the Class 701 fiasco and restore a ten-coach service in the suburban area to reduce the overcrowding that is now commonplace. A reliable and effective railway is a key enabler to grow the economy locally and nationally, improve mobility, and to reduce carbon emissions through modal shift to rail."

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF's latest [Business Plan](#) sets out how it will champion the needs of transport users across Britain's rail, bus and road network over the next three years. As the independent statutory organisation representing transport users, TF brings together governments, transport authorities and operators to ensure that the passenger is at the heart of decision-making. Its vision is simple: a transport network designed and delivered around the needs of everyone who relies on it.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

The theme of Better Transport Week 2025 from 16-22 June is how safe, accessible, affordable, reliable, integrated and green transport can help connect communities and bring people together. The public is invited to join CBT and industry experts in The Parcel Yard at Kings Cross from 1600 on 17 June, and at its Better Transport Conference at Manchester Metropolitan University on 20 June. Both events are free.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

On 21 May and filmed for Channel 5 news, over 100 people, more than ever before, rode the 'Forget Me Not' Train organised by the Esk Valley Community Railway to mark both Dementia Awareness Week and Community Rail Week. It provides those living with dementia with music and entertainment in a safe environment. The service runs from Whitby to Middlesbrough and back at noon on the third Wednesday of every other month. The next are on 16 July and 17 September.

Railway 200 inspired CRN's fifth and biggest Community Rail Week. 140 events across the country such as leading 'try the train' trips, delivering cultural and arts projects at stations, providing opportunities through volunteering, or promoting walking and cycling routes from the railway showed how rail remains accessible, sustainable and integral to everyday life.

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

Glasgow - East Kilbride services have resumed with an impressive new station at Hairmyres. The £143m project also includes electrifying the line to reduce carbon emissions.

Mayors Steve Rotherham and Andy Burnham have called on the Government to back [plans](#) for a line between Liverpool Lime Street and Manchester Piccadilly via a new Liverpool Gateway station, Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Airport. Its construction could begin in the 2030s.

[Yorkshire's Plan for Rail](#) sets out a credible and affordable package of investment, with £2.4bn sought for the first phase to 2030, and some £14bn over the next 15 years to deliver the rest. It would give Leeds, Sheffield and York more capacity, Bradford a through station and Rotherham a mainline station, upgrade and electrify the Leeds - Sheffield line, and increase the service frequency for Scarborough, the Esk Valley, Penistone Line and Wakefield district's Five Towns.

The Midlands Rail Hub, the £1.75bn flagship project of Midlands Connect, could deliver 300 more trains/day to Birmingham by 2031, adding some 20m seats. Two new chords will give trains from the South West and Wales and from the East Midlands access to Moor Street, and thus two more trains/hour each way on the Cross Country line through New Street.

The funding to upgrade Kidsgrove station with a new transport interchange announced when HS2 was cut back will lapse in March 2027. NR wants a fully-funded restoration plan in place before the start of any work to investigate the extent of subsidence caused by coal mining – but Kidsgrove Town Deal Board, which would oversee the scheme, can't predict the final cost until the work is ongoing. Impasse.

18 stations between Birmingham Moor Street and Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare was born, have been graced with a total of 34 statues, each linked to one of his plays, with information about the play and his Warwickshire story.

East West Rail has published an [overview](#) of how its third non-statutory consultation was delivered and emerging findings. A statutory consultation planned for 2026 will refine the plans prior to a final design for the line in the application for a Development Consent Order (DCO).

The NR Academy and Capital City College in north London, offer 16 to 19-year-olds a programme that feeds into apprenticeship schemes at Level 3 such as rail engineering technician and rail infrastructure operator and provide the necessary foundation for a career in rail. NR has also launched a national recruitment drive focused on maintenance roles, with a variety of positions open to entry level candidates, from Operative and Technician right through to Team Leader.

Following the [Vision](#) for Waterloo Station and the South Bank, NR Property, Places for London and the London Borough of Lambeth will partner to regenerate the area.

...and finally

Plans to convert the 150-year old railway signal box in the centre of Uckfield into a micro-pub have a lot of support. They are the brainchild of Three Acre Brewery Ltd, four miles west of the town.

And finally, it really is the end for the UK's longest direct train service from Aberdeen to Penzance. The 775-mile link was established in 1921, but on 16 May the 0820 from Scotland was the last to run the route, arriving at its destination 13hrs 20mins later at 2140. Enthusiasts travelled from all over the country to be on it. CrossCountry said the decision to end the service was aimed at a "more efficient timetable". Aberdeen - Plymouth is now the longest direct route at 695 miles.

CONSULTATIONS

- Mayor of London: [Planning for a better London - Towards a new London Plan](#), closes 22 June

- East Sussex CC: [Draft 2025-50 Strategies for Freight and for Rail](#), closes 30 June.
- ORR: [Accessible Travel Policy](#), closes 11 July.

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.

June

- Tuesday 10. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also 12 August).
- Tuesday 10. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 5 August and 16 September).
- Friday/Saturday 13/14. European Passengers' Federation annual conference. GWR STEAM Museum, Swindon.
- Tuesday 17. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **Zoom**, 1930 (Also 17 July).
- Thursday 19. London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, **Brighton**, BN1 1YD, 1800 (Also 17 July Online).
- Saturday 21. Rf East Midlands AGM, Central Library, **Nottingham**, 1300.
- Saturday 21. Rf East Anglia, St. Mary's at Stoke, Stoke Street, **Ipswich**, 1400.
- 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).

July

- Friday 4. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Norseman Hotel, Riverside, **Wick**, 1200.
- Saturday 5. Rf AGM, Great North Museum, Barras Bridge, **Newcastle**, 1100.
- Thursday 10. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 18 September and 20 November).
- Saturday 12. British Regional Transport Association AGM, United Reformed Church, 83 Portsmouth Road, **Guildford**, GU2 4VS, 1400.
- Monday 14. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs. BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 8 September).
- Wednesday 16. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800.

Further Ahead

- 16 August. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.

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

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