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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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As we approach the 200th Anniversary of the modern railway on 27 September, it's good to see also the many celebrations of the opening of individual stations. It's a reminder of the role that railways play at the heart of many communities as well as nationally. Let us hope that this may continue for another 200 years.

Roger Smith

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

Furness Line Action Group

Last Autumn, the Rail Minister advised that the outline business case to upgrade the Cumbrian Line needed a refresh. Whitehaven and Workington MP Josh MacAlister worked with the other Cumbrian MPs, the leaders of both Councils and of Civil and Defence Nuclear (including Team Barrow) to secure £5m from the Government to bring it to Final Business Case stage in order to get a funding decision. On 2 July the MPs presented it to Rail Minister Lord Hendy; a further update meeting is planned for October.

And on 10 June, the Prime Minister announced plans to unlock 200+ acres of land at Moorside in West Cumbria to pave the way for a clean energy development. 'Pioneer Park' will seek to attract Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and 'the energy intensive industry they could power'. It is good to see such positive support for the long-overdue Cumbrian Coast line upgrade. However, West Cumbria Mining has withdrawn its planning application for a coalmine at Whitehaven.

40 years ago, on 4 September 1985, a public meeting organised by Grange Town Council and the NW branch of the Railway Development Society (now Rf) led to the formation of FLAG. However, half the Committee are now in their 80s, so it needs young blood quickly to ensure it can continue.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

The Chancellor's statement in June didn't appear to offer anything for rail in the shire counties of the North of England. There was no proposal that would ease the current problems of longer distance services feeding into Manchester from, for example, South Cumbria or Blackpool.

On Friday 27 June, LLRUG counted 2,214 passengers against 2158 in 2024, and 2,414 on the 28th against 2132 in 2024. However, on Saturday 2024, one return journey was lost due to a train problem, which must have reduced the total. The CRP also conducted 465 interviews covering 789 passengers on trains from Windermere, and 402 covering 723 people on those from Oxenholme.

The latest timetable booklet appeared two weeks after the change, and shows every scheduled train passing through Cumbria, and Stagecoach bus times for the central Lake District, with hints about places to visit. LLRUG is grateful to TravelWatch North West for part-funding the print run.

Ribble Valley Rail

RVR hails the success of the Yorkshire Dales Explorer, which replaced the defunct DalesRail. Morning and evening trains in each direction connect to S&C trains at Ribbleshead so an afternoon in Carlisle is possible. And it has opened up a multitude of possibilities for southbound travel with passengers from the Dales, Hellifield and even Carlisle, Scotland, Leeds and Bradford using the service to visit Clitheroe, Blackburn, Bolton and even Manchester. Another welcome development is the introduction on 3 May of DalesBus service 80 between Lancaster and Hawes that connects with the YDE trains at Ribbleshead.

RVR Membership Secretary and News editor Bill Briggs has counted the passengers on virtually every YDE train: 6252 in year 1, and 1000 this year to 19 July. He has witnessed a large amount of goodwill and support, and is often asked about any possibility of more trains and operating days. The Community Rail silver award that the YDE won this year was a fitting reward for everyone who put their faith in the new service.

Langho, Whalley and Clitheroe still have short platforms, so there is a timetabled delay at Ramsgrave to ensure that passengers for these stations travel in the front two carriages. RVR continues to press for completion of this work.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Northern has significantly improved its Mid Cheshire Line service with cancellations now rare. The greater reliability has seen passenger confidence return, and numbers are rising. More of its stations are being fitted with customer information screens; Plumley and Mobberley are the latest to benefit.

DfT plans to grow capital investment by 3.9%/year, with £10.2bn for rail infrastructure by 2029; Northern Powerhouse Rail and Liverpool - Manchester got a positive mention. But returned to public ownership, TOCs must meet rigorous performance standards to earn the GBR brand. The Government also plans for more devolution to mayors and combined authorities. So how will the new Cheshire and Warrington CA work with those for Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region to deliver a coherent network?

From 22-27 September, MCRUA will celebrate Railway 200 by walking the Mid Cheshire Line carrying a relay baton, calling at every station. And music trains will run from Chester at 1856 on 27 August and 24 September, and from Altrincham at 1836 on 18 September and 16 October.

Friends of the Barton Line

Email to FBL from Andrea Jenkyns prior to being elected Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire: "I grew up in New Holland, East Halton, Healing then Cleethorpes. I know how important these links are. This is why I am proposing a Transport For Lincolnshire, just like they have a Transport For London. So we can...finally get Lincolnshire moving with a strategic transport plan. My belief also is that a bus service should be a lifeline, and not a last resort, which it often is in rural areas".

In EMR's Project Abraham timetable recast in December, most Barton Line trains will no longer call at New Clee and Grimsby Docks; the added turnaround time at Cleethorpes will improve delay recovery. However, at FBL's behest, the evening peak service will probably still run through. Stallingborough, Healing and Great Coates will regain a service arriving at Grimsby Town at 0800, and the Barton Line will see improved connections with TPE Liverpool services at Habrough. A Cleethorpes - Matlock service will replace Grimsby - Leicester, and connect better at Lincoln to LNER London trains.

The Barton Line now has advance tickets to Nottingham and Leicester, and from some of its stations to many TPE destinations such as Doncaster, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool. FBL hopes that the remainder will benefit from the TPE advance fares later in the year, and that Project Abraham will deliver EMR advance fares to the Derby and Matlock area.

The refurbished EMR regional trains now seen on the Barton Line have a dedicated cycle area, new seats with sockets to enable the charging of mobile telephones and laptop computers, and a new passenger information system. They are expected to enter service at a rate of one/month.

Peterborough – Ely – Norwich Rail Users Group

The expiry of the Liverpool - Norwich rest day working agreement led to many more cancellations. Of the 83 at the Norwich end, 56 were P-coded (train withdrawn from the database overnight) showing the value of signing up for travel alerts or checking a website before leaving home. And after the RMT told its members not to work Monday to Saturday overtime, Cross Country warned of short notice changes and cancellations to its Birmingham - Stansted service until 25 October.

A welcome innovation on the new information board at Norwich Station is a summary of real time bus departures from nearby Thorpe Road. The West Anglia timetable will change in December, but there is currently no preview.

Between Attleborough and Cambridge there is an off-peak day return at £23 but no anytime day return, and an anytime return costs £41.60. But for a day visit with travel during the peak period, you can save £6 by buying anytime day returns between Attleborough and Thetford for £10.40, and Thetford and Cambridge for £25.20.

Fen Line Users Association

On 5 May, in the first of a series of events to mark its 40th Anniversary and Railway 200, Great Northern sponsored a FLUA celebration to mark 50 years since Watlington station reopened. Kate Carpenter, the only surviving member of the committee that raised the not inconsiderable sum of £535 that British Rail needed to reopen the station, had the honour of cutting a cake and unveiling a commemorative plaque. Then on 30 July, FLUA celebrated the 180th Anniversary of Waterbeach station opening in a similar fashion.

On a tour of Cambridge South station, FLUA Committee members were impressed by the size of the public areas, and the platform canopies with integral solar panels. The covered parking for bicycles is good too, but to get spaces for 500 on either side of the site, some 70% are provided by two-tier racks that many find awkward to use. There are two lifts to each platform, but there is no provision for those wishing to take their cycles via the stairs, either by choice or if the lifts fail. The station should open early in 2026 once Stage 2 of the Cambridge resignalling programme has been commissioned, scheduled for the Christmas holiday.

Class 379s are now running on the Fen Line. Designed to serve Stansted Airport, they have extra luggage space and 2+1 seating in 1st Class, so a pair of 379s has 30 fewer seats than a pair of 387s. Whilst their loss isn't ideal, the extra comfort for those travelling on journeys of almost two hours is a reasonable trade-off.

Windsor Lines Passengers' Association

The renationalisation of SWR must deliver a better service or it will have failed. That means a turn up and go timetable at commuter stations, and trains on time and with adequate seating. SWR should also restore the all-day Hounslow loop service and the extra Reading and Aldershot peak-time services, and recast the off-peak and weekend Kingston and Weybridge service to provide a 15-minute stopping service between Waterloo and Barnes. And the Class 701s need to be in service; Class 455 units without toilets are unacceptable on the Reading line.

At the end of its franchise, SWR had 1,281 units in service compared to 1,475 pre-COVID for South West Trains, and 1,615 in First Group's bid for SWR.

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 the Green light for over 50 road and rail upgrades, Rf Vice Chair Neil Middleton [commented](#): "The rail related announcement for Portishead is a reminder that rail campaigning can be for the long haul – that campaign started in 2000! Rail can be a great enabler to connecting people to jobs and for economic growth. Back in April, the BBC reported Northumberland CC as 'think[ing] the Northumberland line will have had 250,000 journeys by Easter, against initial expectations of 50,000'. It's also good to see possible accessibility improvements, with 50 stations [listed](#)".

However, York Area Capacity and Performance, the South West Rail Resilience Programme and Midland Mainline Electrification Phase 3 have all been paused. Transport for the East Midlands said that north of Leicester to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield was essential to improve intercity rail services and increase capacity. And the East Midlands section of the Midlands Rail Hub is still subject to a separate initial business case, with no commitment to a full business case or delivery.

RAILFUTURE EAST MIDLANDS

Midlands Connect STB envisages a direct rail service from Coventry to Leicester and Nottingham for the first time in two decades calling at Hinckley and Loughborough. It would almost halve the journey times from Coventry and deliver 3m more seats a year. And a doubled Nuneaton service with stops at Coventry Arena, Bedworth and Bermuda Park would add almost another 1.5m.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

On 7 July, a CRN Parliamentary reception hosted by Hastings and Rye MP Helena Dollimore, supported by Lord Hendy, and attended by nearly 200 members, MPs, rail industry partners and third-sector supporters from across Great Britain (and the Netherlands!) celebrated the valuable work community rail delivers. And the positive ministerial responses to questions from Transport Select Committee member Elsie Blundell MP and Baroness Pidgeon are now on record.

No major announcements on the development of GBR are expected before the UK Government has responded to the Railways Bill consultation. However, CRN plans to dedicate time at its Conference in October for members to discuss the rail reforms. Simon Lightwood MP confirmed that GBR is likely to be established within 12 months of the Railways Bill receiving Royal Assent.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

According to its [annual report](#), CBT's research and campaigning on the importance of sustainable transport in improving people's quality of life and increasing economic opportunity had an immediate impact, with increased taxes on private jet travel, and a growing rail network. But the work is far from over. Transport remains the greatest single source of carbon emissions, not helped by the new Government increasing rail fares while freezing fuel duty for drivers.

Many communities still suffer from poor public transport; the rail network is often unaffordable and unreliable, and fares can be unfair and confusing. It does not have to be this way, but the process of review and reform could take around two years. We need a strong and resilient campaign; can you [help](#) to make that happen?

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

The [Telegraph](#) says that, a year after it came to power with a pledge to improve Britain's creaking railways, the Government stands accused of blocking the revival of dozens of routes. Lord Hendy told the House of Commons Transport Committee that proposals were considered according to their estimated impact on economic growth, employment and homes; projects had to compete with other upgrades, and would get no special treatment.

NR is working with two telecoms firms to boost 4G and 5G connectivity on trains and in stations. Project Reach will install over 600 miles of ultra-fast fibre optic cable along parts of the ECML, WCML, and the Great Western and Chiltern Main Lines. And Freshwave will work with BT, O2 and VodafoneThree to upgrade connectivity in long tunnels and at 12 of the biggest stations including Birmingham New Street, Bristol Temple Meads and Edinburgh Waverley.

In ORR's latest [Annual Assessment of NR](#) punctuality remained largely stable but cancellations reached record highs. While most of these were attributed to TOCs, NR missed the whole industry national targets for reliability and punctuality, although it met those for its own delay minutes. It delivered strong gains in efficiency, achieving £325m in savings, £63m above target, but ORR has asked it to take action to resolve a significant funding gap of £488m.

Following regulatory sign-off, electrification of the 6.5-mile route between Wigan and Bolton was brought into service on 27 July. Platform extensions at Ince, Hindley and Westhoughton allow for longer trains with more seats. The £100m project gives train operators greater operational flexibility, and aligns with upgrades to the Wigan Springs train maintenance facility.

In December, Thameslink will reinstate a direct Eastbourne - Lewes - London Bridge service after it was suspended in 2020. Monday – Thursday, the 0648 from Eastbourne will arrive in London at 0825, and the return service at 1703 will reach Eastbourne at 1834.

GB Railfreight has invested £150m in 30 new Stadler Class 99 locomotives. Running on electricity and renewable fuels, they could more than halve emissions on a typical journey. The new fleet should enter commercial service later this year once testing is complete.

...and finally

The Britannia Bridge opened in 1850, 175 years ago, as part of the Chester and Holyhead Railway. In Robert Stephenson's original design, trains travelled through massive rectangular iron tubes, but on 23 May 1970, a fire in the timber-lined roof made these structurally unsound. Rail traffic across the redesigned steel arch bridge resumed in 1972, and in 1980, a road deck above the railway line transformed it into the multi-modal transport artery we see today.

But is this the end for Prague's iconic Vysehrad railway bridge? Its capacity is currently limited by corrosion, so the Railway Authority wants to replace it with a new bridge with a third track. However, heritage campaigners believe it could be repaired at a lower cost.

CONSULTATIONS

- Transport for London: [Extending the DLR to Thamesmead via Beckton Riverside](#), closes 17 August.
- MHCLG: [Universal Entertainment Resort Complex Bedford](#), closes 31 August.
- Oxfordshire CC: OxRail 2040 Rail Strategy, opens 28 August, closes 28 September.
- Transport Committee: [Joined-up Journeys: achieving and measuring transport integration](#), closes 16 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 16. Rf London & South East, Kent division, Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel, 1 High Street, **Dartford**, DA1 1DU, 1400.
- Tuesday 26. Rf East Midlands, Victoria Hotel, 85 Dovecote Lane, **Beeston**, Nottingham NG9 1JG, 1200.
- Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil**, Leven, KY8 3RS and **Online**, 1830. (Also the last Tuesday of alternate months).
- Saturday 30. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds division, Tea Rooms, Ridgmont station, MK43 0XP, 1200 (Also 8 October, 1930, Online).

September

- Thursday 4. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800.
- Monday 8. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs. BB7 2JN, 1900.
- Wednesday 10. Rf London & South East, Eastern division, **Online**, 1900.
- Thursday 11. Rail Action Group East Of Scotland AGM, Village Hall, Ladeside, **Reston**, TD14 5JW, 1930.
- Tuesday 16. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh** EH1 2JL, 1900 (Also 23 October, 18 November, 16 December).
- Tuesday 16. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 28 October)
- Thursday 18. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, 1900 (Also 20 November).
- Saturday 27. Rf East Anglia, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, **Norwich**, NR2 1EW, 1400.

Further Ahead

- 4 October. Rf Yorkshire joint meeting with Rf East Midlands and Lincolnshire, **Nottingham** Central Library.
- 8 October. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1900 (Also 10 December at the White Swan, Barton, 1800).
- 14 October. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400.

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

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