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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The power supply failure on 6 August to NR's Manchester ROC, which controls the signalling in the North-West, followed by a pause in the back-up supply kicking in brought down the entire system, causing massive disruption that lasted into the next day. On 22-23 August, Cross Country had to cancel services on all but one of its routes following a power cut at its control centre in Birmingham. And on 5 September, a fire in the Paddington area caused a power failure that closed all services to Heathrow and Reading. A BBC [report](#) explains why such critical systems must have enhanced resilience.

Roger Smith

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

Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Dr Beeching advocated retention of the Skipton - Colne line because of its strategic importance; he proposed to close just the Barnoldswick to Earby branch line and Thornton-in-Craven station. Restoring the 'Missing Link' is essential to revitalise communities that have been overlooked for years. The former track bed is still largely intact, so it is a low-risk option ready to go into the development phase to identify the best design.

SELRAP Vice Chair Nick Tennant said: "Local young people's access to jobs and education would be transformed. Additionally, brownfield sites in East Lancashire suitable for affordable housing would become much more attractive for developers, making it easier for young people to get on the property ladder within striking distance of work opportunities in Yorkshire. Skipton's fast, frequent train service to Leeds and beyond currently contributes to house values in the town doubling those just over the border in Colne."

The new Lancashire Combined County Authority has prioritised the line in its local transport plan. Half of the county's population lives within two miles of the central rail belt linking Preston and Colne, but only 2% of Yorkshire Dales National Park visitors arrive by rail. So LCCA needs to lead a coalition, including its counterparts in West and North Yorkshire, to win over Whitehall.

Friends of the Barton Line

Between 12 June and 11 August, there were thirteen days (21%) on which there was at least one cancellation.

The ORR is currently considering a [Grand Central bid](#) to run a service via Grimsby, Habrough and Scunthorpe before connecting into its existing services at Doncaster.

The Lead Nature Recovery Advisor from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust assessed the level of wildlife and biodiversity for the Wildlife Friendly Stations Award at Barton station. She assessed it as currently being at the silver level. To gain gold status the adopters need to engage with the community, and be proactive in promoting its environment.

Fen Line Users Association

In July 380 services on the line between King's Lynn and Cambridge were cancelled, up from 177 in June. Great Northern says the hot, dry summer has been a major factor, with failing air conditioning systems on trains and damaged tracks. It admitted the service had fallen well below the standard customers "rightly expect".

British Regional Transport Association

What if there was a direct rail link via Dunstable between Luton Airport Parkway and south of Leighton Buzzard/Linslade to enable direct services between Milton Keynes and the Airport? BRTA sees three phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Luton Airport – Dunstable as a terminal branch off the Midland Main Line
- Phase 2: Dunstable Stanbridge area, linking with the WCML between Leighton Buzzard and Cheddington.
- Phase 3: Luton Airport to Stevenage wrap around new-build for Cambridge - Milton Keynes arc and synergies.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Following a spate of missed connections and delays, BTPG is meeting with Danny Kruger MP on 25 September. His office plans to invite a GWR representative to the meeting. It will also discuss the BTPG [report](#) requesting interim improvements to partially alleviate the problems with the Newbury - Bedwyn shuttle.

The GWR WhatsApp team has said that it is no longer GWR policy to hold trains during peak periods. However, GWR has reiterated that Newbury is an exception, and has advised its WhatsApp team of this policy. So if you are on a delayed train and need a hold at Newbury, do still make the request through WhatsApp on 07890 608043. If they respond saying holds cannot be made, then reply "GWR senior management has agreed that Newbury is an exception".

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](#).

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTH EAST

Rail nationalisation should facilitate the coordination of rolling stock renewals, traction choices, and infrastructure upgrades; a DfT and NR strategy is due shortly. However, many short-term rolling stock issues could be resolved by transferring stock between former TOCs, although there are issues such as whether an operator has the necessary expertise to operate a particular train, driver issues, and contractual leasing obligations.

A shortage of Southeastern units to replace early Class 465 Networker units was resolved by taking thirteen Class 377 Electrostars from Southern. But that now has its own shortage, so can neither restore a number of metro services that were removed during Covid, nor lengthen trains on south-coast services from 8 cars to 12 cars.

But South Western will have introduced all of its Class 701 Arterio units to their metro and suburban service by December, so it will put some Siemens Class 444 Desiros and all of its Alstom Class 458s into storage. Southern is unfamiliar with Siemens trains but could feasibly take the 458s. Or the Desiro's could be released to Southeastern (which already has some Siemens stock) and return some Electrostars back to Southern. The rail authorities and operators need to prioritise this issue; solutions need to be found quickly.

RAILFUTURE DEVON & CORNWALL

To build on improvements to the Exeter – Barnstaple line that will stimulate new growth areas, a scoping consultation is underway on reopening its extension to Bideford. Rf has requested a policy explicitly protecting the former rail alignment for future active travel and rail use. A consultation on content and evidence for 'A Plan for Northern Devon' will start on 10 February.

RfD&C Chair Tim Steer commented: "Thanks to the foresight, ambition and leadership of a neighbouring borough council, the reopening of Okehampton station provided the inspiration for Rf, its many partners and other stakeholder organisations to form the [Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance](#) in December 2023." Peninsula Transport's Strategic Implementation Plan to 2050, the Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 2025-40, three recent reports from Rf and one by NR have all built on Policy ST10(1f) in the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011-31 - "exploring opportunities for the reuse and reinstatement of former railway lines" - for Bideford.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT's latest [impact report](#) outlines the progress made in 2025 to 26:

- The cost of transport has been significantly rebalanced: rail fares have been frozen; the 15-year freeze on fuel duty is to end, and tax on private jets has increased.
- Rail projects have received a major boost, with investment in infrastructure and commitments to reopen more disused lines. And funding has been announced for local transport in city regions, including trams.
- Funding for buses is now fairer and more effective, and there is more protection for lifeline bus services.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

In the first week of August, CRN welcomed Bill Freeman as its new Chief Executive, and also launched its podcast [All Aboard](#). Through conversations with guests from across the movement, Chris Birks and Erin Kelly will bust myths about community rail, introduce it to new audiences, and showcase the incredible work happening in communities across Britain.

It's been an encouraging period for CRN in Scotland. It met Scottish CRPs, Scottish Rail Holdings, Transport Scotland and ScotRail to discuss how they can work together to strengthen support for community rail. There was a real willingness to continue the conversation, and talks are ongoing in a positive spirit.

Next year's Community Rail Awards will take place on 4 March 2027; entries are open until 30 September. Whether you're thinking about entering for the first time or are a seasoned Awards veteran, the [Awards Hub](#) is the best place to start. You'll find all the information you need about the categories, guidance on putting together an entry, and inspiration from previous winners to help you showcase the difference your work is making.

...and now the rest of the news

Under the new [National Planning Policy Framework](#), there will be default approval for homes built within "reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station" (Section 5, para 1h). Housing Secretary Angela Rayner said: "By unlocking thousands of homes around well-connected transport hubs, we're helping people live closer to work, school and the services they rely on, while backing local businesses and driving growth in our communities". [*Conversely, growing communities should have a rail link, with any old ones restored, eg a new Ringmer station to support a Lewes - Uckfield link, and a Hoo St Werburgh station and line upgrade for passenger services – Ed.*]

On 13 August, the rear three vehicles of the 1424 London Victoria to Eastbourne derailed around a mile north of Lewes station, coming to rest on their sides on the railway embankment. An initial [RAIB report](#) says that marks on the rails are consistent with the wheels of the vehicles having climbed over the rails. Forward facing CCTV images from the train, and forward and rearward facing CCTV images obtained from preceding services, show that a track geometry irregularity existed on the approach to the point of derailment prior to the accident. The rail embankment there sits on alluvial deposits of loose clay, silt, sand and gravel, and may undergo movement as moisture levels change. The line remained closed for recovery and repairs until 1 September.

And the clay has also dried out and shrunk on long stretches of the railway in Essex, so GBR Anglia has amended its c2c timetables and Greater Anglia its Essex services. On August 15, a train doing about 77mph derailed near Wickford and ran on for another 1.5mls. However, it stayed upright throughout and none of the 62 passengers reported any injuries.

As a regulator, ORR focuses on ensuring a safer railway for passengers, workers and the general public, so it was deeply concerned by August's derailments at Lewes and Wickford. Such incidents are rare, but the approach depends on continual vigilance, learning, and improvement. ORR's role is to ensure that investigations are thorough, that the industry response is evidence-based, and that any lessons needed to manage future risks are identified and acted upon.

ORR has granted Virgin approval to run up to 20 return services/day through the Channel Tunnel to Paris, and Brussels and Amsterdam from 1 October 2030 to 31 December 2040. However, it still has to secure the rolling stock, obtain safety approval from UK and EU authorities and, as the approval only covers as far as the Channel Tunnel, secure access to rail networks on the continent.

ORR has published a [table](#) of its planned consultations on GBR and rail reform; it includes their scope, scheduled publication period, and details on how to respond.

A [study](#) into safety standards at 373 British stations by Sorooptimist International GB and Ireland found widespread gaps in basic passenger protection, with women particularly affected. Persistent issues related to staffing, lighting, emergency help points, and passenger information. 55% of them had no visible security presence, and only 10% were staffed throughout the entire time passengers were present. Almost half of the car parks were considered poorly lit, located in isolated areas, or lacking designated safe spaces. The survey coincided with the British Transport Police's latest report, which stated that violence against women and girls on British railways had risen by over 50% since 2021.

Report Fraud say that reports of scams related to QR codes have risen 700% in the past four years. As they become part of everyday life, criminals are finding different exploits, including conning people who are out and about in station car parks across the country to download fraudulent apps to steal their money and data.

On the West Highland Line, buses will replace trains between Crianlarich and Fort William/Mallaig from 9 - 17 November while NR carries out £13m worth of upgrades.

The Scottish Government has allocated £26.2m to electrify 8 miles of the Borders railway between Tweedbank and Bowshank Tunnel near Stow ahead of battery-electric trains in the early 2030s. With around half of the 350 foundations now complete, work has moved on to erecting the masts that will support the overhead wires.

After a £40m upgrade funded by the DfT and NR, and due for completion in June 2027, the Princes Exchange building besides Leeds station will house track and train colleagues.

Transpennine Route Upgrade will launch the third year of its Community Fund on 28 September. Community groups, schools and charities located within 5km of the route between Manchester, Huddersfield, Leeds and York or the Shipley Traincare Centre can bid for grants of £5,000 from the £270,000 available for projects that make a lasting difference in their area, or £10,000 where the additional funding would significantly increase the impact of their scheme.

Telford and Wrekin Council has allocated £150,000 for a feasibility study into a Very Light Rail line from Ironbridge into Telford Central. It would reuse four miles of heavy rail line between the Ironbridge line and the Shrewsbury – Wolverhampton line, with suitable stations along the route.

As a result of RMT strike action, EMR postponed its Intercity timetable uplift until 1 September. Corby MP Lee Barron has called on the Government to transfer operation of EMR to GBR. He said: “The Corby service is failing, and my constituents are consistently in touch with my office to share their testimonies of being left stranded and out of pocket by cancelled services in London or in neighbouring Kettering.”

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander has announced that the thin, hard ‘ironing board’ seats on all 115 Class 700 Thameslink trains will be replaced with new cushions and backrests. The work is set to begin in 2027 and last two years.

In the first use of the European Train Control System on the ECML, Great Northern’s Class 717 fleet transition in and out of the system between Welwyn and Hitchin. The 15-mile section has been commissioned as an ‘overlay’, so trains can use either conventional or in-cab signalling, allowing drivers to be trained in the technology. More fleets and passenger services will begin using ETCS next year.

A new eastern entrance to Bristol Temple Meads marks a significant milestone in the transformation of one of the region’s busiest and most historic railway stations. Funded by some of the £94.7m awarded to the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, and delivered by NR and Bristol Temple Quarter partners, it provides direct access to the University of Bristol’s new Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus, whilst improving connections for communities and businesses in St Philip’s Marsh and the east of the city. As one of three new entrances aimed at doubling the station’s capacity, it is expected to serve around 2.5m passengers/year by 2030.

...and finally

The Ramblers have named the Strawberry Line path in Somerset as Britain’s favourite for 2026. It follows the former GWR branch line from Yatton to Cheddar, and parts of Shepton Mallet and Wells. Volunteers have transformed it into a popular walking and cycling route.

A rail service linking Finland and Sweden has restarted after almost 40 years. On 10 August, a double-decker train left Oulu bound for Haparanda in Sweden. Passengers going on south from there will need to change. But it is now possible to travel some 3,000 miles by rail from Portugal’s Algarve to Finland’s northernmost station of Kolari - believed to be the longest train route in Europe [*farther than Narvik? – Ed.*]

GB News [reports](#) that searches for train journeys in Europe by booking company Omio have risen 170% in the last year. Its top five scenic journeys are Rome to Palermo, Chur to Tirano, Kiruna to Narvik, Mainz to Koblenz, and Interlaken Ost to Montreux.

CONSULTATIONS

- West Yorkshire Combined Authority: [Thorpe Park station](#), closes 15 September.
- Central Bedfordshire Council: [Local Transport Plan 4 2027 - 2040](#), closes 20 September.
- Mayor of London: [Draft London Plan 2050](#), closes 15 October.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultations.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites as soon as any changes 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 events
- Local Group events.

September

■ Monday 14 September. Skipton & East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, Town Hall, High Street, **Skipton**, North Yorkshire, BD23 1AH, 1900.

■ Monday 14. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, Lancs, BB7 2JN, 1900 (Also 9 November).

■ Tuesday 15. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, Bucks, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 3 November and 8 December).

■ Thursday 17. Rf London & South East, London Metro division, Alan Baxter Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, **Farringdon**, EC1M 6EL, 1900 (Also 12 November).

■ Thursday 17. Rail Action Group East of Scotland AGM, Community Centre, 8 Law Road. **North Berwick**, EH39 4PN, 1930.

■ Saturday 26. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, **St Albans**, 1100 (Also 27 October online at 1930).

■ Tuesday 29. Rf Thames Valley Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1BX, 1730 (Also 25 October).

October

■ Saturday 10. Rf Yorkshire, jointly with Rf Lincolnshire and Rf East Midlands, **Sheffield**.

■ Monday 12. Avocet Line RUG AGM, Manor Hotel, The Beacon, **Exmouth**, Devon, EX8 2AG.

■ Tuesday 13. STORM - Oldham Rochdale Manchester RUG, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also 8 December).

■ Wednesday 14. Rf West Midlands, Platform 3, **Birmingham** Moor Street station, 1745. (Also 11 November).

■ Wednesday 14. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** station, 1915 (Also 9 December at the White Swan, Barton).

■ Saturday 17. Connect Bude AGM, Falcon Hotel, Breakwater Road, **Bude**, Cornwall, EX23 8SD, 1100

■ Monday 19. Watford RUG, **Watford** Junction Station, 1830.

■ Saturday 24. East Suffolk Travel Association, Methodist Church, St Johns Street, **Woodbridge**, 1400.

Further Ahead

■ 7 November. Rf Yorkshire, jointly with Rf North West, Manchester.

- 12 November. Rf North West, venue TBC.
- 21 November. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- 28 November. Rf East Anglia, Mill Road Community Centre, 6 Hazell Street, Cambridge CB1 2GN, 1400.

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

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