

**Minutes of Railfuture North East Branch Committee Meeting held Tuesday 24th
November via Zoom**

In attendance – Keith Simpson [KS], Peter Walker [PW], Damian Bell [DB], Tony Walker [AW], Dennis Fancett [DF], Dave Shaw [DS], I Walker – note taker [IW]

1) Apologies

Received from A Cosgrove, M Chainey, P Wood

2) Notes of the previous meeting on Wednesday 30th September

Already circulated and accepted by all as a true record.

3) Matters arising

i) Updating of Branch website

Following dialogue with Chris Page, amendments have been made by DS to the wording of the advert to join Railfuture. This can be found on the branch web page.

Under heading “Latest News”, the Gilsland, Ferryhill Station, Leamside, Team Valley Station sections have all been updated by DS.

Sections on faster journeys north of Morpeth and Northumberland Line are still to be updated.

To date notification of success or otherwise of the bid for “Restoring your Railway” funding in respect of a new station at Ferryhill is still awaited. Thanks extended to DS for the work he has done.

ii) Branch Facebook page

IW has a contact who will help set up a branch Facebook page. This will be taken forwards as soon as a relaxation of virus restrictions allow. Hopefully before Christmas.

iii) Branch Bulletin

Some work has been undertaken by DS. Further articles required from the Chair & RUGS. PW & KS will contribute on behalf of their respective groups. Aim is to publish before Christmas.

iv) Leamside Facebook contact

Permission had been received from the Leamside Line Face Book administrator for RFNE to upload a ‘recruiting’ advert on to their page. But before the RFNE advert had been submitted, the draft of a North East Transport Plan had been published by the North East Joint Transport Committee following its meeting on 17 November. The Plan was now out for public consultation until 14 January. It includes a recommendation for reopening of Leamside so intention now is that RFNE place an entry on the Leamside group’s Facebook page encouraging their membership to

respond individually to the consultation in an effort to bolster support for the Plan's Leamside proposals. AW to progress the matter asap.

Other Leamside news: AW had written to Richard Cowen of Durham CPRE alerting him about the NE Transport Plan and urging him to agree to CPRE responding to the consultation. AW had also sought confirmation that CPRE would be supportive of RFNE's stance on Leamside.

NB. Since meeting word received from Richard that he will put the RFNE request about CPRE participating in the public consultation to CPRE's management group for a decision.

v) Branch Budget

A finance report for 2020 was being prepared by DB. Only outstanding expenditure for the year likely to be costs arising from publication of the Branch Bulletin in December. Because any meetings at least for first part of 2021 were likely to be virtual, probable that Branch expenditure for the year would be fairly low. At this point he was projecting expenditure of about £900 overall for 2021 meetings. He will include an allowance for (actual) attendance at the Branches and Groups Day. DB will distribute his 2021 budget to Committee members shortly. Any comments should be sent to DB.

4. Branch Matters

i) Discussion held over format of forthcoming meetings. Virtual meetings expected to be the norm for some time yet. Concerns expressed by DS of using Zoom for large scale meetings unless effectively managed. Alternative would be to run any such meeting as a Webinar over which there is greater control. Comments made that the forthcoming vaccination programme might allow return to in-person meetings at some point in the year. Discussion held as to who we approach as a virtual speaker for the AGM. Viva Rail & Tim Burleigh suggested. IW to approach Tim as to the possibility of talking about hydrogen power. Noted by DS that the Network Rail report into alternative power sources actually favours electrification / battery power within our region.

ii) HS2 Policy

Agreed that NE Branch should support TfN/NPR plans for linking classic network in to HS2.

iii) Northumberland Line Update

Looking positive, although no timeframes have been given. Groundwork test drilling is taking place in vicinity of the line. There is also a public consultation currently under way. Morpeth – Berwick service - no definite news, but NCC have been asked to provide additional information.

iv) Date of next meeting & note taker

1800 Tuesday 19th January. Note taker: Peter Walker

v) Review of Yorkshire Branch Meeting – Saturday 26th September

Main speaker was from the local council (Sheffield). It was highlighted as a learning point that any joint Branch meetings must major on a topic of interest to all meeting participants and not just those from the Branch hosting the meeting.

vi) Review of Branches & Groups Day

Attended virtually by DF. Looked at the role of the railway post COVID from various perspectives. DF felt the event had been something of a damp squib.

vii) Review of Northern RUG meeting (held earlier in the day)

Attended by DF & KS and Tony Baxter of Northern. A Stakeholder Liaison Manager to be appointed for the North East. Highlighted how resources are being reallocated during the present COVID crisis to the detriment of services north of Newcastle. Not much “good news” forthcoming from the event.

5. Rail in the North East / Local Issues

i) NEJTC Meeting 17 November 2020

DS led short discussion – he had attended the meeting virtually. A 329 page report had been presented! DS had subsequently prepared a very helpful 4 page summary of the main rail proposals contained in the NE Transport Report considered at the meeting. This had been previously distributed to RFNE Committee members. A lot in the report for the branch to consider. We would welcome many parts of it but would need to seek more details on some matters. DS felt we would want to emphasise need to improve local services in NE before spending money on extending platforms at Newcastle Central! Agreed it would be necessary for some Committee members to meet in order to prepare a Branch response. Consultation open until 14th January. Pointed out the consultation gives the option to agree / disagree for most part. We would have to use the comment boxes in order to get our points of view into the debate constructively. Agreed to convene as a sub committee consisting of DS / IW / TW / PW / KS on **7pm Thursday 17th December** to agree the branch response. DF will concentrate on a SENRUG response.

ii) TfN Community & Rail User Group Conference on Wednesday 25th November

AW / DF / KS attending virtually.

iii) XC Scotland & North East Stakeholder Conference Wed 9th December

IW received invite on behalf of RFNE. KS & IW attending.

iv) Saturday 30th January 2021. Time TBC

Zoom meeting for branches & RUGS that are served by Northern. Open to all members.

6. AOB

There was no further business & the meeting closed at 8pm.