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### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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The BBC [reports](#) that Russia is increasing its attacks on Ukraine's railway system. The 13,000-mile network is a central pillar of its war effort, and a powerful national symbol of resilience. RUX joins Rf in wishing our railway colleagues well as they fight to continue to live in the free world.

Roger Smith

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

### Friends of the West Highland Lines

ScotRail has issued a Market Engagement Notice for 41 new EMUs and 29 BEMUs, possibly more. Delivery is expected to begin in late 2030. The EMUs will mostly operate out of Glasgow, with the BEMUs allocated to lines in Fife and the Borders Line, which will be partially electrified, but not the Forth Bridge; work between Haymarket and Dalmeny is planned for 17-25 January. A contract notice to replace the HSTs should be issued by the end of the year, but there is no news on replacing the 158s used on the Far North Line and the Kyle Line, nor the 156s on the WHLs.

20 new four-axle powder tank wagons have replaced the fleet of two-axle tanks on the WHL. Doubling the payload reduces the number of rail journeys required from 107/year to 76. Alumina is shipped from Europe's largest bauxite refinery at Aughinish on the Shannon Estuary to Blyth in Northumberland, and thence by rail to Fort William.

### Rail Action Group East of Scotland

East Lothian CRP is exploring the possibility of a Rail Exhibition in Haddington to celebrate 200 Years of Rail in the Southeast of Scotland. Anyone with rail related memorabilia they would be prepared to loan for the exhibition should contact Allison Cosgrove at [allison1314@gmail.com](mailto:allison1314@gmail.com), or the RAGES Chairperson at [tom\\_dickson@btinternet.com](mailto:tom_dickson@btinternet.com).

### Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

Following a meeting with local MPs on 3 November, SELRAP Chair Peter Bryson said: "Their continuing support for \*this vital project is greatly appreciated. We now need our leaders in Lancashire and Yorkshire to work together, in partnership with ministers, to quickly make this project a reality. The onus is also firmly on the Leeds MP, Rachel Reeves, to reverse decades of Whitehall bureaucrats ignoring marginalised communities in the North. For a tiny fraction of the cost of HS2 and other big projects down south, replacing the 12-mile 'Missing Link' would drive growth, tackle deprivation and transform connectivity." \*reopening the Skipton-Colne line

## **Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson**

HS2 was an ill-conceived project from the start; the whole thing is a complete mess. However, it is now so far advanced it really has to continue to Crewe. Costly upgrades to the WCML north of Birmingham don't really stack up. And the proposed route for Northern Powerhouse Rail from Liverpool to Manchester via Manchester Airport would be no quicker than the Chat Moss route!

A well-argued report by Policy Exchange [Instead of High-Speed Rail](#) articulates these concerns and moots several alternatives. One is for an 'Elizabeth Line of the North' tunnelled under central Manchester to connect all parts of the network. Quadrupling between Deansgate and Piccadilly might be less costly, but would not be easy and a tunnel could be of greater benefit.

## **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association**

A noteworthy event on the Mid Cheshire line was the six-day Baton Relay Walk, where a knitted baton in the shape of an oil lamp, was carried from Manchester all the way to Chester, calling at every station. Northern and Piccadilly staff started it off, and Pete Waterman and the Town Crier greeted it at Chester. On the way it had two MPs, a mayor, many local councillors and the Court Leet graced it with their presence at Altrincham.

Northern's Mid Cheshire Line service has fewer cancellations but still too many. Reliability is affected by train failures, infrastructure failures and staffing issues. With 40-year-old stock and ageing infrastructure this should not be a surprise. When 4-car trains are used, the back carriage is still locked out due to some short platforms; modern stock has more control of door openings. The line should be a priority to receive newer trains. NR is completing the fit-out of Northwich Station ticket office, with Northern works to follow.

From December, LNWR Crewe - London Euston services will be formed of two Class 730 5-car EMUs. However, these are too long for bay Platform 7 at Crewe, so they have to use Platform 12, which has few facilities and is more onerous to reach. MCRUA totally supports LNWR's proposal to extend this service to Manchester Victoria via Warrington Bank Quay. This may happen in 2026, although several issues have to be overcome. If it were to call at Hartford, it would provide a faster service to Manchester than from Greenbank, and also provide a rail service between Hartford and Warrington for the first time in many years. It would also provide a cheaper way to get from Manchester to London than by using Avanti West Coast.

## **Friends of the Barton Line**

From 16 July – 1 October, the Barton Line suffered at least one cancellation on thirteen days, with seven having more than one. According to the ORR, from 18 August 2024 - 16 August 2026, its stations lost 6% of their train stops.

Last year's Santa Special was extremely busy. To better accommodate the numbers this year, FoBL is planning two Santa Specials, both on 6 December, departing Barton at 0951 and 1151. To speed up distribution, each child will get a selection box rather than an age related gift.

The licensee of the White Swan in Barton has offered to hold a quiz night to raise funds for FoBL that could go towards the purchase of a live departure board, visible from the outside. Press coverage would be sought to highlight the lack of Passenger Information Systems at stations.

## **Fen Line Users Association**

The driest spring for 50 years has caused the fragile, peaty substrate on which the Fen line was built in the 1840's to dry out and make the track bed unstable. This isn't a new problem, the Fen line suffered it back in 2022, but it seems to have gained a new name: "soil moisture deficit". It has also affected lines built over clay, particularly in the west country and parts of Essex, leading to speed restrictions, emergency overnight engineering work, short notice safety inspections (during which trains can't run) and even broken rails. Over the last two years nearly 26,000 tons of ballast have been dropped on the Fen Line.

Greater Anglia has now transitioned to public ownership and Jamie Burles, the former MD of GA, is in charge of both track and train. This is the third route to have this pre-GBR structure. The biggest benefits will come from the ability to be more innovative than was possible when NR and train operators received their orders from the DfT, with the requirement to deliver the cheapest solution to the immediate problem rather than looking at future requirements and new technologies. It is much too early to know whether that will happen, but reports in the trade press suggest that experience so far has been positive. Govia Thameslink Railway will transition to public ownership next May. Its individual brands will be retained, but with Govia no longer involved, GTR will become TSGN (Thameslink Southern Great Northern).

The December timetable promises some improvements to services with slightly shorter journey times for trains towards London and further gains for trains to King's Lynn, which will cross with southbound trains between Ely and Littleport, avoiding the wait at the latter for a train to clear the single line section from Downham Market. The main change is that weekday trains for Ely and King's Lynn leave King's Cross 10mins later at xx.24 and xx.54 respectively to fit around the revised service patterns on the ECML.

## 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 HERTS&BEDS

TfL has [applied](#) to DfT to take over the GN Inner services from Moorgate to Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage. But will the business case stack up? RfH&B has the following concerns:

- The agreement that drivers go into Moorgate only twice a day (noise, dust etc) is greatly mitigated by a shared pool of drivers between GTR inner & outer services
- Loss of synergy from shared maintenance of Class 717s and 700s at Hornsey depot
- Another operator on the ECML
- The democratic deficit: residents outside the Greater London Area would have no say in how the lines were run.

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

The message from the Community Rail Conference was that CRN has a vital role feeding into the national debate on shaping the railways, particularly around rail reform and devolution, while empowering members to engage with local and regional decision-makers. They need guidance on working with devolved mayoral authorities, and contributing to local transport strategies. CRN will communicate more regularly with its members, and equip them to contribute meaningfully.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee on Government plans for a ten-year Integrated National Transport Strategy. Point-to-point travel should be simple, seamless and safe, and offer the most appropriate and sustainable transport available. Much depends on geography. The focus of urban integration is on multimodal ticketing, capacity and reliable frequency, with suburban more likely to include park-and-ride, last-mile bus links, and cycling access to rail. Rural areas need better coordination between scheduled buses, demand-responsive services and rail, with digital ticketing and real-time information where possible to aid simplicity and certainty.

CBT's refreshed [Strategy](#) reflects the shifting political and technological landscape while restating its core mission: to advocate for better, greener, fairer transport for all. Its priorities are:

- Making a success of rail reform, ensuring the machinery of government is fit for purpose

- Improving local transport to connect communities.

Despite 14 years of fuel duty freezes and a five-year fuel duty cut, transport costs are still keeping five million people below the poverty line. Doggedly clinging to the cut in fuel duty - which has primarily benefitted richer households and fuel retailers whilst prioritising road investment - will simply perpetuate this. CBT has urged the Chancellor to use the Budget to rebalance transport taxation and prioritise public transport to help hard-pressed households and provide the sustainable economic growth we need. She could also end tax-free fuel for airlines by introducing a kerosene tax at 33p a litre.

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

ORR's new 'Investment Pathway' guidance helps potential investors in rail infrastructure navigate the regulatory framework, and explains their obligations and opportunities. As part of its review of the [Rail Network Investment Framework](#) requested by HM Treasury, it has also identified opportunities to reform the Industry Risk Fee and NR Fee Fund to ensure charges reflect up-to-date data on risk, subject to consultation.

The Railways Bill that will create GBR was laid before Parliament on 5 November, building on the Government's public ownership programme. It includes a strengthened passenger watchdog, fare and ticketing reform, more streamlined business planning, and localised decision making.

From 14-22 February, no trains will run south and east of Manchester Piccadilly as NR replaces eleven sets of points, renews over five miles of cabling, replaces sleepers with concrete ones, and brings lineside equipment up to date across all six lines.

With 57% of a public vote that attracted over 3,500 responses, NR's new railway training centre in Doncaster will be named The Gresley Institute. Formerly home to the National College for High Speed Rail, it has been transformed into a modern centre for operational training, education and development.

The first of East Midlands Railway's new Aurora trains will enter service on the Midland Main Line in December. The full fleet of 33 trains will increase the number of seats available by 46%.

Campaigners have fresh hopes that [Littleworth Station](#) at Deeping St Nicholas between Peterborough and Spalding could reopen following the extra transport powers granted to the Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire, and the site's inclusion in a key document.

Beaulieu Park station in north Chelmsford opened on 26 October with three platforms and 700 parking spaces. It is the first new station on the Great Eastern Main Line in 100 years. Trains to London take 40mins. The official opening was graced by a visit from 60163 Tornado.

Cambridge South station opening has been further delayed from early 2026 as the sub-contractor fitting out its electrical and mechanical systems has gone into administration. Additional design and construction work have also contributed to the delay. NR now hopes to open it by next June.

The RAIB [reports](#) that late on 25 September, a passenger train travelling at 108mph narrowly missed a van that railway staff had reversed onto the WCML at an access point near Millbrook, Bedfordshire. Work was planned on the closed Up and Down Slow lines, but the van was parked on the live Down Fast line close to the Up Fast line on which the train was travelling. Fortunately, the incident caused no injuries or damage.

East West Rail's latest plans for Bedford station would involve the demolition of homes and businesses in Ashburnham Road. It claims this would support future rail capacity, better link the station and the town centre, and deliver these benefits sooner and with less disruption.

Chiltern Railways' preparations for a half-hourly Oxford – Milton Keynes service have included fitting out Winslow station, and the completion of staff accommodation at Bletchley. It will announce a start date once all the necessary authorisations and agreements are in place.

The Government has committed to reopening the freight line to Cowley in Oxford to passenger service with another new station at Littlemore. NR is working with the DfT and funding partners to restart development work, and confirm key project milestones.

Eurostar has ordered 30 "[Celestia](#)" double-decker trains from Alstom, with an option for 20 more. The first six could enter service in 2031. Two four-car units together will have about 1,080 seats. An expansion plan includes new routes from London to Geneva and Frankfurt. However, ORR has approved Virgin Trains application to share the Temple Mills depot with Eurostar, and this cannot accommodate an expanded Eurostar fleet as well as a rival company's trains. Applications from Evolyn, Gemini and Trenitalia to use the depot were rejected.

Virgin is planning rail services to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam from 2030, and then further across France, and into Germany and Switzerland. But it will need a commercial agreement with Eurostar, finance, access to track and stations, and safety approvals from UK and EU authorities. Eurostar is considering its next steps to ensure it can continue to grow: "Our priority is to deliver the benefits of investment in a new fleet, jobs, and depot facilities that we recently announced.

*...and finally*

On 30 October, around 3,000 armed forces personnel from the Royal Navy, Army, and RAF, along with volunteer collectors, shook their collection buckets at 12 London stations including Waterloo, Paddington, and Victoria. Several military bands and choirs also performed to entertain travellers and encourage donations. Collectors also visited other stations across the country, including Bristol Temple Meads and Edinburgh Waverley.

## CONSULTATIONS

- City of Edinburgh Council: [North-South Tram Line](#), closes 17 November.
- Isle of Wight Council: [Island Transport Plan 4](#), closes 24 November.

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 events
- Local Group events.

## November

- Saturday 15. Rf London & South East, Kent division, 1400.
- Saturday 15. Fen Line Users Association AGM, Marriott's Warehouse, South Quay, **King's Lynn**, Norfolk, PE30 5DT and **Online**, 1400.
- Tuesday 18. Capital Rail Action Group, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, **Edinburgh** EH1 2JL, 1900 (Also 16 December).
- Thursday 20. Rf London & South East, Joint Surrey/Sussex & Coastway/London Metro divisions, Village Hall, 5 Honeycrock Lane, Salfords, **Redhill**, Surrey, RH1 5DG, 1930.
- Saturday 22. Rf Yorkshire and North West, Mill Hill Chapel, City Sq, **Leeds**, 1300 (tbc).

## December

- Tuesday 2. Chesham & District Transport Users' Group, Town Hall, Parsonage Lane, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 2 December).
- Thursday 4. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 8 January).
- Saturday 6. Rf London & South East, Herts&Beds division, Platform 8-9 Gateline, **Kings Cross**, 1215 (Also 14 January Online 1930).



■ Saturday 6. Rf East Anglia, The Signal Box Community Centre, Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB, 1400 (Also 28 February, Bury St Edmunds).

■ Tuesday 9. Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail lines group, The Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, Rochdale, OL11 2SP, 1400.

■ Wednesday 10. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, 1800 (Also 11 February in Cleethorpes, 8 April in Barton, and 10 June (AGM) in Cleethorpes).

#### **Further Ahead**

■ 14 January. Rf West Midlands, Moor Street station, **Birmingham** (Also 11 February and 11 March).

■ 19 March. Community Rail Awards, Pride Park, **Derby**.

■ 5-6 June. European Passengers' Federation, Gouvernement aan de Maas, **Maastricht**.

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

Contact the editor by e-mail: [ruglink@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ruglink@railfuture.org.uk), or phone: 01462 815992.

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*Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, BS21 7NP – **for legal correspondence only.***

*All other correspondence to: 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU*