

## RAILFUTURE (North-east) COMMITTEE, Tuesday January 19 2021

Minutes of Meeting, held by ZOOM: after some technical hiccups, proceedings began at 18.05.

**Present:** Allison Cosgrove [AC], Keith Simpson (chair) [KS], Ian Walker [IW], Malcolm Chainey [MC], Dennis Fancett (administrator) [DF], Dave Shaw [DS], Peter Walker (note-taker) [PJW], Tony Walker [AW], Peter Wood [PW].

1. **Apologies** from Damian Bell and Trevor Watson - technological difficulties.
2. **Notes of previous meeting, Tuesday November 24 2020:** circulated in December. Agreed to be a correct record.
3. **Matters arising:**
  - i. **Update on branch website (DS):** Railfuture (NE)'s response to North-East Joint Transport Committee's Transport Plan is now added. Ashington, Blyth and Tyne (alias Northumberland Line) entry is pending.(Ferryhill station campaign has copied our branch response on Ferryhill for its own purposes!)
  - ii. **Creation of a branch Facebook page (IW)** IW has had one volunteer, unnamed as yet, to assist with this. Nothing else to report until lockdown has been cancelled.
  - iii. **Branch Bulletin** No comments arising from it as such, but it was noted that the branch has recently gained two new members as a result of the branch's website and/or publicity leaflet.
4. **Branch matters:**
  - i. **Next branch meeting (IW)** Saturday January 30, 14.00: combined meeting (via ZOOM) with Railfuture Yorkshire branch.  
Guest speaker: **Tony Baxter**, Regional Director, Northern Trains  
IW asked that those wishing to join the 'audience' for this should register with Andrew Dyson <[andrew.dyson@platform5.com](mailto:andrew.dyson@platform5.com)>.
  - ii. **Branch AGM (IW):** again, to be a ZOOM event, with Tim Burleigh and/or a Viva Rail speaker (as available). While approaches were being made, discussion ensued on organisation of ZOOM for a potentially large audience: MC (from Tyne Valley experience) recommended that *two* people should operate the Zoom mechanics, not just one. AC, mindful of 'confidentiality' issues, suggested use of EVENTBRITE for this kind of occasion. MC opined that a better course would be to trust the "mute" facilities, with the Zoom administrator having power to mute and unmute. DF offered to administer the AGM (with assistance); a subcommittee, KS, IW, DF, would hold a "trial run" prior to the event itself. Dates for the AGM, though discussed, produced no definite decision yet.
  - iii. **Accessibility to Northern and TPE stations (KS)** KS had joined a meeting set up by Graham Collett (Yorkshire Railfuture) to list and review stations inadequately equipped with step-free access. [The list had been 'attached' to the Notice of Meeting, and was particularly lengthy, especially in our NE branch.] Another "Northern" meeting, with an architect, has been fixed for January 28, to discuss the problem further. MC asked to be kept informed of what happened at this meeting.
  - iv. **AB & T (Northumberland Line) update (DF)** As ever, an announcement from 10 Downing Street was daily expected but had yet to arrive; however DF mentioned that he had heard more specific details but had been sworn to secrecy for now.  
The consultations that Northumberland CC had organised on the details of this project, including station plans, had occasionally shown up problems of design that arose from car parking access conflicting with pedestrian access, but often little could be done to resolve them. DF mentioned here that Manors station needed a comprehensively revised layout, especially if/when Northumberland Line trains began to run, as it is arguably the most important station for commuters to central Newcastle. AC asked if there had been, or would

be, a Planning Application procedure for each station, as there would over Scotland's proposed new/reopened stations, Reston and East Linton. Nobody was sure; but anyway Scottish requirements might not apply south of the border (which, in passing, some members now wished to re-site on the Humber's north bank, instead of at Marshall Meadows!)

- v. **Date of next meeting:** fixed for Tuesday 23 March, starting at 18.0. Note-taker, Peter Wood.

## 5. Rail in the North-East/Local Issues

### i. **North-East Joint Transport Committee Transport Plan (DS and others)**

Railfuture North-East had responded to the Consultation, greatly helped by the diligence of DS who had, firstly, followed the original exposition of the plan's content and passed it on to us, and, secondly, had noted and then distributed not one but **four** versions of the branch's response. (In addition, Coastliners RUG and SENRUG had sent responses from their own groups, the former being, in effect, an enlargement of the main response from a Coast Line viewpoint, plus a few extra observations.) The Committee thanked DS warmly for his considerable effort on RfNE's behalf over several weeks. KS, as Railfuture (NE) chairman, had 'officially' sent the branch's response, and thanks go to him for his work on this. Additional points, arising from ideas in the Plan itself, concerned possibilities of re-opening a CONSETT line (but by which route?), that could reach Newcastle via a new station at Team Valley, alias Low Fell. Cllr Gannon, of Gateshead, was said to be keen on this. As a major function of such a revived line would be to take more people by rail to their work, economic considerations pointed to these areas of Tyne and Wear in particular as sources of jobs in future. Much learned comparison of different possible routes (e.g. via Beamish, and/or involving Ouston Junction) was made.

**Follow-up:** AW reminded the committee that replies to the NEJTC's consultation are likely to be so numerous that it will take longer than the time originally stipulated for all of them to be read and noted suitably. Mention was also made of comments in "Modern Railways" implying that their authors had not realised that the Plan covered road issues as well as rail.

- ii. **Review of TfN Community and Rail User Group Conference on Wednesday November 25, 2020:** this, attended by AW and DF, had in effect been a Webinar. c.80 took part in it, and the event was recorded in full.
- iii. **Review of XC Scotland and North-East Stakeholder conference,** Wednesday December 9th, 2020: KS and IW 'attended' this, but it gave little scope for audience participation. Alex Bray is Stakeholder manager at XC, and a new XC timetable is due in 2022. [Meanwhile, consultations on LNER are expected some time in 2021.]
- iv. **Forthcoming Meeting, Saturday January 30<sup>th</sup>** A ZOOM meeting for both Railfuture North-East and Railfuture Yorkshire has been set up to start at 14.0 on Saturday January 30. Addressed by TONY BAXTER, of Northern, its attendance has to be pre-booked by emailing Andrew Dyson - <[andrew.dyson@platform5.com](mailto:andrew.dyson@platform5.com)> - by January 25.

## 6. Any Other Business:

- i. AC mentioned a Railcards campaign organised by Railfuture's Passenger Committee. The severe lockdowns of 2020 and onward render most railcards unusable (legally) for months at a time, but their expiry-dates have so far not been amended to take this into account. Requests to the DfT (who decides such matters) to allow a standard extension of validity have so far been turned down, on grounds of bureaucratic complication. Would Railfuture members please ask their MPs to take this up with the Department on rail users' behalf? So far, the Railfuture campaign has sought to ask DfT to authorise one Travel Voucher for each railcard now held, regardless of expiry date. AC pointed out that, once lockdown can be relaxed, rail has to do all it can to attract passengers back to the trains. Inflexibility over railcards' validity is hardly likely to help on this.
- ii. KS mentioned the current DfT consultation about Manchester's Castlefield Curve - open to replies until March 10. This prompted a long and wide-ranging discussion on how best to alleviate the real and unceasing congestion in and around central Manchester in general and

Piccadilly station in particular, with no recognisably united opinion. As this does not directly concern North-East matters, it was not pursued further - though several exchanged fervent views on the over-ambition of Transpennine with its 6 trains per hour on its core Manchester-Leeds section, and the pros and cons of sending every train from Piccadilly via Oxford Road and then Victoria, rather than alternating with use of the Guide Bridge route.

The meeting closed at 19.55, with thanks to all for their attendance, and to DF for supervising the 'ZOOM' arrangements once more.