

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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■ ■ Railfuture double bill

Railfuture members were impressed by two presentations at their November meeting. Richard McClean explained the work of the Tyne and Wear Metro DB Regio Management Company and confirmed future plans for the Metro. Chiltern Railways chairman Adrian Shooter meanwhile extolled the benefits accruing from Chiltern's 20-year franchise, such as the Evergreen 3 programme and the extension of services to Oxford.

■ ■ Railfuture adds local flavour to regional strategy plans

Branch chairman Martin Murphy co-ordinated a branch submission on the East Coast 2016 rail franchise specification and another on the Northern rail utilisation strategy, which emphasised the particular needs of the area, for the North East Combined Activists Round Table.

■ ■ Metro increases fares and modernises ticket machines

The first of the 30-year-old ticket machines was recently ceremonially removed from Byker station by two Heaton Ward councillors Henri Murison and Christopher Bartlett, pictured right. Fare increases ranging from 3% to 7% have been announced for this year. A simplification of the fare structure, ostensibly to cater for new ticket machines, has seen the graduated daily saver and return tickets discontinued and replaced by uniform day savers which, though giving access to the whole system, can make an evening trip more expensive. The Metro renewal plans include smart card technology and barriers at city centre stations.



Picture: NEXUS

■ ■ Campaign to improve the Northern 2013 franchise

The Tyne Valley Rail Users' Group has agreed to co-ordinate a broadly based campaign across the North for the improvement of the franchise. This will include all user organisations from the Cumbrian Coast to the shores of the North East and will campaign not only for improved early, late weekend and bank holiday cover, but also for an increased market share for rail. The apparent allocation of only seven extra carriages to the region by the Department for Transport will mean unpleasant journeys by overcrowded Pacer units for the foreseeable future.

■ ■ East Coast operator withdraws pocket timetable leaflets

In December 2010 East Coast Trains, to reduce costs and the environmental impact of card use, withdrew the shared service A7 timetables, on routes such as York to Newcastle and substituted personalised timetables obtainable from the internet. The move was met with strong opposition in the region and a review of the policy has now been promised. This latest action reflects the increasing isolation of the DFT-operated East Coast Trains from the concept of a national railway and ignores the needs of passengers who have no internet access.

Ferries, trains and buses need to work together

By Trevor Garrod

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The Railfuture report on Ferry Links has attracted considerable interest and some members have contacted us with their own recent experiences.

For example, one member using a Dover-Calais sailing by P&O before Christmas was pleased that they had delayed sailing to allow for extra foot passengers resulting from the weather disruption to train and air services. P&O announced that there would be buses and taxis to take passengers to Calais town centre, the times of last trains from Calais Ville station that evening and first ones the next morning, and where to obtain information about hotels.

On the other hand, a member using the Hull-Zeebrugge ferry found the route from the quay to Zeebrugge station was very pedestrian unfriendly.

It was unsignposted and difficult to find. The company was less than helpful about access from the quay to the station in Hull.

He added: "I would have complained following the trip, had I known who to complain to."

Next year it should be easier to complain about problems, as the European legislation on maritime passengers' rights will come into force. Agreement was also reached at the end of 2010 on European bus and coach users' rights so these should come into effect a year later.

However, the marketing of ferry services, and the train and bus links to and from them, will remain largely a matter of economic judgement for the operators, and so we on the Railfuture international committee will continue to monitor the situation and make suggestions.

The experiences of our members when using – or trying to use – these services remain important to us.

The Welsh Assembly told us: "One of our key aims for transport in Wales is to promote greater integration between different modes of transport, including rail, bus, airports and

sea links. We are also keen to promote more sustainable transport options for passengers and for freight."

Keir Fitch of the European Commission thanked Railfuture for the useful report and added: "I want to underline the importance attached by the European Commission to ferry lines in the field of freight transport."

Dr Mark Gleeson of Rail Users Ireland has updated us on the Rosslare-Waterford situation. Although the train service was replaced by buses in September, the service is described as "patchy", with claims of buses running 30 minutes early and taking different routes to the licensed one.

However, the rail track remains in position. A company with a European rail licence is interested in operating a train service and has visited the area and held talks with rail users and the Minister of State in the Department of Transport.

It is unlikely, though, that a train service will be restored in time

for the 2011 summer season. For up-to-date news on this issue and other rail matters in Ireland, go to www.railusers.ie

Our Ferry Links report has also attracted interest on the Isle of Man and we have made contact with the Travelwatch association there.

It is concerned with all public transport on and to the island and can be contacted at High Street, Port St Mary, Isle of Man, IM9 5DR or via its website www.travelwatch-isleofman.org

A new Isle of Man bus network provides substantially improved connections to the ferries which still run. However, Irish Sea ferry routes remain a matter of concern. The Fleetwood-Larne route has been closed by Stena while DFDS, which bought Norfolkline, has announced closure of the routes from Birkenhead and Heysham to Dublin.

A few copies of the Railfuture Ferry Links report are still available from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

London and South East

By Roger Blake
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■ ■ Camden Road poser

High-speed rail planners are considering linking the proposed line from London to Birmingham with the existing high-speed line from London to the Channel Tunnel via the North London Line. It could therefore mean high-speed trains passing through Camden Road station. Transport for London has spent millions upgrading the North London Line with new longer trains and uprated signalling, and rail campaigners will want to ensure that passengers and freight on the NLL are not adversely affected. The simplest method would be to resuscitate earlier plans for four-tracking Camden Road station and further west.

■ ■ Timetable changes could threaten local services

The introduction of a new fleet of 30 four-car class 379 electric trains later this year, primarily for Stansted Express services, has led operator National Express East Anglia to consider introducing timetable changes in December this year and also in May 2012. Local campaigners will try to ensure that improvements for long-distance travellers are not achieved at the expense of passengers relying on stopping services.

■ ■ Railfuture looks ahead to demand over the next 20 years

Our branch has been liaising with rail user groups, local divisions and neighbouring branches to produce a consolidated Railfuture response to Network Rail's draft route utilisation strategy for London and the South East which will affect services and investment over the next 20 years. The RUS has already identified acute challenges in meeting demand on the Great Eastern and the South Western main lines.

■ ■ Rail action plan for Kent ignores golden opportunities

Two rail summits last year have led to a draft rail action plan for Kent. Published by the county council in December, the final document was expected to be launched at the third Kent rail summit this month. The action plan concentrates on the South Eastern franchise planned to start in three years time. It virtually ignores Southern, which also operates in Kent as well as the adjoining counties.

The map of the Kent rail network implies that all services start and finish at the county boundary! As well as continued improvements in national services especially radially to and from London, the action plan looks forward to better links with continental Europe, such as more Ashford International services and a Trans-Manche Metro. Local campaigners such as Marsh Link Action Group want similar stress laid on the need to improve the orbital link between Ashford and Brighton which is operated by Southern.

■ ■ Puzzle of 22 schemes vying for share in £600 million fund

Rail campaigners were puzzled by a Government list published in October of 22 local transport projects across the country which were to benefit from a £600 million pot to fund local authority schemes.

The list appeared random. It was not geographic, grouped by mode, nor alphabetical. It now appears that the projects may have been ranked according to their cost-benefit score. Not much comfort, thank goodness, for advocates of the Bexhill to Hastings link road, listed 22nd! Final decisions are expected by the end of this year.

Eco fund could boost rail

With much talk of the Big Society, and the Localism Bill now going through Parliament, a February conference was timely to discuss what effects these might have on rail developments.

The keynote speaker at the Lewes conference organised by the Association for Community Rail Partnerships was the local MP Norman Baker. Mr Baker, as local transport minister in the

coalition government, has already unveiled plans for the £560 million local sustainable transport fund.

The fund is designed for smaller transport projects which bring environmental benefits, and bidding guidance was issued in January for the first round of bids in April.

Only one project per authority will be allowed and involvement of community and voluntary groups and access to third party funding will be taken



into account in evaluating schemes, so we hope that some community rail projects may benefit from this fund.

£2m eco station opens

Two major station projects on community rail lines were opened at the end of 2010. At Accrington a new eco-station has been built at a cost of £2 million, part-funded by the European Union's Interreg programme and with major support from Lancashire County Council and Northern Rail.

The station, supported by the East Lancashire Rail Partnership, is built with recycled materials, the stone block coming from nearby former mill buildings.

Rain water is collected and used for the toilets, while solar heating and good insulation keep passengers and staff warm, with electricity generated from wind turbines.

The station has already been formally rated as "excellent" through a Building Research Establishment environmental assessment. The station is

also linked to other transport modes – cycling and walking routes and bus services. Watch for more "sus stations" in future.

£1 million worth of improvements at Shotton were formally opened in November. Better links between the high level (Borderlands line) and low level (Chester-Holyhead main line) were included, as were ticket machines, new cycle facilities and improved signage and pedestrian access.

New information screens and a leaflet to promote travel to Shotton completed the package. The partnership delivering the improvements included Welsh Assembly Government, Flintshire County Council, Taith, Arriva Trains Wales and their sister bus company, Borderlands Line Steering Group, Sustrans and Network Rail.

The Darlington-Bishop Auckland "Bishop Line" is the 27th line to be formally designated a community railway, allowing greater involvement of local people and freedom to try new ideas.



GREEN: Recycled stone and wood at Accrington eco station

Picture: CHRIS AUSTIN