

railwatch

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Graphic: ELLIE KING



Pinchpoint in Manchester



Our picture shows platform 14 at Manchester Piccadilly as the sun sets on a cold, January day. Platform 14 is one of only two through platforms at Piccadilly and is part of the Castlefield Corridor (shown in the map above). About 40,000 passengers use the two platforms each day and there is now a team of 12 staff to manage the crowds on just those two platforms. But the trains are congested too. The key to unlocking congestion in Manchester and throughout the North of England is the Castlefield Corridor.

See pages 2, 3 and 5

**RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNER
OF THE YEAR 2020**

Further to the inaugural award at the AGM in Cardiff 2019 and in recognition of the dedication and achievements of Railfuture volunteers, we will be presenting the award for Campaigner of the Year at the AGM in Birmingham on Saturday 27 June 2020. The award will be presented after the formal business is concluded and will be followed by lunch and an opportunity to network.

So, do you know someone who has contributed to the success of Railfuture or someone who has raised the profile of Railfuture on key issues?

Perhaps they work behind the scenes, helping their local branch?

Whoever they are, if you think they deserve recognition we would like to hear about them.

We will require a written statement of no more than 500 words identifying how the nominee has contributed to Railfuture's mission to be the number one advocate for rail users and the rail industry and how they have enhanced Railfuture's campaigning for a bigger, better railway.

■ *Nominations may be made by any Railfuture member*

■ *The nominee must be a member of Railfuture*

■ *All Railfuture members are eligible to be nominated*

■ *You may nominate yourself*

■ *The deadline for nominations to be received is 30 April 2020*

For further details or to submit a nomination please email Membership Director, Wendy Thorne: wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk

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Northern Hub is an unfinished job

Parts of the Northern Hub rail project have been built, but we are still waiting for several infrastructure interventions, dependent on Government decisions, to complete the task. The much-publicised problems of train operator Northern were inextricably linked to the failure to complete the Northern Hub. **STEPHEN WARING** examines how this lengthy saga rolled out – while passengers stood on platforms throughout the North waiting patiently for real improvements.

On a December Sunday in 2017, Arriva-owned Northern ran the first trains over the newly installed Ordsall Chord, which allowed some Leeds-Calder Valley-Manchester trains to be extended to Oxford Road station. Close to the university, Oxford Road is a good drop-off for workplaces and education, as well as for attractions and onward connections.

We were told in the autumn of 2019 that Northern was no longer allowed to fulfil its franchise commitment to continue this service. By contrast, TransPennine Express is permitted to run twice-hourly round Ordsall from North East England to the airport.

How can this be fair to the many passengers from the Calder Valley who want to travel through to Oxford Road?

Instead of promised new services, since the botched May 2018 timetable, we suffer continuing train delays and cancellations. Frustrated passengers are finding other ways to travel.

The North West electrification scheme was announced in 2009.

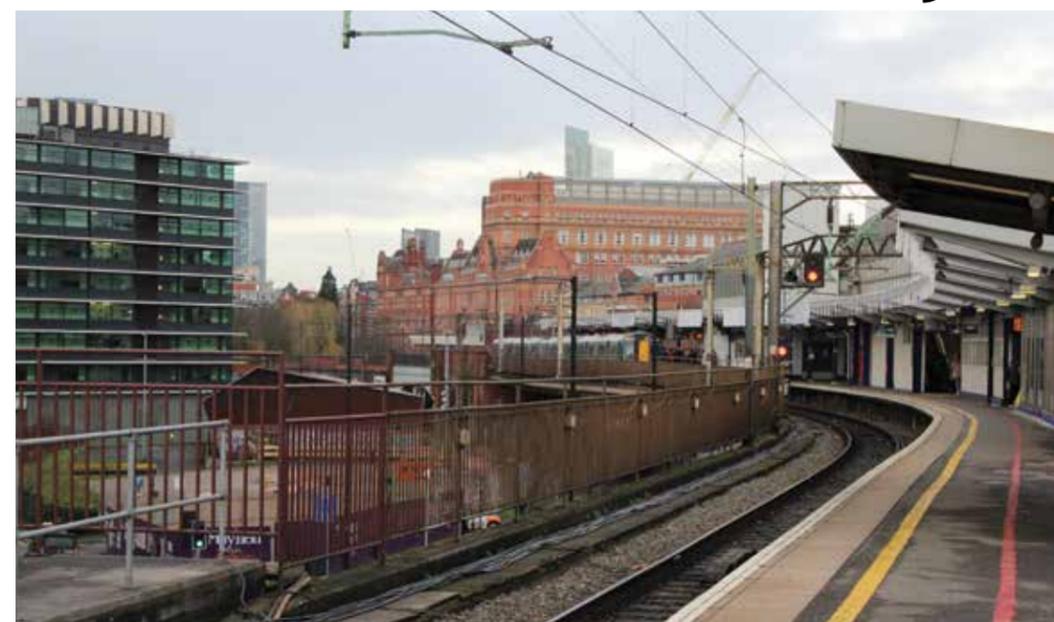
One year later, the Manchester Hub Study of February 2010 began the Northern Hub which became the "Great North Rail Project".

The Ordsall Chord, which helped to join up Manchester's divided network, was given Treasury approval in 2011-12, with massive support from regional leaders.

Theoretically it heralded marvellous new connectivity throughout the Northern network.

But Ordsall was less than half the Hub. By 2014, Network Rail's plan for two additional through platforms at Manchester Piccadilly and an enlarged Oxford Road station was seen as the "single option".

By early 2016, a Transport



TIGHT SPOT: Platform 14 at Manchester Piccadilly station with a TransPennine Express train from Manchester Airport to Edinburgh. Platforms 1-12 are in the terminus part of the station. Platforms 13 and 14 carry all the through trains, including these TPE trains from Manchester Airport to Scotland, as well as local services. Plans for new platforms 15 and 16 (which would have been built to the left of the line shown in our picture) have been on hold since 2016

and Works Act enquiry was complete, and the project was ready to go. For some reason, the Department for Transport refused to publish the TWA report, and the plans to solve the congestion problems have been "pending" for the past four years.

The extra platforms are needed because so many trains now pass through.

With frequent trains, there is insufficient time for the trains to stop to allow passengers on and off, before another train is queueing up to come into the platform.

The timetable is inevitably disrupted because minor delays can cause widespread chaos – and it seems unlikely that solutions such as digital signalling can possibly prove a magical solution.

The aim is to run at least 15 trains an hour along the Castlefield Corridor, between Piccadilly and Deansgate, including the still-to-be-delivered Calder Valley service. The situation is exacerbated by passenger trains having to wait while one freight train an hour lurches through on its way to or from Trafford Park.

Network Rail carried out an investigation into how the desired timetable could be reliably accommodated. Its *Congested Infrastructure Report* was published in September 2019 and concluded that it was not realistic. The report said that

13 trains an hour are the most that can be run with the present infrastructure. Almost certainly that means timetable cuts are likely in the short term in an effort to improve reliability.

In January, Transport for the North's board requested the Secretary of State to agree the TWA order and start detailed planning on Piccadilly and Oxford Road.

TfN also backed other options around Manchester including junction improvements (such as possible grade separation at Ordsall Lane), development of "three quick wins", and assessment of options for freight to avoid Castlefield.

Meanwhile, train operators continue to struggle with delays to services caused by the congested infrastructure. Delays to TPE trains have a knock-on effect on Northern's ability to run trains on time.

Northern, along with the rest of the railway, lacked back-up plans to deal with late delivery of electrification projects, which led to the May 2018 chaos, followed by the late delivery of new rolling stock.

When new trains did start running on the Calder Valley route in October, months of delays and cancellations were blamed on staff shortages and "depot problems". Many passengers and campaigners agree that Northern ran out, not only of money but of external factors to blame for its problems.

They also agree that Transport Secretary Grant Shapps was correct to replace Arriva with state ownership.

But the external problems remain to be resolved – and not just in Manchester. A single new platform at Leeds is going to take another year to complete.

The time for "assessing options" is surely done. Capacity and electrification projects essential for green growth must go ahead. Dare we hope for a positive announcement by the time this *Railwatch* is published?

The Government should require train and track operators to work as one, distribute resources equitably, cooperate with regional bodies such as Transport for the North and restore broken promises.

Top priority must be a timetable that works.

References:

- TfN Board Meeting, 8 January 2020, item 5 <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Item-5-Central-Manchester-Report.pdf>
- Castlefield Congested Infrastructure Report, September 2019 <https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Castlefield-Corridor-congested-infrastructure-report.pdf>
- *Stephen Waring is chair of HADRAG, the Halifax & District Rail Action Group, a co-founder of the Electric Railway Charter.*

Picture: PAUL ABELL

Chair's column: A flood of decisions at last – and more to come

There have been plenty of opportunities for Railfuture to exercise influence lately, with Government decisions on rail coming thick and fast.

We, especially our media rep Bruce Williamson, have been busy with radio, TV and press appearances about those decisions.

The media have sought us out because we give an honest, realistic but challenging point of view. We aim to get our policy position out quickly through our website, and have received feedback from the media that the articles and press releases there are easy to read, in terms that the public can understand. I encourage members to check our website to find the public statements made by Railfuture.

The railways must focus on performance. The Northern franchise made the headlines, but several other operators are also suffering performance problems, often for reasons outside their control which can be traced back to past poor government decision making. The way that the

Government assesses franchise bids means that bidders win if they quote a low price and assume that everything will go according to plan. When it does not, it is the passenger who suffers. Railfuture welcomed the Government announcement of funding for "Reversing Beeching", but £500 million will be enough to reopen only about 25 miles of railway at today's typical Network Rail costings.

The Government funding should be used in part as seed capital to prove the viability of potential schemes and draw in more funding from elsewhere, so that a pipeline of projects can be established.

To use the Government funding efficiently, a streamlined approval and implementation process is required, not constrained by current Network Rail procedures.

In the short term it is existing freight lines such as Ashington, Blyth and Tyne, Wisbech, and Cowley which should be reopened to passengers. Our longer term recommendations include Skelmersdale, Skipton-

Colne and Matlock-Buxton. Funding for Hoo, Levenmouth and East West Rail has already been announced.

HS2 is an essential part of doubling rail capacity in Britain so that more people can travel by rail rather than road or air, reducing carbon emissions.

There will probably be a slow start while contractor costs are reviewed, but any descope must not reduce HS2's ability to release capacity on existing main line routes.

While the green light for HS2 is great news, it will do nothing for passengers now, so we also call on the Government and rail companies to sort out the problems which are causing poor reliability and customer satisfaction. This does not necessarily mean spending lots of money, just getting timetabling, rostering, staff terms and conditions, customer service, ticketing and the introduction of new and cascaded trains right. In addition to HS2, the Government must invest in our existing railways to achieve a zero-



Railfuture chair Chris Page

carbon future. Railfuture's 2030 Manifesto (see Railfuture website) sets out the 10 key topics which must be addressed to achieve this.

There is another big decision still to come from the Government, the outcome of the Williams review. Railfuture will be looking for more devolution and for franchises or concessions to be awarded on the basis of past performance, not just on the premium payment.

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■ ■ Top of the list to reverse the Beeching cuts

Following the Government's expressed desire to reverse some of the Beeching cuts, Railfuture East Anglia has stepped up its No 1 reopening campaign, the Wisbech-March line. Reopening would produce more than £4 in benefits for every £1 spent, so the Government could confidently push ahead with it immediately. Local councils continue to make progress but the pace is glacial, with five years having passed since the benefits were calculated in a Network Rail GRIP (Governance for Railway Investment Projects) study. A sensible step would be to give the go-ahead for Wisbech alongside work to increase capacity at Ely so a Wisbech-Ely train service could run.

In January it was confirmed that East West Rail will reinstate a Bedford-Cambridge railway on a new alignment serving Tempsford, St Neots and Cambourne. East West Rail will also call at the proposed new station at Cambridge South (serving the huge biomedical campus and hospital at Addenbrooke's) which will provide connections for London King's Cross, Liverpool Street and other Thameslink destinations.

Railfuture East Anglia is also keen to see reopening of the 20-mile Cambridge-Haverhill line which closed in the 1960s. Haverhill's population has since grown six-fold from 5,000 to 30,000, with people reluctantly commuting to Cambridge by car or bus.

On a smaller scale, there are ongoing plans to reopen the station at Soham together with the restoration of the Newmarket West Curve.

The extension of the Ely to King's Lynn line north to Hunstanton has strong support with Norfolk County Council which is currently carrying out a study. Also in Norfolk, an imaginative group wants to link the successful Greater Anglia Norwich-Sheringham line to the heritage North Norfolk Railway to Holt and then via Fakenham to join the Mid-Norfolk Railway to create the Norfolk Orbital Railway.

■ ■ Cambridge South station urgently required

Network Rail Anglia held a series of public consultation meetings in January for the proposed Cambridge South station. Railfuture East Anglia met Network Rail to discuss priorities for the station, which will serve Addenbrooke's Hospital, the biomedical campus and huge new housing developments. We called for good facilities for both commuters and hospital patients travelling by train.

Greater Cambridge Partnership estimates that by the time the station opens in 2025, there will be an estimated 67,500 daily trips to the hospital and the campus. More than 46,000 are predicted to travel by car "if current travel patterns continue".

Professor Helen Valentine of Anglia Ruskin University said the partnership must secure a new rail station near Addenbrooke's as a priority. She said: "It is truly scary for that part of Cambridge with huge volumes of traffic. It would be a disaster without the station."

The partnership's transport director Peter Blake said the new station will improve conditions for people and businesses nearby. The station will have four platforms. The future East West Rail line will provide links to Bedford, Milton Keynes, Bicester and Oxford, while an upgraded line via Newmarket will provide trains to Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich and Norwich. King's Lynn, Ely, Stansted Airport, Bishop's Cleeve, Royston, Stevenage, London, Gatwick Airport and Brighton will all be accessible by rail.

To accommodate extra train services the line from Cambridge station through Cambridge South will be four-tracked, with a flyover at the junction where King's Cross and Liverpool Street trains diverge at Shepreth branch junction. This section of track is already the busiest in East Anglia with 10 trains an hour each way off peak. East West Rail will bring another seven trains an hour each way.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia
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Picture: GEOFFREY ROBINSON

DIESEL DIVERSION: A Hull Trains diesel unit at Kettering North junction en route to London St Pancras, re-routed when the East Coast main line was closed for a series of upgrades between Peterborough and London King's Cross in January. In the foreground are the new 25kV masts which will provide an electric train service from London St Pancras to Corby later this year. The revamped inter-city timetable on the main line will however cause problems for a large number of passengers. Sadly the inter-city services will remain dependent on diesels after the Government shelved electrification plans for London to Leicester, Nottingham and Sheffield in 2017. Railfuture is campaigning to get the electrification scheme reinstated

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■ ■ Downside of timetable changes

Railfuture East Midlands is already looking forward to December when there will be substantial changes to the East Midlands Railway timetable. We coordinated our response to the changes with Railfuture Lincolnshire and other Railfuture branches. While welcoming some faster journeys and earlier morning and later evening services on the Midland main line, we are concerned about how new train services to Corby will be separated from the inter-city trains to Nottingham and Sheffield, which are scheduled to run non-stop between St Pancras and Kettering. The present proposals will force passengers from Derby and Sheffield to change trains twice to travel to Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton or Luton Airport Parkway. This would make rail travel less attractive so we have presented suggestions to ease those problems.

■ ■ 400,000 have their 'cake'

Railfuture members joined other campaigners in January to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reopening of Narborough station, which now boasts 400,000 passengers a year. A special birthday cake was shared by Friends of Narborough Station and representatives from Blaby District Council, Narborough Parish Council and East Midlands Railway. The station reopened just two years after its closure in the Beeching cuts. FoNS volunteers continue to keep the station looking good. Other communities along the Leicester-Hinckley line, such as Blaby, Croft, and Elmesthorpe, want to see more stations reopened.

■ ■ Freight gateway to passengers

Freight trains started running into the East Midlands Gateway logistics park (near Kegworth and close to East Midlands Airport) in January, with two trains a day from Felixstowe docks in Suffolk. The new

terminal has enough capacity to handle 16 freight trains daily and is served by a spur off the freight-only line through Castle Donington. Railfuture would like to see this line reopened for passengers, for a Birmingham-Nottingham service, stopping at a reopened Castle Donington station, which would be 30 minutes faster than the existing route through Derby.

■ ■ Questions for CrossCountry

We welcomed David Jones of CrossCountry Trains as guest speaker at the Railfuture East Midlands meeting in January. We enjoyed a candid discussion on a wide range of issues, including fares (especially the split-ticketing issue) and CrossCountry's "advance purchase on the day" system. It was encouraging to hear that train operators are collaborating more to the benefit of passengers.



Railfuture and North West Leicestershire District Council have backed CRIL (the Campaign to Reopen the Leicester-Burton Ivanhoe Line) in forming a community interest company with the legal status to conduct a feasibility study on behalf of stakeholders. Meetings of the feasibility study committee were held in December and January, with the district council providing a meeting room free of charge.

The online retailer Amazon is "interested" in the reopening plan, which is also supported by the county council, according to the *Leicester Mercury*. The multinational company said it could benefit staff at its Coalville warehouse which is close to the railway. Freight trains continue to operate on the route, however no passengers have been carried on the line since the Beeching cuts in 1964.

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New tunnel and/or new platforms

On 1 March, DB Arriva-run Northern was stripped of its franchise following the decision in January by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps. The decision came after train punctuality in the Manchester area slumped. Passengers were waiting not just for trains – but for new platforms. Railfuture vice-president PAUL ABELL gives some background to the appalling punctuality, and what caused it.



Picture: PAUL ABELL

It all seemed so easy in 2010. Option 2 of Network Rail's Manchester Hub Rail Study formed the basis of a series of projects that would greatly improve train services across the North of England. In fact, to reflect the wide geographical spread of the improvements the project was soon renamed the Northern Hub.

Ten years later, reliability of the train services has collapsed, according to *On Time* statistics for January. Yet the Northern Hub was supposed to cater for an expected increase in rail traffic. What has gone wrong?

One product of the Northern Hub was the Ordsall Chord, which means direct trains from Manchester Airport to Yorkshire do not have to reverse at Manchester Piccadilly.

However they have to travel along the Castlefield Corridor, a two-track section on viaducts from the through platforms at Piccadilly (13 and 14), through Oxford Road and Deansgate stations to Castlefield Junction.

Platforms 13 and 14 at Piccadilly are such an obvious bottleneck that the Northern Hub provided for two new through platforms (15 and 16) to be built at Piccadilly, south of 13 and 14, on a viaduct over Fairfield Street.

But such an improvement in the resilience of the railway network is not reflected when the numbers are crunched in the benefit-cost-ratio "machine" which is used to judge whether the project is worthy enough to go ahead or not.

The application for the necessary Transport & Works Act Order has been sitting in the Department for Transport since 2015. The works should have been completed in 2018.

Even if the Order is eventually granted, there will be a fight to get funding for the project, especially since Manchester is neither in Scotland nor Greater London. Instead we have had another report from Network Rail, the *Castlefield Corridor*

NORTHERN HUB BOTTLENECK: A Northern train leaves Oxford Road station en route to Piccadilly on the Castlefield Corridor

Congested Infrastructure Report. This was published in September and will be followed by a second report "for publication in Spring 2020" which will give options to alleviate the capacity constraints identified in the first report.

The delays caused by this congestion on the Castlefield Corridor have repercussions for train services across much of northern England.

Older readers may remember that the Northern Hub has now been running for more time than it took for the Americans to put a man on the moon.

Manchester Oxford Road September's Castlefield report is worth reading in full. With

commendable honesty it admits that there are too many trains timetabled for the existing infrastructure.

In particular Oxford Road station sees 93% occupation, with only four minutes in every hour available for recovering from delays.

This compares with the international standard of 85% occupation for suburban services (not the mixture of class 1, 2 and 4 trains at Oxford Road). It assumes that trains can arrive at a station platform two minutes after the previous train has left the platform. The Northern Hub envisages an increase in platform capacity at Oxford

- Manchester Airport-Blackpool North
- Manchester Airport-Liverpool Lime Street
- Crewe-Trafford Park freight
- Alderley Edge-Southport
- Crewe-Liverpool Lime Street
- Manchester Airport-Edinburgh
- Hazel Grove-Blackpool North
- Manchester Airport-Newcastle
- Norwich-Liverpool Lime Street
- Manchester Piccadilly-Llandudno
- Manchester Airport-Barrow-in-Furness
- Manchester Airport-Redcar Central

The trains listed left pass through Castlefield Corridor westbound in just one week-day hour
Below: Manchester Piccadilly Platform 14 indicator board

Departures	Page 1 of 2
10:30 Crewe	13 10:39
via Manchester Airport	
10:30 Blackpool North	Cancelled
10:30 Hull	9 10:50
10:37 Alderley Edge	13 10:42
10:38 Liverpool Lime St	14 10:39
10:40 Rose Hill Marple	2 On time
10:41 Chester	5 On time
via Altrincham	
	10:37:29

The Government's Operator of Last Resort

The Department for Transport has a company called DfT OLR Holdings Ltd, where OLR stands for Operator of Last Resort. Believe it or not, Companies House records show that a company previously known as DfT OLR3 Limited was renamed Northern Trains Limited on 29 Jan 2020 but the "special resolution to change the name of the company was agreed and passed by the members" on 24 October 2019. Then there is DfT OLR4 Limited, which is recorded at Companies House as changing its name from Transpennine Express Limited on 20 March 2019, following a special resolution passed on 5 March 2019.

Road to match the provision of 15 and 16 at Piccadilly.

Possible freight alternatives

Even worse, the report mentions that Castlefield Junction handles 30 train movements per hour, the line occupancy problem being exacerbated lengthy container trains which take longer to go through than passenger trains.

Diverting the freight trains to leave Trafford Park westbound along the Warrington Central line and over new connections to the West Coast main line was considered in the original Manchester Hub study. But neither of the two possible routes considered (via Padgate and Dallam, or via Glazebrook and Kenyon) was felt to be worthy of further investigation at that time.

Railfuture's *Blueprint for the North* could be the basis for a reconsideration of these routes.

More tracks?

In 2010, four-tracking the Castlefield Corridor by building a new viaduct to the south of the existing one was ruled out of further investigation by the Manchester Hub study. For one thing, the area round Castlefield Junction is complicated by Roman archaeological remains.

Will a tunnel do any better?

Mancunians have seen a succession of proposals for a rail tunnel under the city centre over the years. The next tunnel proposal is contained in the *Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040*.

This tunnel is regarded as a long-term option to be delivered from the mid-2030s. The 2020-2025 Draft Delivery Plan for the Transport Strategy includes the development of options for a metro tunnel. Whether a tunnel could also accommodate the wide range of trains currently using 13 and 14 at Piccadilly is unlikely.

But what might be done?

In Birmingham, both the Snow Hill and New Street lines tunnel under the city centre, while Liverpool has a host of tunnels, both in use and dormant, dating back to the days of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. Is it too much to ask that Manchester should also have a double-track main line tunnel under the city centre, a very positive relief to the Castlefield Corridor?

Such a link could be used for services between London and towns such as Bolton (population 128,000) and Rochdale (pop. 108,000) in the same way as such services are enjoyed by Harrogate (pop. 75,000) and Skipton (pop. 15,000) east of the Pennines.

Overcrowded and unloved – but Cross Country could be an inter-city solution

Critical eyes were turned on CrossCountry when airline FlyBe appealed to the Government in January for a loan to “subsidise” its unprofitable domestic routes.

People asked why the railways were unable to provide reasonably priced domestic travel opportunities rather than “forcing” people to choose polluting air travel.

CrossCountry is already at a crossroads and Railfuture policy director Ian Brown examines its past and possible future, as the Government announced in February that it was extending the franchise until October this year.

By Ian Brown

The CrossCountry (XC) franchise was awarded to Arriva as long ago as July 2007.

It started in the November of that year with a series of service swaps between different franchises, which were implemented in the December national timetable change.

Now XC is again being considered for a degree of “franchise remapping” and it is probably worth considering just how well these changes have fared in terms of investment in service development.

The Birmingham-Scotland services via the West Coast main line were transferred from the then Virgin CrossCountry to Virgin Trains West Coast.

The service was reconfigured as an hourly train from London Euston, serving Milton Keynes, Coventry, Birmingham International and then onwards as before either to Glasgow Central or Edinburgh Waverley (via Haymarket).

By 2011, some XC through services were extended from Edinburgh to Glasgow.

We know that the aim was to cut back mileage on the East Coast main line franchise. The effect of the changes was to remove the important every-two-hours Glasgow-Peterborough link.

In 2020, the main Anglo-Scottish service is operated by Avanti West Coast. It is well-loaded and 11-coach Pendolino trains on many, but not all services.

Some are still operated by seriously overcrowded diesel Voyager trains on a 400 mile journey. This is being corrected, albeit about 15 years late, by Avanti ordering new electric trains. On balance this route has benefited massively from franchise remapping. Another route that was also “remapped” at the time was Liverpool-



NO ROOM FOR BIKES: Two cyclists are ordered not to board a CrossCountry Turbostar train at March, Cambridgeshire, in September 2017. The train is bound for Stansted Airport



SQUEEZE: A CrossCountry three-car Turbostar train (centre) heading for Stansted Airport leaves Melton Mowbray with a new Crossrail electric train, left, on its way from Derby to London hauled by an old diesel loco, and a freight train, right, both waiting to pass through the two-track station in July 2018

Manchester to Glasgow-Edinburgh. It was transferred to TransPennine Express.

This was a half-hearted Cinderella-style operation where Virgin used two-car diesel multiple units.

By contrast, TransPennine saw it as a major commercial opportunity, the chance to boost passenger numbers between two of the most important pairs of cities in Britain. It introduced better diesel trains

and later, with healthy growth on the route, four-car electric trains. The seat layout in the electrics was however based on working on suburban routes. Following the 2015 franchise re-let, TransPennine recently introduced a new fleet of class 397 electric trains.

There were some teething problems but quality improved and the Liverpool-Glasgow service was also reinstated. So this route has also benefited

A little bit of a boost from Turbostar transfer

The Government announced in February that it was providing £2.5 million to make more seats available on CrossCountry and to improve its booking system. The extra seats are likely to come when six West Midlands Railways’ three-car Turbostars transfer to East Midlands Railways and operate in future as two-car trains. The spare coaches will transfer to CrossCountry so its two-car Turbostars can run as three-cars. CrossCountry is also likely to make more extensive use of InterCity 125s (HSTs), especially after the 125s are refurbished with retention-tank toilets and air-operated carriage doors by December this year. Like many other projects on the railways, it is running late.

massively both in terms of capacity and quality from the franchise remapping away from XC.

Remapped into XC were the Cardiff-Nottingham and Birmingham-Stansted services. These have continued to be operated by overcrowded three-car diesel multiple trains. There is no evidence that passengers have benefited from these services being awarded to XC. The remaining XC services have continued largely unchanged and are operated by four-car and five-car Voyager diesel trains.

A few InterCity 125s are hanging on and providing some of XC’s services. The result is overcrowding over long distances throughout the week and no incentive whatsoever to provide cheaper fares.

Running four-car diesel trains from Aberdeen to Penzance does not suggest any real interest in providing a long distance regional service. However, it provides an opportunity to continue to charge high fares.

Over the years the extremities of the XC network have gradually been eroded.

Gatwick and Brighton are no longer served.

Where XC has extended it has generally redeployed a static level of resources to increase frequency over the core route.

This has actually alleviated overcrowding, particularly between Plymouth and Birmingham and to Manchester. “New” XC franchise

This was due on 31 March 2016, four years ago! The franchise was then extended to December 2019, with an invitation to tender for the replacement franchise issued in October 2019. It has not yet been let.

Franchise remapping is back on the table, but in consultation terms is limited to reversing part of the changes implemented at the start of the XC franchise.

Part of the Nottingham to Cardiff and Stansted services may well revert to devolved control from the West Midlands, where they are seen as underperforming, particularly over the Birmingham to Leicester and Derby sections.

The West Midlands area has a much stronger vision of the part that rail can play in the West Midlands as does Railfuture’s West Midlands branch.

A further period of service stagnation is not acceptable in a world where devolved authorities need to provide comprehensive public transport.

Railfuture believes that XC routes play a key role in providing sustainable transport in Britain and that such routes should be revitalised with increased capacity. The new franchise for XC should rise to this opportunity just as TransPennine did.

We must acknowledge though that the average journey length on XC is around 60 miles. But there are many short journeys being made on XC and there may be better ways of providing for growth for such journeys, particularly around large cities.

Maybe XC could concentrate on providing an integrated service in conjunction with other inter-city operators, which would require co-ordination in a national inter-city timetable.

There are essentially two ways of achieving this. It could be planned properly in conjunction with other operators to provide Britain with a comprehensive



SHARING THE STATION: A CrossCountry Super Voyager train for Paignton, left, at Bristol Parkway in September 2019 with a Great Western local diesel train for Great Malvern, right

inter-city network. Alternatively, we could consider abolishing the XC franchise. The level of subsidy provided to XC is high, particularly the network charge given the high route mileage it runs on. Many of these costs

are not avoidable though, suggesting that the best way to reduce them is to increase train capacity and expand the income from ticket sales. Where routes have been transferred away from XC, they have generally

fared better. Railfuture does not advocate abolishing XC but the question remains whether some or all elements of XC would fare better being transferred to other operators, particularly those who operate over large parts of the XC network.

For example, Glasgow-Edinburgh could revert to LNER. Edinburgh-Bristol could transfer to LNER, South West Railways and Great Western.

Railfuture members who use this service are acutely aware that Birmingham New Street is not a natural break for the XC service pattern in terms of the number of passenger journeys and the operational constraints at the station.

But XC could be viewed as an opportunity, with some restructuring, to provide an integrated inter-city service for Britain. Railfuture will campaign for this.

Rail franchise mirrors motorway network

By Mark Parry

Railfuture members expressed their disappointment with CrossCountry Trains when Alex Bray, its stakeholder liaison manager, addressed Railfuture Yorkshire’s September meeting in Sheffield.

CrossCountry is the only franchise that neither serves London nor operates any stations, which reflects the nature of the franchise, but other negatives were pointed out that we felt could not be justified.

The franchise was taken over by Arriva in 2007 and covers the largest area of any franchise. It operates with five IC125 trains, 58 Voyagers and 29 Turbostars.

It calls at 118 stations and employs 1,900 people. In 2019, the franchise was extended until October 2020. This short period means the owners Arriva (ultimately Deutsche Bahn) and the UK Government do not want to invest money in more much-needed rolling stock.

Over the past 12 years passenger numbers have increased from 32 million to 41 million with very few additional seats added. The overcrowding experienced on these services has been widely reported in the rail press with many pleading with CrossCountry to use further old IC125s now stabled out of use.

Unfortunately bringing old stock into line with current legislation on accessibility will be costly. I can’t help wondering where the

extra nine million fares collected are going to. It turns out that £1 million per week is going back to the Department for Transport. Alex pointed out that some fares are not as low as they might be to avoid further overcrowding.

The CrossCountry network mirrors the motorway network so it operates in competition with cars, coaches and also with air travel.

CrossCountry’s central functions take place at its headquarters in Birmingham, with local operating teams around the country. The trains are maintained by other companies.

The IC125s are being refurbished to make them accessible for those with disabilities, provide new power outlets, wifi and new toilets. On the Voyagers, a driver advisory system is being installed to help use diesel more efficiently.

CrossCountry’s customer profile tends to be older, leisure travellers who are generally more affluent and more women than men.

Most customers use the service only once or twice a year but there are regular commuters on some stretches creating pinch points. On average, tickets are bought 15 days in advance. There is an 86%

satisfaction rate, but that is from those who choose to travel on CrossCountry.

Several Railfuture members who travelled to the branch meeting chose the longer journey back to Leeds on Northern. I doubt we would be in the 86% of satisfied customers, claimed by CrossCountry. This is mainly because of overcrowding and the seat reservation system, more on which below. CrossCountry hopes to reduce the journey time between Derby and Newcastle, but one Railfuture member pointed out that because of other services, CrossCountry would simply have to wait longer at stations for a path.

Alex said the situation was being discussed with Network Rail and other operators. As well as the overcrowding issue, a key complaint has been the

seat reservation system. Some passengers buy a ticket on the day of travel after the train has set off, and make a seat reservation. Passengers who have sat in such seats when the screen said “available” are confused when challenged by the new customer and this can lead to confrontations. This situation is likely to get worse as CrossCountry is trialling same day “advance” purchases.

In a show of hands, most members present said they were against seat reservations after departure.

In summarising, Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith said CrossCountry needs to provide much more rolling stock, end during-travel seat reservations and consider new routes such as Leeds to South Wales.



Cartoon: PRIVATE EYE 1514

Don't give up

I was appalled to read in *Railwatch* 162 the letters from some people who are not renewing their subs to Railfuture. What miserable, negative defeatists they are! They ought to know by now that individuals acting on their own to bring about change in the railways will get nowhere. It is only by acting together in an organisation like Railfuture that we have any chance at all of seeing progress. It is not true that no progress has been made on the railways. Obviously far more should have been done, but that is not the fault of Railfuture but the fault of this miserable Tory government that we have had to endure for so long, whose current obsession is "Get Brexit done" to the exclusion of everything else including the railways. Rather than quitting, people should stay in Railfuture and try to put things right.

Keith Bradshaw, Riversdale, Giggleswick, Settle BD24 0AW

Access for All

I have been very heartened by Railfuture's attention to accessibility. Accessibility is so totally inadequate for nearly the entire rail network that it is surely high time every train operator was required by law to have a senior level accessibility officer.

Sally Miles, Farquhar Street, Hertford SG13 3BW

Wrong track lesson

I have been a member of the Railway Development Society and Railfuture for many years and have enjoyed attending meetings and reading *Railwatch*.

My 1991 book *How I Became a Train Driver* covers my employment as a locomotive engineman for 18 years at Aberystwyth, Neasden and Crewe and is still available.

I remember being reprimanded at Towyn Intermediate School in the 1940s when I looked out to see a locomotive shunting in the yard.

The teacher told me: "There is nothing out there for you, Davies!" How wrong he was.

On my third attempt to work for the railway and after being interviewed by the shedmaster at Machynlleth, I started work at Aberystwyth as an engine cleaner. I was promoted to fireman and also worked at the former Great Central depot at Neasden, London.

Later I instructed Pete Waterman on how to fire Flying Scotsman during its period at the Llangollen Railway in 1995.

At Neasden there was much talk that we footplate staff would soon be going to Paris. It never happened, but the GCR was



Picture: ANDREW IRVINE

Farewell to Railfuture campaigner Linda

Botanist Linda Irvine, who was a stalwart of Railfuture's sales and promotion team for more than 20 years, has died aged 91.

Linda, the daughter of a railwayman, died in February in a convalescent home after being treated in Whittington Hospital, north London.

She lived near Arnos Grove on London's Piccadilly line and started work at the Natural History Museum 70 years ago.

A specialist in seaweed, algae, bryophytes and lichens, she was co-author of a book about seaweeds of the British Isles which was published in 1977 and

built with the aim of extending under the Channel to continental Europe, in line with the vision of Sir Edward Watkin. When I returned to Aberystwyth as a fireman, the Cambrian line was still busy with holiday traffic and steam engines were common.

By contrast, during a two-week trip to Switzerland in the 1950s, electric trains were the norm.

Despite what my teacher said, I fulfilled my ambition to work with fine upstanding men on steam, diesel and electric locomotives, and believe me, electric traction is the best means of railway power.

I support the campaigns that I read about in *Railwatch* and I am now of

reissued in paperback in 2011. She was a major contributor to other books and was frequently recalled to the museum for advice after she retired.

Her son Andrew Irvine said: "My mother lived a long and interesting life, achieving all that she set out to do.

"The recent picture shows her with a jar of sweets I won and which I gave to her. They soon disappeared!"

The funeral took place on 10 March at the Crematorium of the New Southgate Cemetery.

A tree is to be planted in Linda's memory.

an age that I look forward eagerly to every new rail development.

John Abergnolwyn Davies, Plas Helyg Avenue, Penparcau, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1QR

Mothball mystery

It would be interesting to know if there was ever a list of lines closed around the time of Beeching that were supposed to be "mothballed" for possible future use.

Looking back, it seems incredibly inept, if not tantamount to treason, that the lines should have been closed without consideration of future requirements.

At the time, Hereford lost its rail links to Gloucester but retained

the line to Worcester, arguably less important.

It seems silly that the important city of Gloucester now has a station with poor services. It probably needs a parkway station on the main line.

The much talked of "western gateway" area on both sides of the Bristol Channel really needs the rail bridge over the Severn at Lydney to be rebuilt. This would allow trains on the London-South Wales main line to avoid problems in the Victorian Severn Tunnel without going to Gloucester.

Remember there are two road bridges over the Severn. There should be two rail crossings.

To improve services in an area poorly served, inter-city trains from both London and Birmingham should be extended to Hereford, supplemented by an improved local Hereford-Malvern service with some reopened stations and a new loop at Colwall.

J Evered, Goylands Close, Llandrindod Wells LD1 5RB

Bus priority

For the *Railwatch* 162 "End this Pennine Procrastination" article, I must ask you to pass on my compliments to its writer Andrew Oldfield. I do not know whether Mr Oldfield is a South Yorkshire resident but his informed piece encapsulates much of what is wrong with South Yorkshire's troubled relationship with the railways.

I am a retired schoolmaster, never having owned a car, and have been a rail supporter and rail traveller for well over 60 years. I have also observed the way that South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive has bumbled along ever since it was first set up.

It seems to lack vision when it comes to providing the county with a transport system fit for a metropolitan area in the 21st century, and, I have to say as a local resident, that South Yorkshire compares so poorly when set alongside the go-ahead areas in the north of England such as Nottingham and Greater Manchester.

In fact, using my latest copy of *Britain's Growing Railway*, I find that the last new railway station to be opened in my home county was a quarter of a century ago!

Alas, SYPTE seems to be in thrall to the First and Stagecoach bus companies. The whole picture currently is one of inertia and, as Mr Oldfield so accurately puts it, "lack of ambition". The world moves forward while South Yorkshire ruminates over more bloody bus lanes and tugs its collective forelock to the rail companies that

still provide us with clapped-out Pacers.

Perhaps when the transport authorities of Sheffield City Region make their mark things will improve but I am not holding my breath. As is well known, mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself.

Peter J Gray, Sprotborough, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN5 8BX

HS2 'damage'

In response to Michael Paine's claim (*Railwatch* 162) that HS2 "will cause tremendous environmental damage", he should indicate in what particular way and what possible capacity-enhancing alternatives (excluding the busy West Coast main line) there may be. Hereabouts, the main concern is impact on the Chilterns, but HS2 would be mainly in tunnel there and with the insatiable demand for road space, the alternative could well be a really damaging duplicate M40 motorway!

As one of those who laboured hard to persuade successive Governments of rail's advantages during the pro-road 1960s onwards, I'm pleased to see, hopefully, the current change of heart, as aided by the current climate argument.

John Davis, Harpenden davis.john@mypostoffice.co.uk

Railwatch by email

Could you please tell me when I shall be able to opt to receive *Railwatch* as a pdf by email instead of by post? I prefer to receive everything by email and I do not really want to receive anything by post.

Alan Mayes, Petersfield Mansions, Cambridge CB1 1BB

Editor's note: Railfuture is working towards making more of our publications available electronically.

Hidden rangers

I completely agree with Paul Abell's complaint that Rover and Ranger tickets are not better advertised. I think the problem is that the different train operating companies are not willing to publicise facilities promoted by other companies.

The Heart of England Rover, which I have used several times, covers an area extending from Oxford to Gloucester, Hereford, Shrewsbury, Chester, Crewe, Derby, Nottingham and Leicester, and is very good value, but there is no information about it at Oxford station, even

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Send material to: The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk



Picture: RUSSIAN RAILWAYS

though it is valid for travel on GWR trains.

Another facility which I have used is to buy a day return to destinations beyond the extent of the Rover ticket, and so I have bought day returns from Crewe to Liverpool (twice) and from Derby to Sheffield. On another related matter, there are no timetable leaflets for Chiltern Railways in the racks at Oxford station. They are kept under the counter at the information desk, and you have to ask for them, as if they are obscene magazines.

Martin Smith, Bath Street, Abingdon OX14 1EA

Third rail power

Thank you for your usual excellent and wide ranging *Railwatch*.

David Bosworth is right about third rail power being far better than battery trains, which are only needed for a very small part of the South East network, in this instance Hoo Junction to the Isle of Grain.

I have not looked at the detailed statistics, but I can recall several deaths of people on railways in East Kent, but none due to third rail electrocution. The marginal cost of adding third rail now would be far less than the extra cost of expensive battery-enabled vehicles, as David outlines.

In addition, the Isle of Grain has a large disused industrial area, some of which could be used for photovoltaic panels, as could all

Proud boast

Russian Railways carried 235 thousand people with reduced mobility last year. See train door left.

To ensure assistance, people have to apply 24 hours in advance for special reserved seats.

Half-price tickets are available, although there are complex arrangements for registering and also to book in advance.

In an attempt to streamline the process, people with special needs can now register and also buy e-tickets online.

A lounge for people with disabilities opened last year at Moscow's Kazansky station. It is a pilot project before other stations are also modified.



the new houses. Riding Sunbeams (ridingsunbeams.org) has already demonstrated the practicality of doing this. So I hope those supporting the Hoo line will push for third rail electrification.

Regarding James Whitworth's useful letter, the key aspect of the UK power system is flexibility, as shown in submissions against the Cleve Hill Solar Farm, proposed further east on Graveney marshes, currently a haven for wildlife.

Flexibility is increasingly being offered by the interconnectors he mentions, but also by electric vehicles and others. Hitherto drivers of electric vehicles have been able to choose only when to charge – I charge at the Economy

7 cheap night rate, but now EVs cannot only choose when to take power from the supply, but also to feed back into the network, and thus provide supply at peak demand. James is correct in highlighting the need for more public transport using electric trams and trolleybuses but this still leaves the large need for pure EVs for taxis, shared transport and distribution vehicles, as well as for those people in rural areas. Hence as the ever-increasing number of EVs grows, the size of this flexible resource will grow rapidly, thus reducing the need for power supplies for high peaks.

Chris Lowe, Hackington Road, Tyler Hill, Canterbury, Kent CT2 9NE

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■ ■ £30m bid for trains to Cirencester

Cotswold District Council agreed in January to make up a shortfall of £13,000 towards the £53,000 cost of a feasibility study into reopening the Kemble-Cirencester branch as light rail. The council is also making a bid for £30 million of Government funding to rebuild the line. Last year Railfuture Severnside wrote to the promoters of the Cirencester Community Railway to give our support to the scheme. Now that Kemble has an hourly Cheltenham-Paddington service, a reopened branch would offer better connectivity than before its closure in 1964.

■ ■ Rail-bus interchange at Bridgwater

Railfuture and Friends of Bridgwater Station have campaigned for seven years for the reinstatement of bus services to and from the station, which is nearly a mile from the town centre bus station. A new bus stop was promised in 2014 as part of an £800,000 upgrade of the station forecourt which was recently completed. However, a TravelWatch SouthWest surgery held near the station on 16 December, chaired by TWSW chair and Railfuture vice-president Chris Irwin, heard concerns that buses were unable to use the stop because of insufficient turning space. It is believed the specification was drawn up when the local bus operator was using 8.7 metre buses. Twelve-metre vehicles are now standard. Train operator Great Western told the *Bridgwater Mercury* that it is "in active discussion" with First Bus to provide a service into the station. TravelWatch is collecting evidence to support adaptation of the forecourt to enable proper bus-rail connectivity. New housing, a flourishing college, an enterprise zone and Hinkley Point C power station all add to the need for a better interchange. Ways of improving bus and train services for Bridgwater were discussed at a public transport forum in the town in February.

■ ■ Priority for Stonehouse Bristol Road

Railfuture's meeting at Stonehouse in November supported reopening of the town's Bristol Road station. Robert Crockford, who chaired it, said the Stroudwater conurbation, with a population of around 60,000, was the largest urban area in the South West without direct rail access to the regional capital of Bristol. Siobhan Baillie, elected MP for Stroud in December, spoke in support, as did MEP Molly Scott Cato. County Councillor Lesley Williams encouraged people to respond to the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan 4 Consultation. Railfuture's response calls for the station to be given top priority as part of an extension of MetroWest to Gloucester. We reject the proposition made in the 2015 Gloucestershire Rail Study Report that people wanting to reach Bristol from the Stroud area could drive to Cam & Dursley station, where the car park is normally full by 08.00.

■ ■ Gloucester warms to Railfuture idea

Gloucester City Council made a helpful response to our request (*Railwatch* 162) for the city's bus and rail stations to display live departures of each other's services, with the city's "head of place" Ian Edwards agreeing that a successful transport hub needed both bus and train information at both sites. The council is working with GWR, Network Rail

and others to promote improvements at the station. The Station Hotel already provides live train information and has taken up my suggestion to promote itself as a comfortable place to enjoy a drink while waiting for trains.



■ ■ £20m 'too high' for Salford

To mark the 50th anniversary of the closure of Salford station, the parish council hosted an event in January when chairman Chris Warren gave a talk on the station's history. His colleague Duncan Hounsell, who represents the village on Bath & North East Somerset Council, said that persuading the West of England Partnership to include the station in its vision for MetroWest in 2012 had been crucial. Network Rail made passive provision for the station but quoted a price tag of £14-20 million. This was considered unrealistically high in view of comparable reopenings in recent years. Railfuture's Graham Ellis believes that the estimate might include a high optimism bias factor and has suggested an update of the attractive campaign leaflet which is now over seven years old.

■ ■ Hourly trains will 'rocket' Melksham

Melksham Rail User Group has recently produced a report on 2019 and plans for 2020 in one booklet. As a station friends group, it helps to increase awareness of train services and to keep the station clean and tidy. It describes the current two-hourly service (a vast improvement on two per day prior to December 2013) as "poor but useable. An hourly frequency and better connections would rocket passenger numbers."

■ ■ Piling climbs back to recognition



Pilning Station Group's Olga Taylor is delighted that nearly four years of promoting the station have led to "a glimmer of hope" in the Joint Local Transport Plan drawn up by the West of England Combined Authority.

"It is finally recognised that Pilning station has good potential for future development," she said. The station is near one of the largest brownfield sites in northern Europe which is being developed into an industrial area. Local MP Jack Lopresti also backed the station's case in a Commons debate. Despite losing its footbridge in a Network Rail "upgrade" in 2016, official figures show passenger numbers have gone up by 900% since 2014, even though the station has only two trains a week in one direction only! Campaign website: www.pilningstation.uk

■ ■ AGM at Kemble station Tavern

Railfuture Severnside AGM is on Saturday 4 April 2020 at the Tavern Inn at Kemble station. www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside Branch [Twitter @RailfutureSSide](https://twitter.com/RailfutureSSide)

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Reconnecting Ringwood

If rail is to play its part in a sustainable transport future, Ringwood is one of many towns that needs to be put back on the railway map. The *Connecting Communities* report by the Association of Train Operating Companies (now the Rail Delivery Group) put reopening the 10-mile line from Brockenhurst to Ringwood in its top ten schemes, ranked according to benefit/cost ratio. The current 25,000 population in the line's catchment area has doubled since the line closed in 1964. A further 1,000 homes could be built there over the next 15 years.

■ ■ Flying the flag for CrossCountry

Financial difficulties at Flybe gave rise to much local discussion about regional air services versus the rail alternatives, most notably the CrossCountry network. Railfuture Wessex has consistently pointed out that capacity, speed and comfort on CrossCountry trains have not significantly changed over the past 20 years, a time of increasing demand from both the leisure and business markets. It is unacceptable for a train company to be running 20-year-old diesels on routes which are largely electrified. The existing trains should be lengthened, converted to bi-mode and upgraded to inter-city standard. Weight could be saved by removing the tilt mechanism on some trains. All this could be achieved for a fraction of the cost of bailing out a failing airline.

■ ■ Bigger future for Island Line

Proposed Island Line upgrades were examined in January at a meeting organised by the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail Users Group. Long periods of line closure can be expected in the autumn for gauge clearance at bridges (for larger rolling stock) and adjusting platform heights (for level boarding). The connection with the steam railway at Smallbrook is being considered as a route to transport 7,000 tonnes of material during trackbed renewal. A new passing loop at Brading will bring the southbound platform back into use. There will also be step-free access from the main station building. Signalling and power supply upgrades are also part of the improvement package.

■ ■ Passengers left in the lurch

Railfuture Wessex protested to South Western Railway when passengers suffered a month of reduced and disrupted services before Christmas because of the dispute over the role of guards. We reported a lack of bus replacements on the line via Chandler's Ford, and stop-skipping.

■ ■ Check on 'longer trains' promise

Railfuture Wessex is monitoring promises to increase train lengths on the Great Western Portsmouth-Cardiff route. Extra peak time services between Basingstoke and Reading have been welcomed.

■ ■ Heritage trains take the strain

Swanage Railway will reintroduce a service between Swanage and Wareham using heritage diesel units for the summer, starting on 5 May. The Mid Hants Railway is now able to run steam trains the full length of its line from Alton to Alresford after completion of bridge reconstruction work which took most of 2019.

■ ■ Southampton AGM in April

Railfuture Wessex AGM will be held in Southampton on Saturday 18 April.

■ We are now on Facebook: search "Railfuture Wessex"

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+Branch [Twitter @RailfutureWessex](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWessex)

Is your train (or replacement bus) accessible?

By Graham Collett

2020 was the year that all trains on the British rail network are supposed to be accessible to people of reduced mobility.

We know that many stations will remain out of bounds for some people for a long time but the rail industry has had years to ensure that all our trains are accessible. Sadly in 2020, many are not – because train companies have been allowed to ignore the law "temporarily".

This state of affairs is the result of a large number of derogations (temporary exemptions) to the Disability Discrimination Act issued by the Department for Transport on New Year's Eve.

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

The DDA, as originally enacted, enabled the Secretary of State for Transport to make regulations to facilitate the accessibility of rail vehicles for disabled people.

These regulations, made under the original DDA (1995), are called the Rail Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (RVAR) and required all railway rolling stock to be fully accessible by 31 December 2019.

But on that very day, derogations were issued by the DfT to cover all the non-compliant train fleets still operating.

A useful table which lists these derogations was published in the February edition of *Modern Railways*.

This shows that many fleets, mainly class 153 diesel units and unmodified InterCity 125s (HSTs) are authorised to keep running until December 2020. But the DDA issue has been known about for years, so why did the DfT seem to wake up to this recently?

Of course, the new trains appearing on our tracks and those on order will already be DDA compliant. But you may ask why those franchises which were re-let by DfT in the past few years did not require the bidders to include replacement of all non-compliant stock by 31 December 2019.

LNER, which stopped using HSTs at the start of the December timetable, seems to be the only operator with non-compliant stock which met the end of year deadline.

There seems little prospect of many current train operating companies – beyond what has already been agreed – seeking tenders for new DDA-compliant stock in the near future, given the fragility of many franchises.

So many passengers will have to either change their journey, go by car, bus or coach (if they can) or grin and bear it.

Rail replacement buses

What happens when trains are replaced by buses because of planned track closures or emergency work? A recent legal ruling means that these are now – with limited exemptions – required to be DDA compliant.

This will have a huge impact on the rail replacement services commissioned by train operators. Many of these services use coaches, most of which have steep steps with no other way of boarding.

Older buses (sometimes double deck vehicles) which are not DDA compliant are also used in some areas. There is a very limited supply of coaches with lifts, or of compliant vehicles of any kind at peak times, so most train operators will struggle to meet

◆◆◆◆ Please remember Railfuture in your will: www.railfuture.org.uk/legacies



Fleets of coaches were called into action when the East Coast main line was closed from Peterborough to London for engineering work over a January weekend. Customer information screens advised passengers not to travel by rail. Many passengers were bussed to the Midland main line at Bedford, above, where they could catch trains to London. It was not clear if any cycles or disabled people were accommodated

the DDA requirements. The DfT issued an "urgent warning" to train operators on 16 December, giving them until 31 January to comply with the act, or risk legal action.

On 20 December, the Office for Rail and Road launched a consultation on this issue with responses requested by 14 February, which was surprising given the urgency of the DfT's message.

However, in response to appeals by train operators, on 31 January the DfT extended the compliance deadline until 30 April. This was subject to certain conditions and alternative accessible transport for disabled passengers being made readily available. I have submitted a response to the ORR's consultation in conjunction with Railfuture passenger group colleagues, including input from members who liaise with train operators.

Accessible stations

It is all very well making your journey on an accessible train, but what happens if the station at which you intend to start or end your journey is not itself accessible?

There are over 2,500 stations in Great Britain, but only about 200 (less than 8%) are currently fully accessible. A further 73 stations are expected to be made accessible in the current control period 6 (April 2019 to March 2024), together with the completion of 24 ongoing station projects which started in CP5.

Some stations are partly accessible. For example, you may be able to get on to the

platform but may not be able to board the train without help, or vice-versa. Even if a ramp is provided, there may not be a member of staff available and, even if they are, the ramp may not be easy to use (see "Ramp problems" in *Your Views Railwatch* 162).

Accessible station projects have to meet strict criteria to qualify for funding, which (as I described in *Railwatch* 161) can come from three main sources.

The DfT's *Access for All* fund is the most well-publicised source of funds but money can be available from train operator sources: their customer and community improvement fund or their minor works funds. But the DfT is dependent on money from the Treasury, while train operators are often reluctant to commit funds to what are inevitably long-term projects.

The accessibility programme therefore suffers from having no overall plan, with each project – by and large – treated as a new one with no standard specification.

This has meant that there are many variations in the size and type of lifts being put in, some of which can take bikes and some which cannot.

A standard specification should enable cost savings. We need a much expanded and fully funded *Access for All* programme with a target of, say, 100 stations per year.

■ *Graham Collett is vice-chair of Railfuture Yorkshire and accessibility officer for Railfuture's passenger group.*

'Head in the sand' attitude of bus and train operators

The rail industry has had at least 10 years to prepare for the Equality Act to ensure accessible trains and yet we ended up with an unacceptable list of dispensations. The train operators, the Rail Delivery Group and the Department for Transport have failed to implement it, said Stephen Brookes MBE, the Rail Sector Champion for the Minister for Disabled People. The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations

2000 are a real nightmare because of "head in the sand" syndrome by train and bus operators, although they have been given flimsy advice by the DfT and the Office of Rail and Road.

Train operators should have taken responsibility for vetting the vehicles offered by the bus companies rather than, as has happened, getting the old rubbish from the back of the garage. Bus operators have known

for years that they are a vital link in the chain, and of course do get quite reasonable fees for providing buses. The best practice example is Blackpool Transport which, when asked to supply buses for the 13 month blockade between Blackpool and Preston, advance ordered 20 new Alexander Dennis accessible vehicles, with two wheelchair spaces, full audio and video screens and wifi.

Too typical: 42 steps that can block access to Walkden station

By Andy Barlow

This is the story of how political intrigue features in the saga of the campaign to make Walkden station's platforms more accessible.

Many will be familiar with *The 39 Steps*. It is now just over a century since the initial publication of John Buchan's famous novel, later adapted for film by Alfred Hitchcock, in which an Anglo-Scottish rail journey plays an important part in the plot.

Walkden Station, located on the Manchester-Wigan line via Atherton, had already been welcoming passengers for 27 years by the time Buchan's thriller was published, but the book and station still share a common theme today – passengers must climb 42 steps to reach the platform. The campaign to provide step-free access at Walkden presents a tale of intrigue of its own.

Walkden is no backwater. The latest Office of Rail and Road data show strong growth in passenger usage despite well-publicised challenges during 2018-2019 with the impact of engineering work, industrial action and the May 2018 timetable changes.

The station is now the busiest intermediate station on the line with over 300,000 users – nearly double its patronage in 2007 when Friends of Walkden Station (FOWS) was established by volunteers determined to improve facilities and services at the station.

From day one step-free access has been a top priority for the group. Passengers unable to access the platform can only be provided with a taxi to the nearest accessible station – Atherton – which is five miles down the line in the opposite direction to most rail journeys, which are predominantly towards Manchester.

Walkden's impressive passenger growth has been boosted by an increasing population in its catchment area, which is plagued by severe peak time traffic congestion.

Service frequencies have been boosted after the new Northern franchise begun, although the full four trains per hour daytime frequency has yet to be delivered. The line lacked any Sunday services at all until 2010 when, following a campaign by FOWS, a limited service was introduced. The service proved such a great success that it has been written into the current franchise as a day-long half-



A CHALLENGE FOR MANY: Part of the long stairway leading up to the platform from the booking office at Walkden station. Note the artwork adorning the walls, commissioned by Friends of Walkden Station to commemorate local history subjects

hourly service. Currently only an hourly service is operating but this should soon be rectified now issues with driver rostering on Sundays appear to have been resolved.

In July this year a major boost for the area, and potentially for the station, will be delivered when the RHS Garden Bridgewater opens its doors for the first time.

This major tourist attraction is expected to bring up to half a million annual visitors once it becomes fully established. Walkden Station, with its fast, direct services to Manchester, and through services to Leeds, the Calder Valley and East Lancashire, is the natural railhead, being the closest station at just two miles away.

Step-free access at Walkden also has strong political support locally including Mayoral backing, and the station was featured on regional news programmes when a local girl wrote to Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and obtained his support for making the station accessible to all.

With all these factors in mind, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) ranked Walkden number one in its most recent priority list for step-free access improvements, and a strong bid was placed with the Department for Transport for the 2019-2024 round of Access for All funding. However, in a surprise decision the DfT rejected the application



FLOWER POWER: Andy Barlow, chair of the Friends of Walkden Station, left, with secretary Neil Stapleton on the platform at Walkden. Some of the planters installed by FOWS volunteers are visible in the background

in favour of Daisy Hill – along the same line in the Wigan direction and closer to Atherton (the only step-free accessible station on the line).

Rail officers at Transport for Greater Manchester and campaigners such as FOWS were perplexed by the seemingly illogical decision and submitted a Freedom Of Information (FOI) request to the DfT. The heavily redacted response – finally obtained after two postponements and registration of a complaint about the delay – gave few clues but no clear cut explanation for the about turn.

A question, raised by MP Barbara Keeley in Parliament, as to why Walkden's bid was not approved, was met by a stock answer quoting wider DfT criteria but no locally focused explanation.

FOWS have ambitions for a fully accessible station, allowing

access for all passengers whether travelling for work or leisure to use the services on offer.

Visitors to the RHS Garden could arrive by sustainable means – the train, with bus connections, through ticketing and perhaps even discounted entry, if the vision of FOWS and its many local supporters could be brought to fruition.

However, the fight for step-free access continues, and the number one priority from the formation of the group remains its highest priority today.

The Friends remain fully committed to closing the final chapter in the saga of "The 42 Steps" sooner rather than later.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service was awarded to the group in 2015.

www.walkdenstation.org.uk

■ Andy Barlow is chair of Friends of Walkden Station

Picture: ANDY BARLOW

Picture: LAURA JOFFRE SALFORD ONLINE

Meanwhile in Castleton, Rochdale: HAVE DOG, WILL TRAVEL

By Francis Salt

Travelling anywhere with a guide dog often attracts attention and some mystification among fellow travellers.

It takes years for the blind person to develop and learn to trust the dog!

I live in Castleton, in Rochdale, with my dog Lewis and I am a frequent user of all kinds of public transport.

But my love of all things rail means train and tram (Metrolink in Greater Manchester) is my preference.

My journeys usually start from my local station. I can walk the mile or so but in uncertain weather, the bus stop is at the end of my street.

My local station has two platforms and my normal train arrives from the right, travelling towards Manchester Victoria, and beyond.

My first challenge: "What type of train is it?"

My possible next question: "How many coaches?" is now redundant with the public address telling me two, three or even four coaches.

In some parts of the railway each commuter service is formed of the same type of unit but up here my train could be any one, or a mix of, any five types of unit.

This does not raise problems for a sighted person. A train door is a train door when you can see.

Lewis will take me to the nearest door but the mystery of my train journey is only just beginning.

The interior of each type of train is different so finding a seat, occupied or unoccupied means I have to "gently" survey a seat with the back of my free hand.

And the aisles on ALL trains are too narrow to allow me to "work" Lewis.

I hold the handle of his harness as he takes me along the aisle until I find a seat, or a new friend for the journey.

On arrival at my destination, say Manchester Victoria, the fun starts. The on-board announcement tells me I am there but not on which side or which platform number I am leaving the train from. Usually there is a "The platform is on this side, mate" or a "Do you need any help?" offer from a passenger.

Once I know the platform number, I can continue, as I



METROLINK: Frank and his guide dog Lewis find life easier on a tram than on some trains thanks to the uniformity of the design

am familiar with Manchester Victoria, my all-time favourite station.

I walk towards the stairs to the footbridge. I seldom use the lifts for reasons I will mention later.

The signs, which I cannot see, advise me, I am told: "Keep to the left."

As guide dogs work on the left, and for my safety I want to use the hand rails, I have to go up and down on the right.

The majority of passengers understand

but, as always, a minority either do not understand my plight or are not aware of their surroundings, and a standoff on the stairs ends with Lewis always winning.

Now onwards to the ticket barriers. What a boon to us all. Guide dogs can use the normal gates but I cannot find where my ticket or pass should be waved to activate the gate so the helpful staff usually speak to me (not the dog please) and voice-guide me through happily.

My progress to the Metrolink stop is step free, as is every stop on the system, so Lewis guides me to a boarding point, marked on the floor with tactile panels.

Here lies an advantage for me and all other passengers with impairments. Each tram is the same type as the next one.

On the downside, no announcement is made to tell me where the next tram is going. The trick here is to stand on the

boarding point and as the doors open, listen for the on-board announcements which will say: "This is the service to...." – the terminus for that service.

The doors at the rear of each car will line up with the boarding point. I know that the priority seating is either around to my left on the same side or slightly to the right on the opposite side of the car, depending on which side of the tram I am boarding. Regular blind travellers will always stand to board the first car at the

second door. A word here to non-impaired passengers. Please use the many vacant seats but if you are sitting in a "priority" seat and you notice a blind person, please move

or speak. There are only so many new friends I wish to make on a single journey.

Now the vexed topic of buttons. As mentioned above I seldom use lifts on rail journeys because of the spectre of buttons. For a start, buttons are not easy to find for a blind person.

Guide dogs are trained to find lift doors but, unbelievably, cannot press them or read the instruction.

Is it really beyond the wit of man in the 21st century to place a lift call button in the same place, next to the lift door, and on both sides of the door?

The buttons within a lift are also puzzling to a blind person. They are placed in different places on

different sides and are never the one which will convey one to platform or bridge/subway.

It is only one up or one down on a rail station, so why not have one button and let the lift make the decision to go up or down?

Now don't get me started about on-board toilet buttons. Again each type of train has its own way to open, lock and close the door on an accessible toilet.

Call me an old romantic but give me a Pacer train any time. These much maligned units had faults but were more "blind friendly" than more up-to-date trains.

With a Pacer, Lewis would guide me to the rear door where a friendly "Hiya do you need help?" would let me know that the guard is there to assist me.

OK, it was two steps to get on but around to the left was a bench seat with lots of room for Lewis to curl up under my legs. A guide dog can curl up quite small.

Oh well, rant over.

On a wider view of train travel as a blind person, I have some likes and dislikes when travelling by train.

Apart from the obvious, that I cannot see and enjoy the passing panorama, I still enjoy every journey, long distance or local. My favourite route, as students of geography will understand, is the Calder Valley line between Rochdale and Bradford.

I know from before going blind that this is one of the most underrated scenic routes I have travelled in Britain. Biased? Not me. My familiarity with the route means I can usually remember many of the views. And in any of the 16 tunnels, my view is as good as anyone's!

Although train and tram travel are not perfect, especially at times of disruption, they are, to me, preferable to other forms of travel.

Having on-train staff means that I am never alone which gives me the confidence to travel independently whenever I choose to.

There are some stations which need improvement. Whoever thought that a ramp is not a ramp unless you put a step every few feet? Westhoughton is a prime example.

And public announcements at stations should be a priority for the rail industry.

Picture: ALAN LOWE TfGM

Picture: JIMMY RODGERS



LEAD ON: Frank's guide dog Lewis at Castleton station

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Too long to wait for new Grove station

Railfuture Thames Valley was delighted to hear at its committee meeting in January that its campaigning may be paying off. A new station at Grove should open within eight years, according to the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which was commissioned by the Oxfordshire Growth Board. We welcome this but will be trying to convince the authorities that we should not have to wait until 2028. The new station is justified by massive new housing development planned for the area, but we believe that the station must be in place before the houses are built.

Railfuture Thames Valley had a meeting with CrossCountry, which has had its franchise extended to October but needs to replace its current rolling stock. It is suggested that 40 new bi-mode trains could offer higher performance and solve the problem of overcrowding. We believe that the Department for Transport should step in and ensure that new trains are ordered.

Railfuture Thames Valley will be supporting plans to double the hourly Southern service to Milton Keynes so there is a train every half hour. We will be joining Railfuture members in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire in their submission to a public consultation. We will ask timetable planners to ensure the increased service does not limit the capacity for East West Rail services to link into Milton Keynes.

We are joining Railfuture East Anglia in commenting on plans for the proposed new Cambridge South station. East West Rail will provide a useful link between the two major centres for medical research in Oxford and Cambridge.

Work on remodelling and resignalling at Bourne End is dragging on, and the branch line to Marlow will also have to be closed for two weeks for track relaying. Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the decision of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead council to lobby the Government to reopen the line from Bourne End to High Wycombe. High Wycombe, however, is in Buckinghamshire, where the council has been preoccupied with transforming itself into a unitary authority by April 2020. It still needs persuading to support the rail reopening.

Battle to stop expressway road

Railfuture Thames Valley is concerned that Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has refused to meet the No Expressway Group which opposes the Oxford-Cambridge "expressway" road. Specification for the proposed road has been upgraded while East West Rail has been de-scoped (cut back before it is even built).

Labour should have backed national railcard

The Labour Party meanwhile has reiterated its support for investment in railways. Its policy of slashing rail fares by a third failed to convince the public. Railfuture's campaign for a national rail card would have been a more realistic policy in the short-term at least. The late Tom Comber, the first chairman of Railfuture Thames Valley, was keen that British Rail should issue railcards for everyone. People making fairly frequent journeys would get a one third reduction, and so be encouraged to travel more frequently by rail, and the railways would get more revenue.

Thames Valley timetable revision

We will be making representations over some failings of the new Thames Valley timetables. With electric trains terminating at Didcot, passengers between Thames Valley stations from Tilehurst to Cholsey and stations from Appleford to Oxford have to change, except on the few through peak trains which are still diesel powered. Connections at Didcot vary between 11 and 19 minutes. One former through train which is sadly missed is the 17.18 from Paddington to Oxford which used to call at Radley (the station for Abingdon, with a bus connection), but now terminates at Didcot. There were no ticket restrictions on this train, and there is now a 50-minute gap in the peak service from Didcot to Oxford between 17.59 and 18.49.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames Valley Branch
Twitter @RailfutureTV



Picture: DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

PROGRESS: Work started in January on building the new £10.5 million Hornden station, south of Seaham, on the line between Hartlepool and Sunderland. Contractors Storeys were expected to complete the platforms in March and the footbridge and stairs in April, ready for the station to open in May. Durham County Council is confident the road approaches, cycle and foot paths will be ready by April. Hornden will serve a population of 60,000 with hourly trains to Carlisle, Newcastle, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough

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Northern Rail nationalisation

The Government decision on Northern Rail raises as many questions as it answered. Railfuture North East gives credit to local management for ensuring that virtually no services remain Pacer-operated. Even Saltburn-Darlington-Bishop Auckland services, Pacers until early December, are now operated by class 156 Sprinters.

Why not Hitachi?

The Mayor of Tees Valley Ben Houchen has objected to Swiss firm Stadler being chosen by Nexus to build Tyne and Wear Metro's 42 new five-car trains, rather than Hitachi, based at Newton Aycliffe. Stadler is reported to be working to source components in the North East.

Redcar waits for regeneration

The station at Redcar British Steel lost its minimal train service in December. Work has begun to regenerate the steelworks site and the station is eventually expected to be revamped and reopened.

TransPennine Express travails

Delays in the delivery of new Nova trains mean that Redcar will not be served by five-coach trains until the "spring". Morpeth also had to wait until February for new trains to operate TPE services to Edinburgh. Power supply problems and a train maintenance backlog led to diesel operation and bus substitution.

Tyne Valley CRP innovations

The Tyne Valley community rail partnership team took its *Open in Winter* initiative to Middlesbrough in January. They handed out leaflets advertising the possibilities of visiting Hadrian's Wall by train. The team was planning similar events at Thornaby and Northallerton

stations, as well as a return visit to Middlesbrough. Local businesses are supporting this project with special offers. The *Line and Lyric* initiative is promoting the Newcastle-Carlisle line with a singer/songwriter at community events. Other initiatives include a *Welcome, Explore* pilot, focusing on Haltwhistle and Hadrian's Wall and a project to commemorate the evacuation of children from Tyneside to the Haltwhistle area during the Second World War.

East Coast main line local services

Railfuture North-East is backing Tees Valley Combined Authority's call that one of the two CrossCountry services between York and Newcastle each hour should run along the Durham Coast route to free some capacity on the main line north of Northallerton, as well as to improve the scope and quality of long-distance services through Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland.

The freed-up main line path could then be taken by the long-promised Northern Connect trains between Middlesbrough, Thornaby, Stockton (with a combined population in excess of 300,000) and Newcastle. Such trains would reduce Teesside to Tyneside timings by 20 minutes each way.

But the shortage of main line paths should lead to attention being given to the need to reopen the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton line, as advocated by the Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group.

The Northern Powerhouse Rail initiative should lead to more direct rail links to places on Teesside and Wearside via the Stockton-Ferryhill and Leamside alternatives.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North East Branch
Twitter @RailfutureNEast

Jet-fuelled rail freight award

By Lee Davies

A joint entry by Railfreight Consulting, British Airways, BP, VTG, Freightliner and Network Rail won the *Freight and Logistics Achievement of the Year* award at this year's National Rail Awards.

The team established a new service of up to 16 trains per week delivering over one million tonnes of jet fuel to Heathrow airport each year.

The service is estimated to have taken 100 round-trip lorry movements off the London orbital M25 motorway.

The service will run for at least 15 years and has involved investment in new terminals and rail wagons.

"I am delighted to see four years of hard work recognised," said Ralph Goldney, managing director of Railfreight Consulting.

"The new service will reduce the delivery cost to the airport, improve supply chain capacity and add to the resilience within the fuel supply chain.

"It has also substantially reduced the carbon footprint of the haulage operation."

Environmental advantage

Hector Rail Group has sold GB Railfreight to Infracapital, part of M&G.

GBRf, the third largest rail freight company in Britain, has a turnover of £200 million a year and more than 900 staff. It moves around 23% of UK rail freight.

GBRf managing director John Smith said: "I look forward to working closely with our new owners to maintain and surpass our growth ambitions."

Infracapital was attracted to GBRf because its "environmental credentials set it apart from competitors".

Go-ahead for Gateway

The Government has given development consent to Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange.

The interchange will be able to take trains up to 775 metres long, and will have three gantry cranes, a train maintenance depot, rail-connected warehouses and a bus terminal. The consent also approves work on the A508 road, a bypass to the village of Roade, and changes to Junction 15 of the M1 motorway.

£1m canopy for gypsum

Middlesbrough freight logistics firm AV Dawson has officially opened a new £1 million canopy

Railfuture deliveries

Our picture shows *Railwatch* editor Ray King delivering a batch of *Railwatch* magazines from the magazine distributor to his home, using a bike and trailer.

Railwatch is delivered by road from our printer in Histon, Cambridge, to east London.

Once most of the magazines have been despatched by Royal Mail, Ray collects the "overs" which are used by Railfuture members to promote Railfuture at events throughout Britain and by members to recruit people.

Ray has used the bike and trailer for this purpose for more than 15 years. Bikes and trains are the ideal way to maintain an environmentally friendly freight system, although not every load will fit on a bike! But parcels traffic has been virtually lost to rail. British Rail's initiative in setting up Red Star Parcels in 1963 foundered when the railways were privatised. Red Star Parcels offices on rail stations were finally closed in 2001. Even



Picture: MAGGIE KING

though *Railwatch* magazine is delivered to members by Royal Mail, the now-privatised postal service has only a minimal rail operation. Both Royal Mail and the rail industry have failed to answer the public demand for an environmentally friendly and affordable option for delivering small amounts of freight. Or is it all the Government's fault?

to help service its multi-million pound contract with British Gypsum, which produces plaster and plasterboard. The 100 metre canopy provides dry-loading for trains and reduces costs of drying the product when it arrives at British Gypsum's factory.

The material comes by ship to Middlesbrough and is delivered by daily train to the East Midlands, reducing the carbon dioxide emissions compared to delivery by road.

iPort gauges a success

Doncaster's iPort Rail depot celebrated its second Christmas, after successfully operating throughout the November

"biblical" flooding in South Yorkshire. Managing director Steve Freeman said: "While the rest of South Yorkshire mopped up, iPort Rail flowed on regardless." Five trains are despatched daily from the depot, owned by European logistics company Verdion, and with the potential to handle 12 trains a day. Gauge clearance for freight trains on the East Coast main line has been crucial to the success of iPort.

£90bn rail benefit potential

The Government should ensure that freight gets its fair share of the national rail network, ensuring that there is scope

for long-term growth. Rail freight already provides nearly £2 billion of identifiable benefits to the British economy but has the potential to increase this to £90 billion in the coming decade.

That is the advice from the Rail Freight Group, which wants the Government to ensure the planning system supports rail terminals.

Maggie Simpson, director general of the RFG, said: "The new government has an opportunity to unlock significant benefits through its support for our sector and our plan sets out five priority areas which should be addressed. We look forward to working with them to take this forward."

Cement trains roll on

GB Railfreight has agreed a seven-year deal with Hanson Cement to operate trains from London King's Cross, Avonmouth (Bristol) and Mossend (Glasgow). GBRf also runs an average nine trains a week from Ketton cement works in Rutland and Ribblesdale, near Clitheroe, Lancashire. One destination is Hinkley Point C nuclear power station.

"We are working to increase the tonnage of material we transport by rail across the UK," said Matt Barlow of Hanson UK.

"This arrangement helps us to take trucks off the roads and reduce our carbon emissions."

HS2 freight spinoff

Building HS2 should release train paths on the existing rail network and some of those paths should be available for freight trains, the Freight Transport Association has told the Government.

The FTA said its members want a guarantee of fair treatment and fair access to capacity released by HS2.

"HS2 predicts that its first phase alone could free up rail freight capacity equivalent to around 1,500 lorries every day," said the FTA's Alex Veitch.

Rail flow for Highland water

Construction will begin soon on a new rail freight facility to serve Highland Spring's depot at Blackford, near Gleneagles, to deliver bottled water by train which should remove 8,000 lorry movements and save 3,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.

The new facility is expected to open next year and will be operated by JG Russell which has been using rail freight since the 1970s. It

operates six rail-linked sites. There are likely to be two trains each day, the equivalent of 22 lorries, from Blackford which is on the main line from Dunblane to Perth, a prime candidate for electrification. An electric rubber-tyre crane will lift and position containers on the train, and Highland Spring is exploring opportunities to bring raw materials to site by rail to reduce its carbon footprint.



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Wales wins Access funds for 4 stations

Wales has received funding from the Access for All scheme for stations at Grangetown, Pontypool & New Inn, Llantwit Major and Neath.

Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth

Passengers on the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury line will have to wait until December 2022 for an hourly service, but all the class 158 trains have been modified to comply with access requirements. Passengers are sometimes confused by platform arrangements at Shrewsbury and additional information screens are needed at Dovey Junction, a crucial connection station, as well as at Welshpool and Caersws. At Welshpool better facilities are needed for the replacement bus services, which have been regularly in action over the wet winter months. Discussions are still under way for a new station at Carno.

Protests over timetable skip stops

There has been a delay in the introduction of mark 4 rolling stock on Cardiff-Holyhead services, but to accommodate the desire for fast services between north and south Wales some trains were retimed from December.

There were protests at the removal of station stops north of Shrewsbury for the morning service from December. After a number of timing trials, an earlier start, at 07.02 from Cardiff, enabled the stops to be reinstated.

The return at 11.33 from Holyhead to Cardiff also had stops removed, but this problem has not yet been resolved.

Petition to reverse the cuts

A petition has been presented to the Welsh Government after protests from commuters along the North Wales Coast, who have seen a reduction in rush-hour train services despite paying some of the highest train fares (when measured per mile) in Britain. The cuts have led to a fall in the numbers of passengers using north-east Wales stations. More commuters are switching to driving, adding to congestion on the A55 road.

Transport for Wales has cut the only direct evening rush-hour rail service between Bangor and Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Prestatyn and Flint – the 17.16 service from Bangor.

The changes to the timetable go against Welsh Government policy:

1) It will result in increased greenhouse gas emissions by forcing people from public transport into their cars, at a time of a "climate emergency".

2) It will deny access to Bangor University for those living in some of Wales' most deprived communities.

Railfuture has called on the Assembly to force a rethink on TfW and to ensure the rail service in North Wales is sufficiently frequent and affordable to encourage commuters back on to the trains.

The main complaint is that since December the main evening service from Bangor at 17.16 omits calls at all the intermediate stations to Chester apart from Llandudno Junction. There is now a two-hour gap between trains for people who want any of the nine stations between Bangor and Chester. The 17.16 was previously popular among workers and students returning home from Bangor.

Picture: RAILWATCH



OVERCROWDING: This family was forced to stand up from Welshpool to Newtown because of overcrowding on the train from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth. Long-suffering mum Chelsea Hayley told Railwatch that it is the same situation almost every day on the 15.52 train from Welshpool when she picks up her children from school

The other option is to change trains at Llandudno Junction, where they face an hour's wait for a connection.

SE Wales transport commission

Railfuture will be making representations to the South East Wales Transport Commission, which has been set up to find alternatives to the M4 relief road which has been abandoned by the Welsh Government. It is an opportunity for public transport campaigners to put forward alternatives to road building. The commission has already held a series of stakeholder workshops and will be collecting information about passengers' experiences.

gov.wales/south-east-wales-transport-commission

Not much satisfaction in survey

The national Transport Focus passenger survey was published in January and was the first to cover a full year of Transport for Wales operations. The levels of satisfaction were not encouraging.

FARES Value for money satisfaction down to 48% – from 57%

PUNCTUALITY Satisfaction down to 73% – from 78%

FREQUENCY Satisfaction down to 69% – from 73%

OVERCROWDING Satisfaction down to 66% – from 68%

STATION STAFF Satisfaction down to 75% – from 83%

STAFF AVAILABILITY Satisfaction down to 57% – from 67%

Toilet facilities are important for passengers and it was reassuring to see that satisfaction levels are improving slightly. The satisfaction level is 46% at stations, up 7%, and 44% on trains, up by 4%.

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Burscough curves a 'quick win'

Prompted by the Government's interest in reopening railway lines, Railfuture North West has reaffirmed its backing for Skipton-Colne, Penrith-Keswick and Skelmersdale. But a quick win is Burscough curves, a simple, low-cost plan to re-connect the Southport-Manchester and Liverpool-Ormskirk-Preston lines by reinstating the north and south junctions.

The Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association believes it would improve rail links for Southport, providing a fast, direct rail service to Preston, Manchester and Liverpool city regions. The connectivity provided by integrating the two existing lines would realise benefits in the whole area. Work undertaken by OPSTA in recent years indicates that the project would deliver £3 for every £1 spent.

It would also enable Sunday services to be improved. They are poor on the Southport line and non-existent between Ormskirk and Preston, which acts as an economic inhibitor and a cause of social isolation. OPSTA says the extra rail connectivity could also reduce traffic and congestion on the A59, A5209 and A570 arterial roads. The formations that carried the rail curves are complete and unblocked and each is just a few hundred metres long. The junctions or physical connections with each line would have to be installed with additional signalling. Otherwise neither running line would need upgrading as they both have capacity for additional services.

New loops could boost frequencies

Railfuture North West believes that putting in an extra passing loop at Diggle would enable an enhanced service at Greenfield and Mossley. The current one-train-per-hour service to Manchester at Greenfield and Mossley stations is lacking in a major commuter area. The loop could easily be installed near the former Diggle station on the once four-track formation, and should make provision for a possible future reopening of the station, which closed in 1963. Railfuture North West and the Stalybridge to Huddersfield Rail User Group believe the loop could allow improved service frequency on both sides of the Pennines by providing more through services. The Yorkshire stations of Slaithwaite and Marsden would benefit from a two-trains-an-hour service.

Another quick win would be to relay the extra line which ran behind the down platform of Miles Platting station (closed 1995). This would ease congestion caused by several lengthy freight trains per day coming from the Phillips Park direction which block the main line as they cross, observing a strict 10mph speed limit.

10% boost to station figures

For the first time, the Office of Rail and Road figures for station usage at Greater Manchester stations include an estimation of the free journeys made by senior citizens, after protests by STORM (Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester line). The uplift is 10% but 15% is a more realistic figure and makes a good case for reopening more stations.

Previously no allowance had been made, although Transport for Greater Manchester believed that it had been. On checking after the point was raised with them by STORM, they found that no allowance had ever been made before. It is thought that this will now help in making a better case for future reopenings.

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AGM on Maid of the Loch

Railfuture Scotland is holding its AGM afloat, on board the *Maid of the Loch* at Balloch on Loch Lomond, at 14.00 on Saturday 18 April. Appropriately for an event aboard a former BR steamer, the speaker will tell us something about Rail and Sail.

West Coast freight terminal is reborn

Cloburn Quarries has taken out a long-term lease on a former coal loading point on the West Coast main line to deliver decorative aggregate supplies to customers in both Britain and mainland Europe. It is leasing Ravenstruther (pronounced Renstrie) rail terminal, near Lanark, from Hargreaves Land as a way to strengthen its market position. Cloburn, which also supplies rail track ballast, has previously been dependent on an "unsuitable loading bank" at nearby Carstairs Junction, from where it was despatched to ballast depots at Millerhill (35 miles away) or Inverurie (150 miles away). Ravenstruther opened in 1988 to load 40 million tonnes of opencast coal on to trains, until the local council granted consent for housing, but it was never built. Railfuture is calling for crossovers and signalling to be installed to prevent delays as freight trains join the main line.

Action on new East Coast stations

Network Rail is carrying out surveying work for the new stations at Reston and East Linton. The planning application for Reston has been submitted, with East Linton expected within the next few months, along with an information initiative aimed at the local community.

Rail is the key in south-west Scotland

Reopening of the rail link between Stranraer and Dumfries, a new line from Stranraer to Cairnryan, a rail link between Dumfries and Lockerbie and new stations at Beattock, Thornhill, Eastriggs, Cumnock and Dunragit are all options in the *Case for Change* report on SW Scotland which is now with Transport Scotland.

The potential merits of new stations and services to improve connections to Glasgow on the South Western line will also be explored in detail, in a strategic transport projects review. It appears that the rail options are preferred over road enhancements. Dualling the roads from Dumfries to Stranraer (A75), Edinburgh (A701) and Lockerbie (A709) plus the A77 between Ayr and Cairnryan have been ruled out.

StARLink's case for change

Following the completion of the *Case for Change*, St Andrews sustainable transport study, Transport Scotland, the consultancy Stantec and StARLink will be meeting shortly to finalise the report. Among the options proposed are: a direct rail link from St Andrews to the main line, a tram-train from Dundee running on the existing roads and a light rapid transit line between St Andrews and Leuchars rail station. The case for a St Andrews railway has been further bolstered by two things. Leuchars was one of the few Fife stations to see an increase in passengers during the year ending March 2019, by 5.1% to 644,262, just 7,000 behind Dunfermline Town, the third busiest station after Inverkeithing and Kirkcaldy. It is certain that the increase at Leuchars is driven by St Andrews where most of the passengers are going to/coming from. The road bridge over the River Eden on the A91 to St Andrews,



ALL CLEAR: A section of the Leven line that has been cleared for survey purposes

Campaigners are angry that the proposed reopening of the railway to Levenmouth has stalled because Fife Council has still not appointed a project manager, seven months after the scheme was given the go-ahead.

Responding to complaints from Levenmouth Rail Campaign, the Scottish Transport Secretary Michael Matheson told *Fife News* that "all partners" were committed to an opening as soon as possible. Fife Council said it hoped to have a programme manager in place in

the busiest road in North East Fife, has been undergoing major repairs, meaning traffic lights and traffic hold-ups into St Andrews. Already taking longer than scheduled, it has now been found that the bridge is in a worse condition than expected, and so only a temporary repair will be completed by the end of March. The second phase will take place some time in the future. That bridge is vital for St Andrews. If it were closed for any length of time, the effect would be catastrophic on a town accessible only by road. Rail would provide an alternative connection with the rest of the country.

Falkirk Council backs Bonnybridge

Bonnybridge station campaigners gained the support of Falkirk Council in December when it agreed to proceed to the next stage of the Scottish transport appraisal process, following a pre-appraisal study. Railfuture Scotland's research showed large numbers of Bonnybridge residents driving to work in towns connected to the rail network. These cars could all be taken off the roads if a station were provided. Bonnybridge Railway Campaign meanwhile is considering a crowdfunder initiative as volunteers struggle to meet running costs.

Boost for the Borders line

More than 2 million people a year are now using the Edinburgh-Tweedbank Borders Railway, more than three times the original estimate of 650,000. The most frequent complaint is severe overcrowding. John Lamont, MP for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, said he is looking forward to making progress on reopening the line further towards Newcastleton and Carlisle.

the spring to co-ordinate the £10 million Levenmouth Blueprint fund, which will promote economic and social growth in support of the rail reopening. Councillor Altany Craik said: "Working with Network Rail and Transport Scotland, we are developing options, including possible station locations. "Once ready, this information will be presented to locals and stakeholders for consultation. In addition, we are also working closely with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and partners on the River Leven project."

Robroyston is 60th station for Glasgow

Scotland's newest station, £14 million Robroyston, was opened in December, providing trains every half hour to Glasgow Queen Street (12 minutes) and to Edinburgh (an hour). The station's free car park, close to the M80 motorway, is aimed at relieving road traffic congestion in Glasgow. Robroyston is Glasgow's 60th rail station and in February had attracted more than 30,000 passenger journeys since its opening – 3,500 more than forecast.

Contacts:

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES): www.rages.org.uk/

Beattock Station Action Group: www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/

St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink): www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/

[facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign)

Levenmouth Rail Campaign:

www.lmrc-action.org.uk/
[facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/)

Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG): www.capitalrail.org.uk/

Newburgh Train Station campaign: <http://newburghtrainstation.org.uk/>

Forth Rail Link (*Dunfermline-Kinross-Alloa*): www.forthraillink.com

[facebook.com/forthraillink/](https://www.facebook.com/forthraillink/)

Thornhill Station Action Group: chrisandmimi@supanet.com

Bonnybridge Railway Campaign:

<http://bonnybridgerailway.scot>
www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway

Pictures: LEVENMOUTH RAIL CAMPAIGN

It was railway enthusiasts who challenged the 'haters'

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

As I read this book in January, I was occasionally distracted by the extensive radio and newspaper coverage of the future of High Speed Two. Little did I know that there have always been opponents to the railways, stretching right back over 200 years!

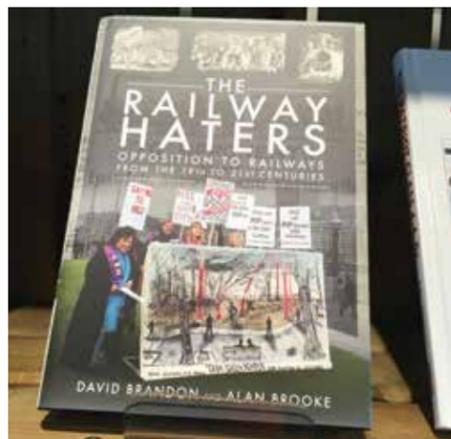
These have ranged from the turnpike trusts and canal companies to the aristocracy, the Road Haulage Association, MPs and certain Ministers of Transport!

It is very hard to imagine Britain without railways, but 200 years ago inland transport was centred around stagecoach travel along turnpikes, along with water transport on canals and navigable rivers.

Stagecoach travel over long distances was expensive, dangerous and uncomfortable. Railways transformed the country in every sort of way, from the standardisation of clock times to the popularity of seaside resorts and the growth of the suburbs.

With the advent of railways, the landed aristocracy were generally opposed to lines being constructed on or near their estates. Two lengthy chapters are devoted to the opposition from the aristocracy and other landowners. Brandon and Brooke's strength is their ability to give a clear overview of all this, but also to provide fascinating case studies to enlighten the reader.

I did not realise, for example, that the Duke of Devonshire prevented the Derby-Manchester Central line going anywhere near the Chatsworth estate. Other landowners effectively bullied railway companies into building pretty



The Railway Haters – Opposition to railways from the 19th to 21st centuries by David Brandon and Alan Brooke (Pen & Sword Transport 2019 £30) ISBN 9781526700209

stations near their country estates. Many of the themes which dominate current discussion about railways have been around since their inception.

Nationalisation was first discussed in the 1840s by a young William Gladstone and, a century later, was opposed by the railway industry's 'Big Four' companies along with the unlikely allies of the Road Haulage Association.

The penultimate chapter of the book is a more cheerful one to read. It looks at "Examples of support" for railways and mentions early rail guidebooks, the ubiquitous Bradshaw guides and what the authors bunch together as

"railway enthusiasts". The latter are given fair treatment for a change!

I was expecting a demonisation of Dr Richard Beeching and his infamous 1963 report (with its list of loss-making services and stations surveyed over one week in April 1961).

However, the authors produce a fair and factual account of those events. Again, individual case studies are fascinating. The lengthy final chapter of the book, entitled "Hostility continues" brings the story up to the present day and includes a discussion of HS2 and its opponents. Obviously, there are similarities with the opposition to the railways in the nineteenth century. However, we can now see the huge advances that railway construction brought to our country over nearly 200 years, in spite of the opposition described so clearly in this book.

The book finishes on a positive note, citing the saving of the Settle and Carlisle Railway as an example of how people power can be successful. It also recognises that the railways in Britain have been transformed in the last few decades, with the huge increase in passenger numbers and a series of reopenings. No politician would dare suggest closing a railway line or station these days! Railfuture's forebears – the Railway Development Association – even received a mention!

I cannot praise this fascinating book enough; it is beautifully illustrated, thoroughly researched and well written. Brandon and Brooke have produced a book that will appeal to both the general reader and the railway expert.

■ *Richard Lysons MA is chair of the Friends of Littleborough Stations*

The Midland main line – forever Cinderella

By Roger Bacon

From 1 January, all trains in Britain should have complied with accessibility rules. They do not.

A significant number of trains on the Midland main line that do not comply will continue in service in 2020. How did this happen?

Before the end of 2019 Transport Minister Chris Heaton-Harris wrote to the Rail Delivery Group saying "it is extremely disappointing that the rail industry and train operators will fail to meet the deadline to provide accessible trains for every passenger and every journey by the end of the year".

He goes on to say that "owners and operators have had 10 years to prepare for the 31 December 2019 deadline" and that "it is deeply frustrating that disabled passengers will still be waiting into 2020 for accessibility improvements to some services".

The key question is, does the blame for this failure really lie just with the rolling stock owners and train operators, or should it lie partially or totally with the Department for Transport which is now publicly absolving itself?

The IC125 trains (HST) formed of mark 3 coaches will continue

operating on the Midland in 2020 with slam doors and toilets that dump sewage on the track bed.

The IC125 trains provide 50% of the main line services to Nottingham and some to Leeds, Derby and Sheffield, but the Rail Minister does not mention any of the detail regarding the East Midlands franchise and the catalogue of disjointed events orchestrated by the DfT that took place in the past decade.

Initially the original franchise award to Stagecoach ran from November 2007 until March 2015. In October 2015 it was belatedly directly extended by the DfT until March 2018 with the option of up to another 13 rail periods. In February 2019 it was again extended by DfT until August 2019 with the option of a further six rail periods.

To add to this complex picture, the DfT had earlier announced in July 2012 that the Midland was to be electrified by Network Rail from Bedford up to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield.

After Network Rail in effect became a nationalised organisation under the DfT, this plan and others were put on hold in July 2017, and eventually electrification was allowed to go ahead as far north

as Kettering and Corby. Add to this another saga where in March 2019, with only nine months to go to the accessibility deadline, DfT confirmed it expected an update from Stagecoach East Midlands Trains in April regarding modifications to its IC125 coaches so the fleet would meet disability regulations coming into force on 1 January 2020.

This was, as DfT must have known, years too late to have any credible chance of being met, and a plan should have been actioned by them with Stagecoach and a train factory as soon as electrification north of Kettering was axed in 2017, if not before.

Within one month, in April 2019, Abellio was awarded the East Midlands franchise, and took over from Stagecoach in August 2019. Stagecoach, along with Arriva, was notified of its disqualification from the competition.

In our view the whole picture from March 2015 was of dither, delay and a failure by the DfT to plan objectively for a way forward that would allow time to upgrade old or provide new trains.

Questions were asked many times by our MPs in Parliament about new rolling stock for the Midland

to replace the post-2019 non-compliant IC125 coaches, and also by us directly to the DfT, and the answer from the DfT was always that it was up to the franchisee to decide what to do. After March 2015, the franchisee Stagecoach had only short-term direct-award contract extensions that as far as we are aware did not include any mention of upgrading the mark 3 coaches until March 2019, when it was far too late to get the work done in time.

How then can the DfT blame everyone else for the eventual failed outcome, when it was clear as day to the various stakeholders, especially after the cancellation of the major part of the Midland electrification in 2017, that this would happen?

Surely the DfT is the overall project manager of the UK's railways and has an obligation to ensure that major failures like this one are avoided.

It would be interesting to see the conclusions from any future investigation that could take place by the National Audit Office or the Rail Regulator into why this was allowed to happen.

■ *Roger Bacon is treasurer of Railfuture East Midlands*

Railfuture in Europe

Railfuture has renewed its subscription to the European Passengers Federation for 2020 and hopes that a two-way informed dialogue will continue post-Brexit.

Britain remains a participant in Interrail and Eurail but Railfuture's European Passenger Group will review our work as a consequence of Brexit.

Interrail has been actively promoting travel from and to the UK by Interrail, as Railfuture suggested it should.

Railfuture's European group held its first post-Brexit meeting in February.

Railfuture will be assessing best practice on both rail and light rail. We also plan to maintain contact with Eurostar in promoting better access, especially after the successful introduction of services to Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

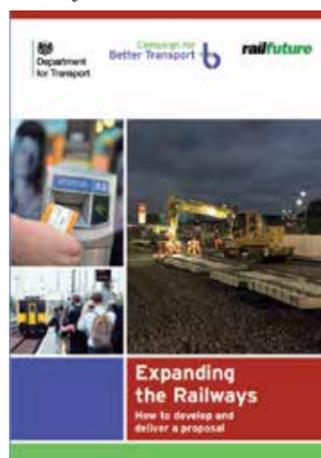
Railfuture freight group Maggie Simpson of the Rail Freight Group told Railfuture's freight group that more and more businesses want to use rail freight for environmental reasons. Finding rail terminals near city centres is crucial. The London Plan has done a lot to protect wharves and rail sites from development.

Railfuture infrastructure Railfuture is supporting MPs who have bid for cash from the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* (Reversing Beeching) Fund.

Railfuture is now turning its attention to the DfT's *New Stations Fund* which has invited local authorities to put forward candidates by June.

Potential schemes ready for delivery over the next 10 years are described in *Expanding the Railways*, a document produced by the Department for Transport in conjunction with Railfuture and the Campaign for Better Transport. It can be downloaded from:

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1745-Expanding-the-Railways>



Ron – the man who really saved the S&C

Rail champion and Railfuture vice-president Ron Cotton died in January at the age of 88.

"There is no doubt that it was Ron who saved the Settle and Carlisle line, never mind what Michael Portillo says," said Railfuture vice-president Peter Rayner.

It was Ron, a lieutenant-colonel in the Territorial Army, who also backed Railfuture's campaign for a national railcard launched in 2003.

Ron made his mark on the S&C in the 1980s, after most of the stations on the line had closed and he was appointed by British Rail as the project manager expected to close almost the entire line. InterCity

trains had been diverted away, Ribbleshead Viaduct needed repairs and there were just two trains a day on the line described as a "73-mile museum". But Ron found ways to promote the line as a lifeline

for local people and tap into its massive tourist potential. He backed the Dalesrail special trains for

walkers, which stopped at some of the disused stations.

Between 1983 and 1986, the number of passengers carried increased from 93,000 a year to 450,000 and eight stations reopened.

Former transport secretary Michael Portillo also played a role, commissioning a review which led to a reprieve.

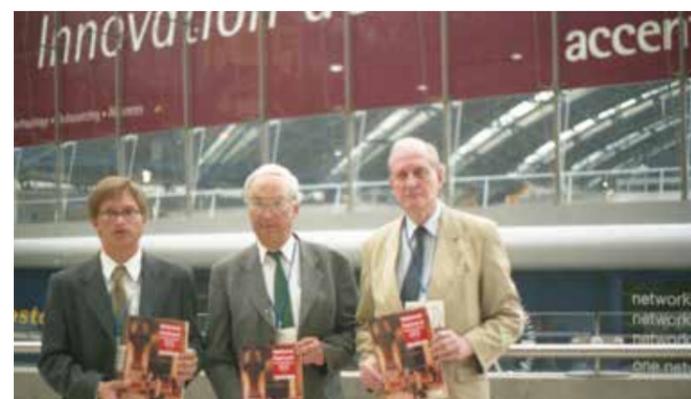
Both Ron and Michael travelled on a special train in 2014, from Blackpool to Carlisle to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its reprieve. Ron was credited with inventing the Merseyrail and Ayrday brands and introduced Saver



tickets. He was always brimming with ideas and could be guaranteed to brighten up a dull day. After he retired, Ron became a member of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line. In 2009, he unveiled a statue of the dog Ruswarp (a hero of the campaign



COLONEL COTTON: Ron at London Waterloo station in 2003



CAMPAIGN LAUNCH: Ron, right, with National Railcard report author Douglas Medrisch and Railfuture chairman Peter Lawrence (in 2003), centre, with copies of the report at Waterloo

to save the line along with his owner Graham Nuttall) at the reopening of Garsdale Station.

The Friends said: "This is very sad news for all of us. A debt is owed by all of us that love the line. He will not be forgotten."

Ron went to school in High Wycombe and joined BR straight from school, and spent his National Service with the Royal Engineers on the Longmoor Military Railway.

He worked in both operating and commercial positions at London Liverpool Street, Scotland and latterly in Liverpool. While he was a BR manager, he joined the Territorial Army with the Irish Guards and rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Ron Cotton, who was born in 1931, is survived by three sons and one daughter. His wife Sylvia died earlier this year.

Pictures: railwatch

Peak District route to lower carbon

A rail reopening that will help the planet

Railfuture vice-president PAUL ABELL explains the advantages of running limestone trains downhill from Peak Forest

You cannot blame Dr Beeching this time. He was quite happy to retain the Chinley-Matlock line through the Peak District, which had originally been built as part of the Midland Railway's London-Manchester route.

However, in the atmosphere of the 1960s it was still closed south of Peak Forest after the Euston-Manchester electrification was completed.

The argument was that passengers could use the new electric services to London, though this was not much help if you wanted to get to Derby or Leicester from Manchester.

But the consequences of the closure have proved more serious for the 2000-tonne trains from the limestone quarries around Peak Forest and Buxton travelling towards the south-east of England, where much of the demand for stone is located.

Heavy trains from Peak Forest quarry could coast largely downhill from Peak Forest to Matlock – if only the line through Miller's Dale and Bakewell was still open.

They could then continue through Cromford to join the Sheffield-Derby line at Ambergate.

That would be a 26-mile journey through the National Park, with visitors unlikely to be disturbed by the noise of coasting diesel engines.

The problem

Because the line through Bakewell is no longer available, the loaded trains labour up a long climb to the 985ft summit just before Dove Holes tunnel, before joining the busy Hope Valley line from Chinley to Sheffield. The train struggles up another steep 1 in 100 climb to the summit inside Cowburn Tunnel, followed by another stiff climb to Grindleford. The roar of large diesel engines can be heard in the surrounding hills.

At Dore the trains head towards Ambergate with yet another 1 in 100 climb to Bradway tunnel.

At the 26-mile point on this journey, the trains are a couple of miles closer to the Arctic Circle than they were at Peak Forest.

This way round, the journey to Ambergate is 41 miles, compared to 26 miles via Bakewell. A mile or so south of Peak Forest is the



LOADING LIMESTONE AT PEAK FOREST: By Peak District standards this is a small quarry, but 100-tonne wagons are now standard for this traffic, which mainly goes south to London



PEAK FOREST SIGNAL BOX: A 24-wagon train of 100 tonne wagons arrives from Ripple Lane depot at Barking, East London, on a roundabout journey via Willesden, the West Coast main line, Sandbach, Northwich, Altrincham and Hazel Grove

huge quarry at Tunstead. Trains from here have to climb more than a mile of 1 in 90 to reach Peak Forest signal box, before joining the long-way-round route to Ambergate.

Trains from the quarries near Buxton have 2.5 miles of such climbing.

The easiest route for trains in the other direction would be along the Midland main line, if the Bakewell route was available. As it is, they do a wide westbound swing, along the West Coast main line from Willesden to Crewe, and then go via Sandbach, Northwich, Northenden and Hazel Grove (near Stockport).

The solution

Reopening the railway north of Matlock was the subject of a feasibility study in 2004. This found that "the project was unlikely to be economically viable, at least in the short term", but the consultants went on to emphasise "the line of the route should be safeguarded



The Monsal Trail at Chee Tor No.1 tunnel looking uphill towards Peak Forest

for possible construction in the longer term when they expected the financial case to improve".

Happily the route has been safeguarded, its integrity being assured by its use as the Monsal Trail for walkers and cyclists.

The world has changed since 2004. The obvious advantages of reopening the direct line have led to two recent proposals.

One, associated with the heritage Peak Rail which runs trains from Matlock to Rowsley, emphasises how useful the link would be for freight traffic. A more general

proposal put forward by the Manchester & East Midlands Rail Action Partnership (MEMRAP) is supported by Railfuture.

Every loaded limestone train which does not have to wander round by the Hope Valley would save four tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions if it could travel the short way to Ambergate, says MEMRAP.

In these days of climate concern that is a powerful argument.

In addition, passenger trains using the link would greatly improve connectivity between Manchester and the East Midlands directly, and there would be an indirect improvement in connectivity between Sheffield and Manchester resulting from the extra paths made available by the removal of through limestone trains from the Hope Valley line.

The National Park

A direct link from Peak Forest to Matlock would run through the Peak District National Park for much of its length, an organisation which has policies to cover a host of situations which might arise in its area.

Those relating to the reopening of railways can be found in its *Local Development Framework*, a document adopted in 2011, and its *Development Management Policies*, adopted in May 2019.

The national park is in the conservation business rather than the transport business, but these policies do not prohibit the reopening of the railway.

Given the ethos of the national park, it is understandable that there must be demonstrable environmental benefits, while the Monsal Trail which allows cyclists and pedestrians to use the formation of the closed line in its turn is regarded as something to be safeguarded. Railfuture believes a suitable parallel route should be provided.

The funding

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." (Julius Caesar – William Shakespeare)

Now is the time for campaigners to stake a claim on the £500 million promised by the Government for a Beeching Reversal Fund, both for the carbon saving that would arise from the more rational routing of limestone trains, and also for the improvement in connectivity between Manchester and the East Midlands.

Let us see if the Government will put its money where its mouth is.

Join Railfuture at: www.railfuture.org.uk/join

West Midlands

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■ ■ New stations are key to West Midlands £15 billion plan



RAILFUTURE: Malcolm Holmes of West Midlands Rail Executive, West Midlands Mayor Andy Street, Birmingham City councillor Waseem Zaffar and Brenda Lawrence of West Midlands Railway with a sign for one of the planned new Camp Hill stations

Another of Railfuture's campaigns looks likely to come to fruition. The case to reopen Aldridge is viable, according to the West Midlands Rail Executive which conducted an analysis last year. The executive is drawing up a business case for the new station and devising ways to secure the £10 million funding needed to take the project on. Transport for West Midlands' plans include a 150-space car park for the station, on the Sutton Park freight line to the north west of Walsall. There are also plans for new stations on the Wolverhampton-Walsall line at Darlaston and Willenhall. It is planned that two trains an hour would run from Wolverhampton to Aldridge, one via Birmingham New Street and one via Walsall, with an estimated 500,000 passengers using the service annually. This will be the sixth reinstated station in the West Midlands Combined Authority area. Construction is also expected to start this year on another three new stations – Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell – on the Camp Hill line. Railfuture West Midlands can be proud that its campaigns over many years are finally paying off. West Midlands Mayor Andy Street mentioned the reopened stations when he announced an ambitious £15 billion 20-year transport plan.

■ ■ Widescale benefits already certain from High Speed Two

Even before the renewed go-ahead for High Speed Two in February, it had kick-started economic developments in Birmingham with well-known companies in the finance and banking sectors relocating from London. Railfuture West Midlands will be pressing for improvements to the existing network so it can exploit the promised boost from HS2. The flagship Midlands Rail Hub scheme will transform east-west links across the Midlands. The planning application for Curzon Street station has been submitted to the City of Birmingham, and extensive work has already been carried out on the site and at Washwood Heath where HS2 trains will be maintained. The depot will employ up to 500 staff working in shifts, in jobs within the depot, maintenance and support workers, or train drivers who will start and finish their day there. It will be HS2's only rolling stock maintenance depot for Phases One and 2a of the UK's new high-speed rail network.

■ ■ Coventry-Leicester service at risk from high costings

Coventry Rail Action Group, Railfuture and many others responded to reports that high costings might jeopardise plans to rebuild Coventry station and create a new platform to clear the way for a two-trains-per-hour service to Leicester. We have been reassured that rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris is investigating after reports in mid January that Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership had been told that phase three of the large-scale works depended on a better business case.

■ ■ Transformation plan for Stoke-on-Trent stations

Railfuture supported Stoke-on-Trent's application to the Transforming Cities Fund to create a bus-train-taxi transport interchange, which involves relocation of one of the car parks to open up the entrance to the station with a new east to west footbridge. The plans also include improvements at Longton and Longport stations.

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◆◆◆◆ Increase Railfuture's lobbying power: Recruit a new member

Yorkshire

■ ■ Cost-effective doubling 'enough for Harrogate-York'

A £12.5 million plan to upgrade the Harrogate-York line is reported to be "passing through critical gateways" at North Yorkshire County Council. The money is needed for track and signal upgrades at Cattal, and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has agreed to continue to maintain its key £9.5 million contribution which was agreed in 2013. The council is expected to commission Network Rail to undertake detailed design and delivery of the scheme, which should be completed this year. It was found to be more cost effective to limit the amount of double tracking, which will be restricted to sections at Cattal and Hammerton, mainly to ease the passage of trains through these points. Officials are confident that the measures will allow for a doubling of services between Harrogate and York in December.

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Devon and Cornwall

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■ ■ Reverse Beeching should first target diversionary routes

The need for alternative rail routes, which Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has long campaigned for, was demonstrated in January with a series of incidents affecting train services in our area. It is 20 years since we recommended the replacement of Bradford-on-Tone level crossing and its near neighbour (Victory) with road over-bridges. Railfuture's South West Rail Strategy, published in 2000, explained that the bridges were needed to improve road safety but also to provide for an increase of speed on the Taunton-Exeter main line from 100 to 125 mph. Sadly, on 23 December 2019 a Paddington-Plymouth train hit a car on the Bradford-on-Tone automatic half barrier level crossing, four miles from Wellington, Somerset. A local car driver was killed. Another Exeter-bound train from Paddington had reached Taunton, but had to return to Castle Cary so it could run via Yeovil and Honiton to Exeter. Subsequent trains were cancelled or diverted via Honiton.

On 15 January, a building next to the railway line in Exeter caught fire, causing the line towards Taunton to be closed for almost three hours in the afternoon and forcing the cancellation of main line trains to London, CrossCountry services and local trains to Barnstaple. There were no diversions via Honiton, because the Castle Cary-

Yeovil line was closed for engineering work Maintenance work also closed the Exeter-Plymouth main line on three Saturdays and four Sundays in January. If the Okehampton line had been reopened, trains could have continued to run between Exeter and Plymouth. The Okehampton reopening should be a priority in any Government proposals to restore lost railway lines.

Our second reopening priority is a link from Tiverton to Tiverton Junction (not to be confused with Tiverton Parkway) to allow through commuter services to both Exeter and Taunton. Tiverton has a population of around 20,000 and is set to grow further with large housing developments on the east side of town. These could be rail served with a second Tiverton station. About five miles of new track would be needed.

Our third priority would be to extend the Exeter-Barnstaple line by nine miles, to serve an additional 25,000 people in Bideford and Northam. Bideford has been a reopening candidate since the days when the line still had track, but now the Tarka Trail cycle and footpath would have to be relocated alongside.

■ ■ Railfuture Devon and Cornwall AGM in Plymouth on 4 April



■ ■ Network Rail work under way at Dawlish in February

Network Rail has installed a bigger sea wall at Dawlish, Devon, to protect the coastal line following the repeated breaches by the sea over the past few years. The line connects 50 towns and cities in Devon and Cornwall with the rest of the country. Railfuture believes the line between Dawlish and Teignmouth is so vulnerable that an alternative route should also be made available by reopening the line via Okehampton.

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Birthdays for Britain's Growing Railway

Spring 2020 is a very significant period in Railfuture London and South East branch's rail development almanac. It marks anniversaries of the culmination of years of concerted campaigning to secure the addition of nine stations to the region's rail network.

■ 40 years ago in May three stations opened, at Hackney Central and Hackney Wick on the North London Line, and at Moulescoomb just east of Brighton.

■ 35 years ago in May Homerton station also opened on the North London Line.

■ 25 years ago in May Chafford Hundred station appeared on the rail map of Essex.

■ 10 years ago in April four stations opened with the first extension of the East London Line northwards from Whitechapel – at Shoreditch High Street, Hoxton, Haggerston and Dalston Junction.

■ 10 years ago in May the link opened to enable London Overground services to extend south of New Cross Gate to Crystal Palace and West Croydon.

The Office of Rail and Road's estimates of station usage only start from 1997-98 but for any of those stations their patronage then, or in the case of London Overground 10 years ago, is but a pale shadow of the latest estimates for 2018-19 published in January. Leading the list is Shoreditch High Street, now in the top 50 of the busiest stations in Britain.

Some of those still to come:

■ Barking Riverside (at the end of a new London Overground branch, off the London, Tilbury & Southend line) to support a new community of 11,000 new homes and due to open in December 2021.

■ Sharnal Street (on the Hundred of Hoo freight-only line in Kent) also to support a new community of 11,000 new homes.

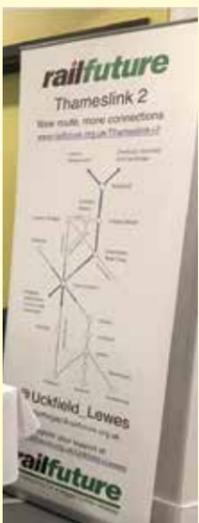
■ Thanet Parkway, which has recently completed its funding package with support from Kent County Council and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Buy 'Britain's Growing Railway' – Railfuture's A-Z Guide to more than 400 new and reopened Railways since 1960:

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/shop/books.php?id=bgr1>

Road tunnel defies official policy

Hackney Council failed in a bid to persuade Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to ditch his planned Silvertown road tunnel. The mayor has been told by campaigners that building a road tunnel under the river Thames contradicts his policy to reduce road traffic pollution. He has also ignored rail campaigners (not Railfuture) who have called for a new service to Canary Wharf from Brighton via Lewes, using a combination of existing lines and short sections of new build. Railfuture has developed its own Thameslink+2



Good advice from young Londoners



Picture: RAILWATCH

Children living in the Tower Hamlets area of London suffer some of the worst pollution from road traffic anywhere in Britain. For years, the council has done little to tackle the problem, but at last it is trying. It has launched a series of consultations to make local areas less dominated by road traffic and more friendly to children, cyclists and pedestrians in general. But every time the council tries to do something positive, local protests flare up

from motorists who want the freedom to drive cars wherever they want. The council has even tried to persuade drivers to turn off their engines, rather than leaving them idling when they are not needed. The signs and the appeals are routinely ignored. The drivers of coaches taking children to the Mile End stadium sit with their engines running while the children have sport sessions. Close to where the coaches park are large signs asking drivers to turn off their engines.

Nearby – but hidden underground – is the junction where Crossrail trains will diverge to serve Shenfield in one direction and Abbey Wood in the other. Sadly Crossrail is badly behind schedule and although trains are still undergoing test running (our picture below shows a Crossrail train at Prince Regent station in January), we have no clear idea when the project will be completed and real trains for real passengers will be running.

suggestions which was promoted at a rail show in Longfield, Kent, in January. See picture, below left.

We will have a similar stall at the London Festival of Railway Modelling at London's Alexandra Palace on 21-22 March.

Engaging with the establishment

Railfuture London and South East has had half-a-dozen recent consultations to respond to, exerting our independent influence where decisions are taken.

■ East Midlands Railway's new timetable for December 2020.

■ The ORR's Accessible Travel Policy Guidance – accessibility of rail replacement services.

■ Mole Valley's Local Plan: we are championing a Dorking Transport Hub embracing the two stations where radial and orbital routes cross.

■ Hertfordshire's Rail Strategy.

■ Network Rail's Reigate station upgrade.

■ The DfT's closure of Newhaven Marine station.

Our responses can all be viewed at

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation+responses>

Members' annual meeting

On Saturday 25 April in Wesley's Chapel near Old Street station we will hear about rail devolution and the new pipeline for network enhancements.



Picture: RAILWATCH

Monthly news updates

London and South East branch members can subscribe free to our monthly two-page e-newsletter *inter-railse*. It usefully fills the gap between the quarterly eight-page *raillse*, sent to branch members with each *Railwatch*. Both newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from the branch website page, below.

www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East
Twitter: @RailfutureLSE

Reversing Beeching was a very good line – in public relations

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

It is easy at times to despair about my profession of journalism, particularly when looking at the coverage of railways in the national media. Invariably they either get the wrong end of the stick or cover the wrong type of story. This was particularly true of the coverage of Grant Shapps's £500 million to "reverse Beeching". Amazingly, this pathetic promise of £500 million – in an industry that spends at least ten times that annually on investment – attracted widespread coverage.

It was an excuse for the TV companies to trot out those lovely shots of steam locomotives with the blackened faces of their drivers, kindly porters loading luggage for families spending a week in Skegness and Brief Encounter type shots of couples separating at railway stations. The lugubrious figure of the long dead Dr B grasping the copy of his report inevitably also featured in the coverage.

No one, though, bothered to explain the flaws in the "reversing Beeching" story. First, the coverage neglected to point out that there was only £250 million of new money as the other half had already been allocated to Network Rail.

Second, Mr Shapps trotted up to Fleetwood where there is a five mile branch line from Poulton that was shut in 1970. He was not announcing the reopening of the line, merely that a feasibility study costing £100,000 would be undertaken. Why it costs £100,000 to assess whether further assessments should go ahead is beyond me. I suspect if Roger Ford and I popped down there for a couple of days, we would be able to work out what needed to be done and suggest that they get on with it. Moreover, Fleetwood is already on the tram route from Blackpool but this is not properly integrated with the local railways. Therefore one alternative might be a Rotherham style tram train solution and while local campaigners



Railfuture president: Christian Wolmar

would prefer reopening the line to Poulton le Fylde, it would be worth assessing the alternative. Third, the hardy campaigners at Railfuture have ensured that over the past half century there has been a steady stream of reopening lines shut following the Beeching report. According to the 2017 version of *Britain's Growing Railway*, some 400 stations and nearly 1,000 kilometres

of track have been added to the network since 1960 and there are several schemes in progress. And finally, most obviously, £500 million would be enough to reopen perhaps, optimistically, 100 miles of track but in reality probably considerably less than that.

Yet some 6,500 kilometres of lines were lost in the decade after the Beeching report and much of this is completely irrecoverable and totally uneconomic anyway. All of this helped disguise the fact that the Government was in some disarray over its railway policy. Big decisions over HS2 and the future of franchising were in the offing, and the announcement about "reversing Beeching" was made the day before Mr Shapps confirmed that Northern was being taken back in house, effectively temporarily renationalised, which is a bit of a stomach churner for a Conservative minister.

There is, however, good news in all this nonsense. The very fact that "reversing Beeching" was seen by ministers and their public relations teams as a good news story shows that they understand the railways are popular. Despite all the flak about the railways in the newspapers, which is really disproportionate to their performance since most of the time trains can be relied on to deliver passengers on time, it shows just how much the public wants a good railway service. Ministers will have to do a bit more than promising the possible reopening of a few railway lines, particularly in the North, to convince rail users that things really are getting better. That is good news for rail campaigners.

Railfuture is winning on the media front

By Bruce Williamson
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Railfuture had its busiest ever January for radio, TV and press appearances.

Fare rises, the fund to reverse Beeching, Northern renationalisation and further speculation over the future of HS2 meant that we were more in demand for comment than usual, with Railfuture's name and views appearing in the media on average more than once per day. Many outlets picked up on our press release on fare increases, and our quote of "another decade of misery for rail passengers" was widely used in headlines. Twelve different members of our team of press officers and spokespeople were quoted or interviewed. We appeared on national radio 12 times, national TV four times and made it into just about all the national papers. Add in our local media appearances and you'd have to try pretty hard to avoid us.

Online too, journalists read our website articles and have complimented us on them being in terms that the public can understand.

It's a great reflection on our campaigning work, and shows that we are being taken ever more seriously as a source of informed comment on railway matters in Britain. As ever, you can see, hear and read many of our media appearances by typing "Railfuture in the news" into your favourite search engine.

◆◆◆◆ Increase Railfuture's lobbying power: Recruit a new member

railwatch

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railfuture
campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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BIRMINGHAM: Five Ways underpass is being converted from a road into the track for the Metro extension to Edgbaston

Is this the start of the revolution?

As one railway campaigner put it: "Who would have thunk it? Five Ways underpass converted from road to rail."

He was delighted that even in the car-proud city of Birmingham, cars are at last making way for trams.

Throughout the storms of February, work continued on the Midland Metro extension to Edgbaston with 300 metres of track installed at Five Ways.

By the end of next year, trams should be operational in the underpass. It cannot come too soon.

Even rail campaigners have become accustomed to road traffic dominating our lives.

Birmingham's Five Ways underpass was a key part of the 1960s motor city revolution which has made people play second fiddle to car traffic.

Now though, thanks to Greta Thunberg shaming her elders into confronting some hard scientific facts, and increasing awareness of the damage that pollution causes to everyone's life, it is possible to think of a better lives in our cities.

There is increasing talk of restricting car use in favour of public transport – and maybe some of that talk will eventually result in some action on the ground.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has finally allowed HS2 to proceed and has even been photographed on a railway line that might even be reopened. In Luxembourg, meanwhile, matters have

progressed further. From the beginning of March, the government of the tiny European state has introduced free travel on buses, trams and trains.

It claims to be the first state in the world to abolish fares nationwide. Luxembourg, which has more cars per head than anywhere else in Europe, is now run by a coalition of the centrist Democratic Party, the left-wing Socialist Workers' Party and the Greens.

First class carriages are being retained on the rail network so people can pay to work "serenely" on the train.

Luxembourg is in the middle of a five-year public transport investment programme, with £2.2 billion being spent on rail and trams. The bus fleet will be all-electric by 2030.

Transport writer Nicky Gardner told the *Independent*: "To give an entire country free transport is revolutionary.

"Apart from encouraging commuters to shift from their cars, it will slowly transform the attitudes of an entire population towards public transport."

The move will also help the many people who commute from Germany, France and Belgium to work in the Luxembourg financial sector.

For one woman who lives in Thionville (France) and commutes to Luxembourg, her £73 monthly ticket now costs her £42. In Hungary and Slovakia, European Union senior citizens can travel by train for free.

But just as rail campaigners consider the possibilities, the reality of rail travel in Britain gives pause for thought.

The estimate for work at Ely North Junction, urgently needed to clear the way for freight trains from Felixstowe and upgraded passenger services for many parts of East Anglia, has increased 20 times, from £25 million to £500 million, according to a BBC report.

Network Rail told the BBC that the £25 million would not release the additional services needed by rail users.

A spokeswoman added: "A far wider range of interventions is required, including layout changes at Ely station, improvements to bridges, power upgrades and improvements to level crossings."

The upgrade is needed to run more trains between Norwich and Cambridge, King's Lynn and London, as well as Ipswich and Peterborough.

The Government was preparing to launch its Budget as *Railwatch* went to press and although HS2 is going ahead, it was reported to still be planning to spend £29 billion in building roads.

But maybe change is coming there too. After the successful legal challenge to Heathrow expansion, some campaigners are hoping to block road building. Ipswich has already abandoned plans to build a £500 million northern bypass because all local councils withdrew support for the scheme, making funding highly unlikely, as part of it

was linked to house building. There are hopes that the Oxford-Cambridge "Expressway" road might be ditched too.

There was once a campaign to convert railways into roads. Is it time to consider converting more roads into railways? Five Ways could be just the start of a revolution.



Pass it on

The best way to recycle *Railwatch* is to pass it on to a friend who may be interested in railways and tempted to join Railfuture.

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