

railwatch

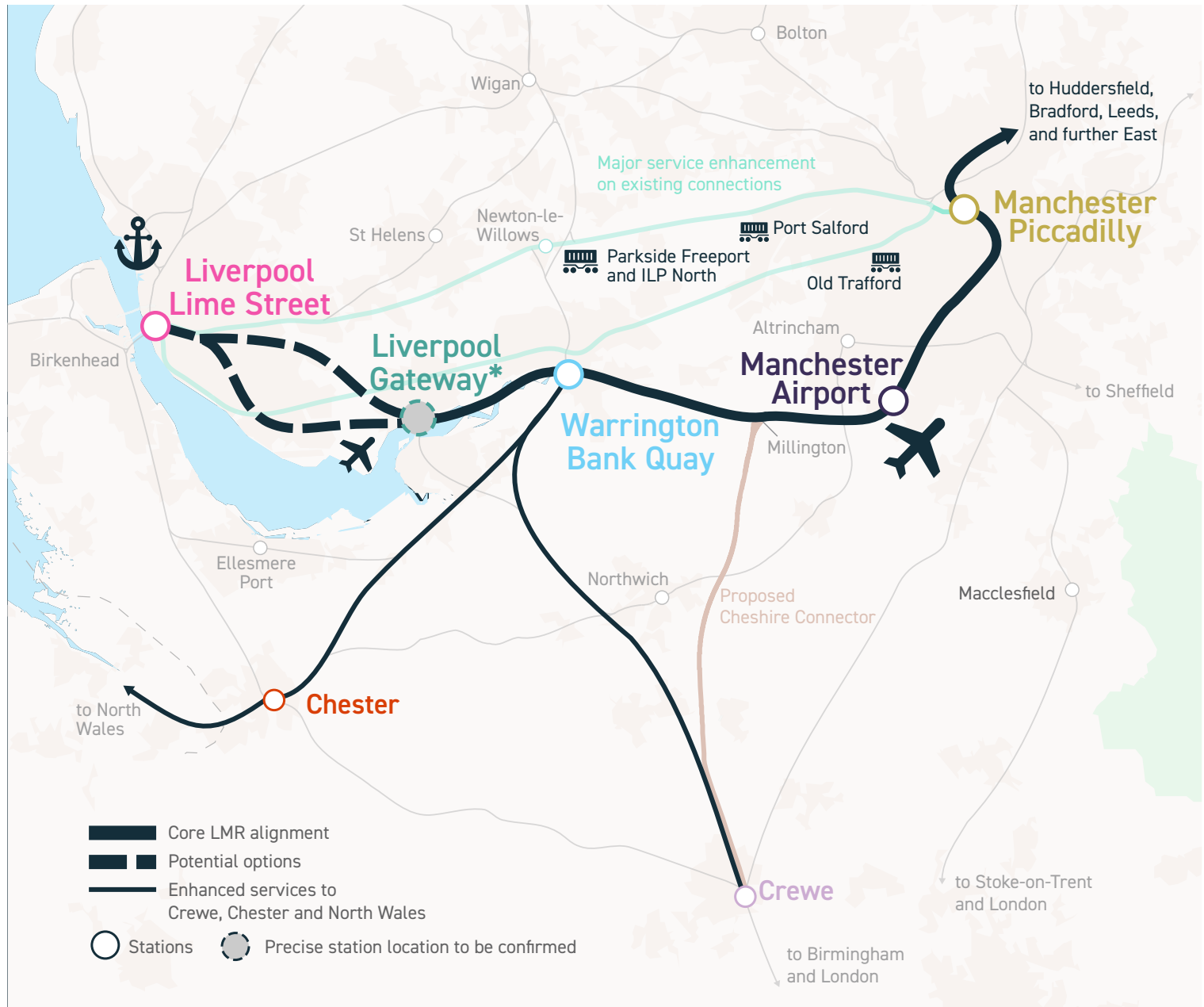
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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Change the world, kickstart a new railway age: Page 2

'Two centuries ago, the Liverpool-Manchester Railway changed the world – kickstarting the railway age and powering a revolution in trade, travel and opportunity. Today, we have the chance to do it again'

Liverpool city region mayor Steve Rotheram calls for a new Liverpool-Manchester railway



INSIDE: ● Christian Wolmar on the world's greatest rail network

● Family friendly trains ● Ian Brown's alternative tunnel vision ● Bikes on trains

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A new inter-city world

By Arthur Thompson
and Ray King

The world's first inter-city rail line needs a "change the world" replacement to make the area fit for a high speed future, say the mayors of Liverpool and Manchester.

They are challenging the Labour government which was elected on a "change" manifesto to give the go-ahead for a line to reduce journey times between the cities by 20 minutes.

The initiative comes from Liverpool City Region mayor Steve Rotherham and Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham in response to the government's 2023-24 axing of HS2's northern leg.

Westminster is urged to support investing in the line, part of their Northern Arc growth corridor from the Mersey to the Pennines and into Yorkshire.

"It is what the people in the North rightly deserve" said Mr Rotherham. "There is huge latent potential here."

The two Labour mayors launched the report by their combined authorities in May, compiled with support from former Conservative rail minister Huw Merriman who now chairs the Liverpool-Manchester



How a high speed Manchester Piccadilly station could look

Railway Partnership Board. The mayors say a fresh approach to infrastructure delivery is needed, with local knowledge, private investment and the latest technology to deliver value for money

The new line could provide a £15 billion boost to the economy and generate 22,000 jobs during the construction period, with a potential long-term economic benefit of £90 billion.

This compares favourably with the expected £78 billion of economic growth from the Oxford-Cambridge East West Railway. The Liverpool-Manchester line would encourage modal shift from road to rail and reduce pressure

on both the existing road and rail networks. Mayor Andy Burnham said: "The Northern Arc can be the fast-track to green growth."

The new line would have stops at a new Liverpool Gateway station, Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Airport.

The mayors pointed out that the previous government had committed £17 billion to a new Liverpool-Manchester line following the cancellation of high speed rail's northern links. Now they want the Labour government to act.

The Department for Transport said: "We are reviewing the position we inherited on HS2, and will set out next steps in due course."

Wales – and the world's greatest rail network

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN By Christian Wolmar

Nothing can quite prepare you for the shock of China. Of course before I travelled there I knew the numbers: 48,000 km of high speed rail already built, with plans for many more. I knew, too, that it is a huge country, with a population of 1.4 billion, and has developed at rates which meant more growth annually than western countries manage in a decade. But as I toured round the country by train and was driven round various towns and cities with motorway systems that make Spaghetti Junction look like a village crossroads, I kept on returning to the key issue: the scale, I mused, the sheer scale.

It is impossible to overstate how much China has changed and how out of kilter much of our western image of the nation now is. Pagoda-style buildings are as rare as women with bound feet. There are probably more 20-storey-plus buildings in China than in the whole of the western world, many in strange ghost towns.

Even in rural areas, people have been rehoused in stark, grey, high-rise apartment blocks that overlook the vast acres of brown fields their inhabitants still till. Small cities

have become large ones with five or more million people, while large ones are now megacities with 10, even 20 million inhabitants. Having a minimum of 10 metro lines (the same as London) is de rigueur for any city aspiring to be in the top tier and several cities have more. Anyone who suggests this is not going to be the Chinese century simply has watched too much American TV.

That is the context of the construction of the remarkable high speed rail network, overlaid on the country like a spider's web covering a bush. The first line opened in 2008, which means that on average more than seven km per day, every day, have been completed in the intervening period.

To put that in perspective, the current length of China's high speed network, built in less than two decades, is three times the size of Britain's whole network, constructed painstakingly over the course of the latter two thirds of the 19th century. It is tempting, if

cruel, to remind ourselves that the 225km-long HS2 between London and Birmingham was initially launched in 2009 and may be completed by 2033, though no definite date has been announced. We can barely manage seven metres per day. China's

achievement of building what must now be considered the world's greatest rail network has been made possible by a government that decided on this strategy of building a high speed rail network and was never knocked off course by any objections or setbacks. And there was an accident early on in 2011 that could have derailed, as it were, the whole project as it was

caused by a series of human and technical failures. But no, after a hiatus, the lessons were learnt and China's high speed rail network continued to be built apace.

So can we learn anything from this? Let's go from China to Wales, a big leap from the world's second most populous nation to a very small one. However, there is a significant

project to celebrate in Wales, the creation of the South Wales Metro, currently coming on stream and due to open fully next year. It involves the transformation of what were once underused and largely forgotten Welsh valley lines into a modern suburban rail system using a fleet of new tram trains.

This idea was first put forward by Mark Barry, a local businessman who had no transport expertise. Listen to my interview with him on my podcast *Calling All Stations* and you will get an idea of how one man with a big idea and a lot of nous can make a difference.

He managed to persuade the Welsh, and then the British, government of the viability of this ambitious idea and it has now been funded to the tune of £1 billion.

It might not quite be a high speed network across a vast nation, but it is an inspirational story that shows the importance of vision, ambition, persistence – and also a modicum of luck.

■ **Railwatch readers can buy a signed copy of my latest book *The Liberation Line (Railwatch 181)* for a special price of £20 post free. Email christian.wolmar@gmail.com and put Railwatch offer in the header**



Christian Wolmar

Let's be friendly to families on trains

A plea for more social seating in railway carriages

By Michael Willmot
mwillmot@talktalk.net

In recent issues of *Railwatch*, there has been mention of campaigns to make rail more inclusive – making rail useful to more diverse and less advantaged communities. My plea is to include families and groups in this mix.

Noticeable, especially in standard class, has been the ever-increasing proportion of airline type seating in many newer carriages. This is not satisfactory when more than two people want to sit together and converse during a journey.

Even for two people chatting, this is not an ideal arrangement. How much more satisfactory to sit opposite your companion and see and enjoy the body language and facial expressions that inevitably accompany speech.

Also, for a family, how much more pleasant to sit round a table with all the additional activities that a table allows. Furthermore, have you noticed how much easier it is to strike up a conversation with a fellow traveller when sitting opposite rather than alongside?

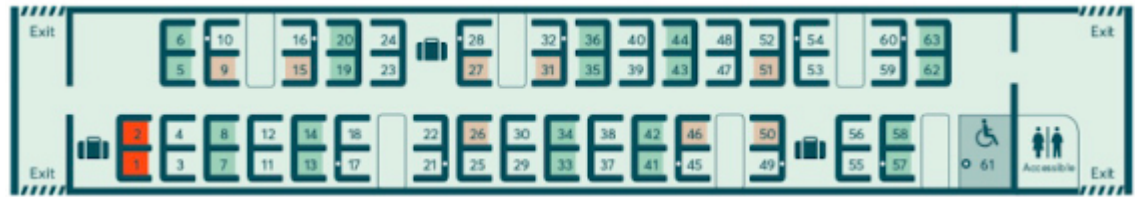
The drive towards airline seating is presumably to squeeze in a few extra seats, but at the expense of social seating and alignment of seats with carriage windows.

Social seating also allows the convenience of being able to stow more luggage near each passenger – on the floor between the back-to-back seats.

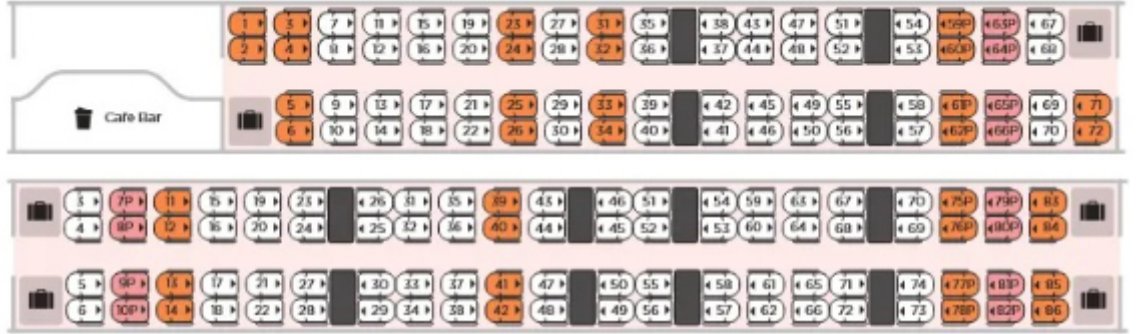
Not everybody wants social seating. Many passengers prefer to travel undisturbed while consulting their phone or watching a video. That is fine. My ask is for a 50 : 50 mix of airline type and social seating so that groups, especially families, can enjoy a journey together, and more widely the art of conversation can be promoted.

Goodness knows, in a world of ever-strengthening social silos and sometimes toxic online messaging, the opportunity for striking up a conversation with a fellow traveller, often from a tradition beyond your own social circle, can be valuable, rewarding and a small contribution to the social glue needed to keep society united. This is especially beneficial if the wider campaign mentioned at the start of this piece is to be progressed – making rail useful to more diverse communities.

■ Michael Willmot is secretary of the Far North Line community rail partnership



Pendolino carriage: 40 airline seats, 22 social seats, ratio 1.8 : 1



Azuma carriages: 56 airline seats, 16 social seats, ratio 3.5 : 1
54 airline seats. 32 social seats. Ratio 1.7:1



Class 197 (classes 195 & 196 are similar): 50 airline seats, 24 social seats, ratio 2.1 : 1

‘Interior refresh’ for high speed fleet

Train operator Southeastern, which has been run by a government-owned company for the past four years, has proudly announced that it has given all its class 395 Javelin high speed trains an “interior refresh”.

Whether there was any passenger or customer input into the process is not clear from the press release.

The first phase of the £27 million upgrade saw all 29 trains fitted with new carpets, new seats, energy-efficient LED lighting and at-seat USB charge points.

A second phase of the upgrade is underway to improve passenger information and introduce a “sleek

new exterior livery”. The upgrade programme is being delivered in partnership with rolling stock company Eversholt Rail and train maker Hitachi Rail.

The new on-train screens will provide real-time updates and travel information.

Southeastern’s engineering and major programmes director Mark Johnson said: “We are committed to delivering better journeys for our customers and the refurbishment of our flagship high speed fleet is a vital part of our programme.”

Southeastern’s high speed service started in 2009. The trains travel at 140 mph and connect London

St Pancras International with Ashford, East Kent and the Medway towns. Other Southeastern trains are also being upgraded.

Class 376 trains are getting refurbished seating, new LED lighting and at-seat power points. Toilets are being retrofitted in all 30 class 707 City Beam trains.

Some newer class 377 trains are also being transferred to Southeastern. At the same time, there is a procurement programme to replace older Networker trains.

Eversholt Rail’s client services director Paul Sutherland said: “We are continually investing in our fleets.”

Ditch the Roscos, says ASLEF Scotland

Train drivers’ union ASLEF is urging the Scottish government to dump the “parasitic” rolling stock companies and PFI, and instead to use public finance to acquire new trains which could make the process 70% cheaper.

A report commissioned by ASLEF and launched in April at the Scottish Parliament shows that £364 million could be saved in procuring 69 new trains over the course of a 30-year contract, by using green bonds and the Scottish government’s borrowing powers. It was launched at the Scottish Parliament in April.

The figures are based on current bond levels compared to the current cost of private capital. The report, *A Public Vision for Financing Scotland’s Railways*,

compiled by Professor Andy Cumbers and Grace Brown of Glasgow University, sets out a new vision for acquiring new trains now and in the future.

ASLEF Scottish organiser Kevin Lindsay says the rolling stock companies, also called Roscos, have benefitted from massive public subsidies and added: “Private extraction of public money is one of the great political and economic failures of our times.”

He said large amounts of profits have been sent to offshore tax havens to avoid paying tax in Britain whereas green bonds have successfully raised billions of pounds in Germany and the Netherlands, and help improve public infrastructure, grow economies and meet environmental policy objectives.

Chain of events on my bike-train

By John Thompson



I often take my bike on the train but last September I went further than normal. I travelled from my home near Lowestoft in Suffolk to Aberdeen in north-east Scotland, where I put my bike on the ferry and enjoyed a great cycling trip in the Shetland Isles.

As the journey to Aberdeen involved five different operators, with differing cycle storage facilities on their trains, it is a good one to highlight the issues facing cyclists.

My journey began positively on a Greater Anglia service between Lowestoft and Norwich. I have long regarded GA as the best operator for bikes on trains. It officially allows six bikes per train, and for most services, reservations are not required, the exception being Norwich-Liverpool Street inter-city trains. However, there is one negative point for the first-come first-served approach. It can be worrying not knowing whether you will be able to get your bike on board to connect with the services for which you have reservations. In my case I am fortunate. My nearest stations are Oulton Broad North and Oulton Broad South. However, Lowestoft station is less than two miles from home and for longer journeys, the fare is the same as from Oulton Broad. Thus, it is no major issue to cycle to Lowestoft station to ensure I am the first to put a bike on board. Cyclists boarding at stations further along are not in my fortunate situation.

There is a case for being able to reserve bike spaces on services where you normally cannot, if you are going on longer journeys involving services for which reservations are compulsory. There is also a case for being able to reserve bike spaces on services that are usually first-come, first-served.

For instance, I should be able to reserve a bike space between Lowestoft and Ipswich to ensure I can connect with the main line service my bike is reserved on.

Not all peak services have bike bans and certainly there is a lot of bike and train commuting on Greater Anglia's peak services. Surely that should be encouraged.

The next leg was Norwich-Grantham on East Midlands Railway. I have had protracted correspondence with them. It is not EMR's fault it inherited trains with a capacity for only two bikes but it is disappointing EMR did not increase capacity on its forthcoming new trains. EMR could increase the official capacity on its existing 170 trains from two to four as Greater Anglia did. EMR's response was that the current situation suits its needs.



BRITISH STYLE: The cramped and inconvenient cycle locker for two bikes on an inter-city Azuma train. These Hitachi-built trains are probably the most awkward for cyclists. Hitachi-built inter-city trains operate on Great Western and LNER. Greater Anglia's Stadler-built trains are much better for cyclists, and probably for passengers without bikes too.

More info: <https://yorkcyclecampaign.bike/2023/04/02/pushing-for-cycle-friendly-train-designs/>

What about the needs of its cyclist customers? I had politely explained to EMR how enabling more bikes on board would benefit EMR.

EMR has also put a limit on cycle reservations between Norwich and Peterborough between June and September, because of the number of holidaymakers using the services and feedback from its predecessor, East Midlands Trains.

EMR refused to detail EMT's feedback, claiming it was commercially sensitive. Hmmm!

It is confusing reserving bikes online for EMR's Norwich-Liverpool service. For this journey, my bike was automatically reserved. However, for journeys I have made to Skegness and return, the system indicated

reservations are not required. That contradicts EMR's website stating reservations are essential. However, on phoning customer services, I

have been able to reserve my bike. That might be down to National Rail, which has responsibility for online timetables. It seems that, if it is only the section of the journey on a Norwich-Liverpool service that requires bike reservations, the system indicates they are not required at all.

There are several issues with reserving bike spaces online involving all operators. I have taken them up with Transport Focus, which claims some of them have been resolved.

However, many EMR guards are unaware bike spaces can be reserved on Norwich-Liverpool services. On my Skegness journeys, I have had puzzled looks from guards when telling them my bike was reserved. Also, my correspondence was initially prompted by a customer services person advising

me that EMR does not reserve bikes on those services. Customer services also told me it has no way of informing guards about cycle reservations. That is surely nonsense. Such has been the confusion with online booking for EMR services that, combined with the supposed restriction between June and September when I travelled to and from Aberdeen in September 2023, I got so concerned I would not be able to reserve my bike, I went via London.

Fortunately, I was able to use services that with advance singles, worked out only £14 more expensive than using the direct route. However, it meant not arriving in Aberdeen until 2055, quite late to find my

accommodation.

Fortunately, I was able to get a couple of pints in before last orders.

On this occasion, putting my bike on board the EMR service at the starting point went smoothly. I think the

problem in 2023 was more down to National Rail. I sense EMR has quietly dropped thoughts about June-September restrictions, even though it is still stated on the website. Perhaps I can chalk up a success. It is curious the facility for reserving bike spaces online was set up shortly after ticket offices first came under threat. I wonder if it was rushed through.

I had a problem at Grantham. My bike was booked on the 1018 to York, which was cancelled. That meant an anxious trek to the ticket office to try to get my bike booked on the following service to Newark to then change on to an Edinburgh service. Fortunately, all was OK, at least until it was announced the Newark service was running late.

As the Grantham-Newark journey is only 13 minutes, I did not try to find

a seat. A train crew member was happy for me to stand with the bike without putting it in the stand. I had a dash across the bridge at Newark Northgate because the faster Edinburgh service arrived almost immediately after the stopping service. Now, the issue of the LNER Azuma cycle storage facility. Cyclists have to remove panniers, which was not necessary on the older trains. What's worse, the official limit for bikes has reduced from six to four. The cycle space is extremely cramped. It can be very difficult getting your bike in place if there is one bike already racked. Bikes with wider upright handlebars make things even more awkward.

I have developed some skills but initially I had difficulty lifting the front wheel on to the hook. I use Marathon Plus tyres which are puncture resistant but thicker than some tyres. LNER has responded to criticism with very complicated instructions on its website, especially about tyre sizes. Is LNER trying to make taking a bike onboard as difficult as taking a bike on a plane? As a platform staffer at Newark Northgate said: "I do not think the person who designed these rides a bike."

One thing I did initially like about the Azuma facility, was that it is away from the guard's compartment and was unlocked. On return journeys, I have had unnerving experiences changing at Peterborough. Despite them supposedly having been phoned, there were no platform staffers waiting to unlock the guard's van. On one occasion, I had to knock on the driver's cab window. Unfortunately, non-cyclist passengers sometimes blocked the cycle space with luggage so LNER started locking them. Once bikes are in the stands, it is at the whim of the guard as to whether the cycle space gets locked. On one occasion, a passenger put skis through the triangle of my bike frame so, approaching Peterborough, I had to remove the skis to be able to remove my bike from the stand.

The changed itinerary on my Lowestoft-Aberdeen journey gave me the unexpected opportunity to experience the cycle storage on a ScotRail inter-city service from Edinburgh Waverley. That was easy enough. Getting on board at the starting point, I got my bike into position before anyone sat on the tip-up seats or put luggage there.

For my return journey, the Aberdeen-York leg was with CrossCountry, which was OK. I had to lift the front wheel but it is not as clumsy as in the Azuma compartment. Considering the limitations of its current trains, CrossCountry is justified in allowing only reserved cycles. The question is whether CrossCountry will increase



trip from Lowestoft to Aberdeen



Picture: Ian Brown

CANADIAN STYLE: Ian Brown, a member of the Metrolinx Capital Oversight Committee, reports: 'Metrolinx Toronto is inserting two carriages just for bikes in many Metrolinx GO trains and people are using them in droves. As many stations are park and ride, not in communities, but originally intended for car-based commuters, this really extends the catchment area particularly with younger, in many cases non-car-owning, people'

cycle capacity on new rolling stock. Being the first cyclist on board the LNER train at York, I had no difficulties and the compartment was kept unlocked, so there was no stress alighting at Peterborough.

However, boarding an EMR service en route, a cyclist never knows if the tip-up seats will be occupied by passengers or if luggage has been placed in the cycle storage area. On

the occasions I have had to explain I need to put my bike there, people have been accommodating and some have moved without being asked.

One can never really be sure of what the reaction will be though. I question the need for tip-up seats in the cycle storage area. Luggage is often stored there because customers see an empty space.

There should be notices advising passengers to vacate tip-up seats and move luggage if bikes are brought on board. Guards could also keep a better eye on the cycle storage area. Fortunately, none of that was an issue on this occasion, and at Norwich getting my bike on the train was easy.

Overall, my return journey was a relaxed one, being able to reflect on

a great cycling trip in the Shetland Isles. Although I admire Greater Anglia's approach to facilitating bikes on trains, I acknowledge what ScotRail has done with the Highland Explorer services, and what Transport for Wales is doing to increase cycle capacity on the Heart of Wales line. Fellow cyclists are probably familiar with much of what I have described. For others, I hope it has been informative.

East Midlands

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Access victory

East Midlands Railway has shelved plans to close access to platforms from the public right-of-way footbridge across the middle of Nottingham station, after protests by Railfuture, two MPs and Nottingham City Council. EMR closed the access for a trial period last year, because it believed it was losing £1.1 million a year from fare evaders using the footbridge. Railfuture is encouraging EMR to consider alternative revenue protection measures and has suggested a new footbridge near the east end of the station.

Leicester-Coventry rail benefits

A direct Leicester-Coventry rail connection would bring £400 million in economic benefits to the region, the Department for



Anthony Kay

Transport has been told in a business case study prepared by Midlands Connect. A new dive-under at Nuneaton would be needed to cut journey times between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham, but the scheme would improve freight capacity and so remove many lorries from the region's roads.

Main line electrification

The electrification of the Kettering-Wigston section of the Midland main line has been completed on time and under budget, with this section now certified for use by electric trains. Railfuture East Midlands vice-chair Terry Holt urged his MP James Naish (Labour, Rushcliffe) and the DfT to recognise the importance of continuing the electrification northwards. The DfT response states that electrification is "currently planned to be completed by the early 2030s subject to business case approvals and affordability considerations". The response ignores the need to

avoid disbanding a successful team of electrification engineers.

EMR stakeholder conference

The EMR stakeholder conference, held in January in Nottingham, was attended by members of Railfuture East Midlands, several also representing user groups or community rail partnerships. The conference included a workshop session on the December 2025 timetable for EMR Regional services, which sees significant improvements. Delegates, including those from Railfuture, were able to ask some searching questions and engage in meaningful debate.

Regional timetable workshops

Following the stakeholder conference, EMR arranged a series of workshops with stakeholders to look at the proposed changes. At the local lines workshop, attended by Railfuture's Peter Small, it was announced that the Ivanhoe line (Leicester-Nottingham) stopping trains will no longer go forward to Lincoln or Grimsby, while Derwent

Valley Line trains from Matlock will continue through Nottingham to Lincoln and, every two hours, to Cleethorpes. This should improve timekeeping while reliability issues are being addressed in the turnbacks at Matlock, Lincoln and Cleethorpes, with extended dwell time at Nottingham. A Sunday service for the Ivanhoe line was requested by campaigners, but EMR says it cannot be provided this year. So Syston, Sileby and Barrow-upon-Soar will remain without trains on Sundays for now. EMR was keen for Friends of the Derwent Valley Line representatives to provide input.

Railfuture East Midlands AGM

Railfuture East Midlands will hold its AGM at Nottingham Central Library at 1300 on Saturday 21 June. The open part of the meeting, after the formal AGM business, will have a presentation from CrossCountry Trains about its fleet upgrade.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/
East+Midlands+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch)

X @RailfutureEMids



Corby pays tribute to Elisabeth

The funeral took place on 10 April of long-standing Railfuture member Elisabeth Jordan, who died in March. She was 89.

Though born on Merseyside in 1935, she lived for many years in Gretton, just north of Corby on the former main line between Kettering and Nottingham, not far from the famous Harringworth Viaduct.

Her 90th birthday would have been at the beginning of May. It was in Gretton that she and her husband Arthur made their long-term home and became deeply involved in the life of the village and the surrounding area.

Among her many interests was the railway, both its history and future. She and her husband Arthur undertook research, gave presentations and led courses on railway history.

Some of their work, such as *Away for the Day, The railway excursion in Britain from 1830 to the present day*, was published – in 1991.

In the 1980s, Elisabeth was chairman of the East Midlands branch of Railfuture's forerunner the Railway Development Society.

Back then, it was fine for a woman to be a chairman rather than chair. Indeed, we used to address her in branch committee meetings as Madam Chairman. She was a very effective chairman, too, engendering respect in a sometimes boisterous committee. She also cared about everyone. In an almost parental way, she made sure everyone was heard and valued. Her professional life as a teacher for children with special needs probably stood her in good stead for this.

RDS meetings were also good fun, often lubricated with tea and cakes, even if the subject matter, such as the campaign to get the Midland main line electrified, was sometimes heavy going. Elisabeth was much admired locally for her cake-baking skills.

She ran the Railfuture lottery for years and was instrumental in the Corbyrail campaign, established in the 1980s to pursue the reopening of the passenger service to Corby. This achieved temporary success in 1987 with the opening of an experimental diesel shuttle to and from Kettering.

Sadly, it had an irregular timetable and proved unreliable. It was withdrawn in 1990. In 2009, however, the line, much upgraded, was fully reopened. The evolution of what had been a basic freight-only link to become a busy electrified commuter line with two trains an hour between London and a brand-new station at Corby can stand as a memorial to her.

Family was of primary importance to Elisabeth, despite – or perhaps because of – some complicated



REST IN PEACE: Elisabeth Jordan at home with a bunch of flowers



1991: The Jordans' book

family relationships in her earlier life. At her funeral, in Gretton Village Hall, many tributes were given by family and by people from numerous groups and societies, based both in Gretton and more widely.

Last month she stood down as question setter for the Gretton Village Hall Quiz after 17 years in the role.

One thing is sure, Elisabeth always put in 100% to everything she was involved with.

She was a remarkable lady whose varied activities touched the lives of many, and who was much loved and admired.

She leaves her brother Malcolm, son Julian, daughter Karen and their families. Our sympathies go to them. It was a privilege to have known her.

Steve Jones (secretary,
Railfuture East Midlands)

Railwatch

Return to sender



Railfuture's predecessor, the Railway Development Society, delivered a 20,000-name petition to Parliament in 1993, urging MPs not to approve the Conservative government's rail privatisation plans.

Elisabeth Jordan co-ordinated compilation of the petition and, with Midland main line campaigner John Armstrong, pictured on the front cover of Railwatch 55, above, delivered the petition to Labour's Peter Snape. The RDS team also met public transport minister Roger Freeman.

It has taken more than 30 years but the message, always popular with passengers and voters, has finally got through to government. East Midlands Railway, which runs inter-city trains on the Midland main line, will be taken into public ownership in a process starting in 2025 and continuing until 2027.

Railfuture in the news

Railfuture's mini conference at Peterborough in May was covered by BBC News. Railfuture's Peter Wakefield welcomed news that the "station quarter" would be regenerated in a £48 million project funded by the government. But he said it was important that facilities on the station itself, including platform canopies, should also be upgraded. Lewis Banks, who is overseeing the project for Peterborough City Council, said the £48 million project would "transform the city". He said there were no current plans for platform improvements. The first phase will see a new pedestrian and cycling route created between the station and the city centre, replacing an existing underpass at Cowgate. The station would gain a new entrance on the western side and a multi-storey car park with 460 spaces. The existing eastern-side station building would be refurbished.

Lottery winners

February: W Connolly, S Boulding, P Groll, P Clark, T Davies, A Colquhoun

March: A Colquhoun, W Morrison, L Butler, G Smith, D Saxby, T Davies

April: D Saxby, L Butler, T Davies, P Fox, W Connolly, G Smith

Join the Lottery

Railfuture Lottery profits go towards the Fighting Fund, which supports the campaigns our members are working on. For £12 per year for 12 entries, you can take part and could win one of six prizes every month. Multiple entries are possible. Taking part is easy – contact lottery@railfuture.org.uk and decide how many entries you want every month and how you would like to pay: via online banking, Paypal or cheque. With 72 winners every year and increased prizes in the December draw, give it a try – who knows, you could easily be a winner!

www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/

Salvo salutes 200 years of rail

Britain is celebrating 200 years of train travel – and it all started in the North of England.

Northern Rail Heritage by Paul Salveson introduces the exciting history of railways, from the early days of the Stockton and Darlington through to the railways of today – with a glimpse to the future.

The book, designed by Peter Skelton, includes a foreword by rail minister Lord Hendy.

Lord Hendy said: "The railway changed the face of the North and the lives of everyone who has lived there. Despite gloomy predictions, it has survived (and helped win) two world wars, the growth of motoring, recessions, Beeching and more recently Covid."

He added: "It is wonderful that trains still run over the tracks of the original Stockton and Darlington Railway (1825) and the Liverpool and Manchester Railway (1830).

"The railway is very much a part of the living heritage of the North. The train operations of today are part of a fine tradition, which included the great companies that formed the London Midland and Scottish and London and North Eastern Railways and went on to become British Railways."

The book was sponsored by train operator CrossCountry. Paul Salveson said: "This is our contribution to the wonderful celebrations of Railway 200 this year.

"We are incredibly grateful to CrossCountry for the

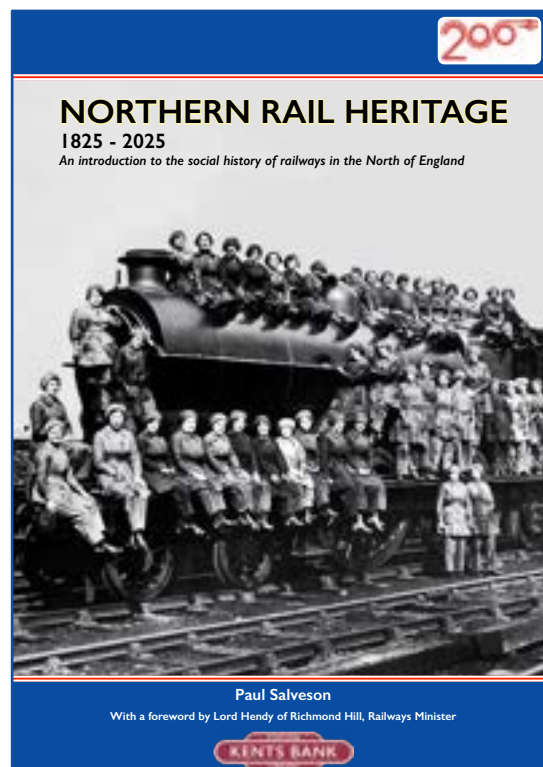
generous support they have given us. Without them, we would not have been able to publish the book at what is a very affordable price."

This is the first publication of Kents Bank Library CIC, which runs the unique railway library and bookshop on Kents Bank Station.

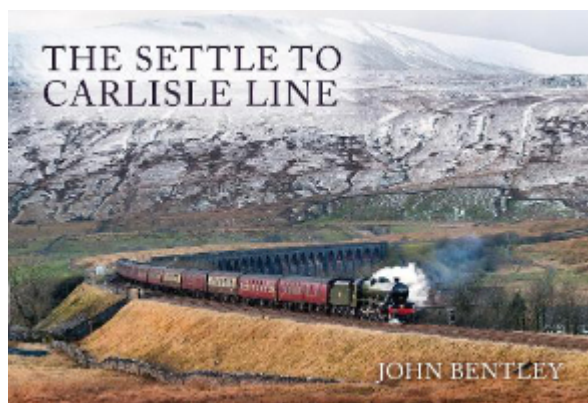
There was a launch event at Daisy Roots Books, Grange-over-Sands in May.

Northern Rail Heritage: an introduction to the social history of railways in the North of England is available for £5 from Kents Bank Station Library.

Cheques for £8 (to cover post and packing) to Kents Bank Library, c/o Station House, Kentsford Road, Grange-over-Sands LA11 7BB. ISBN 978-1-0683741-0-4



BOOK REVIEWS BY RICHARD LYSONS

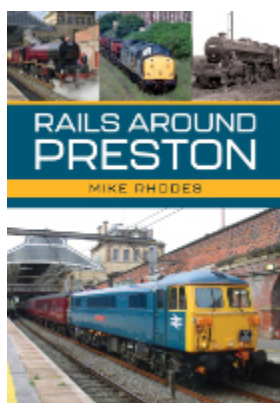


***The Settle To Carlisle Line* by John Bentley, Amberley £19.99 128 pp ISBN 978-1-3981-2089-1**

I first travelled on the Settle-Carlisle line 40 years ago around the time, I suppose, that it was threatened with closure. Since becoming a transport campaigner, I have realised how important the route is, not only as a visitor attraction but as a diversionary route and freight line. This handsome landscape paperback acts as a companion to Paul Salveson's recent book on the line. Bentley is an accomplished photographer and his images have been taken not only in the last decade but also from the 1980s. The quality of this book is exceptional.

***Rails Around Preston* by Mike Rhodes, Amberley £15.99 96pp ISBN 978-1-3981-1869-0**

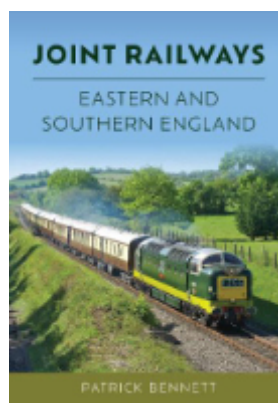
Railways reached Preston as early as October 1838. Six decades later, there were no less than 70 stations within a 15-mile radius of this Lancashire town. About half of these are still in use now. Mike Rhodes has been photographing the rails around Preston for over



50 years. His experience and knowledge is matched by the high quality of his images, both black and white and colour. There is a useful introduction and, I am pleased to say, both an historic map of the Preston area and informative captions for each photograph. A large proportion of *Railwatch* readers will have travelled by train through Preston at some point in their lives. I am sure that they will enjoy this informative book.

***Joint Railways: Eastern and Southern England* by Patrick Bennett, Amberley £15.99 96pp ISBN 978-1-3981-19352-1**

This book deals with the cooperation of the pre-grouping companies when a large number of joint lines emerged. This is the latest in a series of books by Patrick Bennett and features several rare and unpublished photographs. There are 14 chapters dealing with the different train companies in this region. It is a specialist area of railway history but quite appealing to the general reader and rail enthusiast. I particularly like the



"before and after" pages which never fail to interest me.

***A History of the Great Western Railway* by Colin Maggs, Amberley £11.99 320 pp ISBN 978-1-3981-2539-1**

My maternal grandfather, Herbert Jack Ellis worked for the GWR. According to the 1911 census he was a wagon builder based in Shrewsbury, later moving to Wrexham and becoming a railway clerk according to the 1939 registration. I still have his burgundy GWR pocket notebook (8cm x 5cm), (see picture) but he sadly died long before I could ask him any questions. Grandad Ellis was a month short of his 71st birthday when he died of intracranial arteriosclerosis. I was a few months off my fourth birthday. I can just about remember him. This family detail is not meant to be self-indulgent, but to show why I was initially attracted to this book.



This paperback edition does not suit the vast subject matter. The fascinating photographs and illustrations deserve a larger (and glossier) format to do them justice. There are five chapters covering the birth of GWR up to the British Railways era, and three appendices covering locomotive classes, engine classification and opening dates, mileage and gauge.

I do not doubt Maggs' complete command of this subject area, but found the book a challenging read. The lack of either an introduction or acknowledgements surprised me. As an author myself (and serial reader!), I feel that an introduction can attract casual but potential purchasers and a list of acknowledgements shows an author's debt to fellow researchers (who may be unpublished), libraries and museums. The lengthy bibliography includes 10 other titles by the author. These may be a little more easy to digest.

■ Richard Lysons is chair of *Friends of Littleborough Stations* and co-organiser of the *Electric Railway Charter*

Rail before roads

An article in *The Herald* advocated dualling all Scotland's trunk roads. Perhaps it should have been published on April 1.

Domestic transport is by far the biggest source (about 28%) of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, the vast majority coming from road traffic. It has also become clear over many years that increasing road capacity, whether in the form of bypasses, relief, ring or link roads, enlarging car parks or simply adding extra lanes, generates even more journeys and consequently even more emissions. The Edinburgh City Bypass, for instance, is now one of the busiest roads in Scotland.

Rather than dualling roads we should be double-tracking railway lines and expanding the network. Rail is more efficient than road transport, produces much less greenhouse gas and can transport several times as many people in a narrower corridor, so has less impact on the landscape than road vehicles, while a goods train can take 50 lorries off the road.

Travelling by train is undoubtedly pleasant and soothing, compared to a journey by road.

Dualling the trunk road network would undoubtedly increase emissions and other pollutants, whereas expanding the railway network would reduce them. So why on earth do we persist with building more roads but merely tinkering at the edges of our rail network?

Jane Ann Liston, St Andrews

janeann.liston@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Editor's note: A longer version of this letter appeared in *The Herald* in early April.

Third rail review

My thoughts may make some readers throw their hands up in horror.

The Mayor of London has renewed his idea for another Overground line from Hounslow to West Hampstead Thameslink and Hendon.

Looking at the projected costs, they seem to vary between £300 million and £600 million.

The line is currently mostly non-electrified with four mechanical signalboxes, some of which still have semaphore signals.

I imagine the significant cost is to convert the line to 25,000 volt overhead electric and to replace all the signalling.

But is that necessary?

As the line is largely self-contained, why not electrify using the 750-volt third rail system which already runs through Hounslow?



Picture: Greater Anglia

This is the impressive floral display at West Runton station on the Bittern line in East Anglia. In May, train operator Greater Anglia improved the Sunday service between Cromer and Sheringham on the North Norfolk coast. From December 2025, the Sunday service will become hourly, fulfilling local aspirations for a more frequent Sunday service. That is double the previous two-hourly frequency.

Local stakeholders, including Railfuture, and residents were keen to see an hourly Sunday service at the station, which is already in place on Mondays to Saturdays.

The seaside village of West Runton has become popular for walkers using the Norfolk Coast Path, so the additional stops will provide more options for those using public transport to get to and from their walks. The area, especially popular in the summer, is becoming a year-round destination for short breaks and day trips, served by a very reliable and attractive rail service on the Bittern line between Norwich and Sheringham, using Stadler high quality bi-mode

trains. Annual punctuality consistently averages over 95% and the new, longer, more comfortable trains that were introduced in 2019 have markedly improved the journey experience for passengers using the line.

The route, and the communities and attractions along it, are also promoted by the Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership, which has been helping to support and develop the line, consistent with local aspirations, since it was founded in 1997. Greater Anglia has pledged to build on the success of the Bittern line. Improvements over the past 30 years have helped increase passenger numbers on the line from around 200,000 journeys a year in 1994 to over 700,000 in 2025.

The coastal bus service between Sheringham and King's Lynn, across an area denuded of railways since the 1960s, has also vastly improved over the years. It allows people to use a combination of bus and train to visit world famous bird reserves at Cley, Blakeney, Holkham, Titchwell and Holme.

This has three significant savings:

1. The cost of third rail is a fraction of the cost of overhead catenary
2. The signalling need not be replaced for the time being
3. Delivery would be far quicker.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com

Incentives needed

I am afraid that this government has got off to a bad start so far as public transport is concerned. Not only did it continue the freeze on petrol duty, but rail fares were permitted to go up by more than the inflation

rate, while the bus fare cap was raised by 50% to £3. Railwatch reader Robert Manning (*Railwatch* 183) additionally notes that the discount on fares paid by those with a senior railcard was reduced from 34% to 33.4% last September.

Well, I recall from my student days when railcards gave you a 50% discount, helping me to travel all over the country.

Perhaps we need more of these incentives if we are serious about the environment and the negative impact car use has upon it.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Steel for the railway

As many people will know, the future of Scunthorpe steelworks hangs in the balance. This affects Britain's railways because the Scunthorpe site produces steel for about 95 per cent of the UK's tracks. If the blast furnaces at Scunthorpe close, this will make Britain the only G7 country that cannot produce virgin steel.

While it is a good thing that Britain is spending more on defence, it is also important that we increase our manufacturing base. Britain's foundries, whose output has already fallen by 85% since 2000,

face further closures. If the British Steel plant shuts down, and we start importing from China or India, it counts as a carbon win even if their steel is produced using the dirtiest coal on the planet and with none of the green levies we apply here.

Thomas E Rookes, Ruskin Avenue,
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thomasrookes@btinternet.com

Trains to Morecambe

As a member of Railfuture I am a believer in rail. But I believe even more in the case for good public transport. And sometimes trains are not the best solution. This is the case between Lancaster and Morecambe. When the decision was made in the Beeching era to close the line from Lancaster Green Ayre station, the West Coast main line was not as busy as today. Now at least three fast trains each way, to and from Scotland, pass through every hour and occupy the line north of Lancaster, as do others to Leeds, Barrow and Windermere and, of course, freights. This prevents a frequent service being pathed to/ from Morecambe. The one intermediate station at Bare Lane already has "frequent bus services" with lower fares, as Mr Alexander tells us in his letter in the April *Railwatch*.

I admire him and the other station adopters. But they need to recognise that a frequent bus service, say every 20 minutes, from Lancaster station would provide a far better service for Morecambe passengers than occasional trains. The buses could even be in Northern livery! A rail link would continue with the Bentham line trains and the Heysham connection with the Isle of Man boats.

David Dixon, Carlisle



Rail map 1913: Red lines were LNWR, green lines Midland

Map: Railway Clearing House

Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups

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

Clocking up success on Northumberland Line



Picture: Northern

Staff from Northern, Morgan Sindall, Aecom and the county council mark a major milestone in April

A major milestone was reached in April, four months after train operator Northern began running passenger trains on the Northumberland Line for the first time in 60 years.

The passenger figures topped 250,000, even before the remaining three stations have opened, dwarfing the original estimate of 50,000.

Trains now call at Newcastle, Manors and new stations in Seaton Delaval, Newsham and Ashington.

Stations at Bedlington, Blyth Bebside and Northumberland Park are under construction and should open later this year.

A journey along the entire route takes around 35 minutes and a single fare costs £3.

More than 8,000 trips were made on one day when Newcastle United football fans celebrated their Carabao Cup win with an open top bus tour of the city.

There have also been big queues at the ticket vending machines, particularly during weekends and school holidays.

Northern is encouraging passengers to buy tickets in advance on its website or app.

Passengers can also buy POP pay as you go cards, which allow



By Dennis Fancett Chair SENRUG

Members of the South East Northumberland Rail Users Group are delighted but not surprised at the high passenger numbers on the Northumberland Line, which has seen significant overcrowding particularly on Saturdays. The massive regenerative benefits and huge popularity of the line are the points I have been making to anyone who would listen during the last 19 years of our campaign.

We do of course want to see the line completed, not just the three remaining stations, on which progress seems incredibly slow. We also want to see the



Network Rail project map for the Northumberland Line

them to tap in and out when they switch between Northumberland Line trains and Tyne and Wear Metro services. After monitoring journeys on the new line, Northern has decided to provide four-coach trains on all Sunday services by July.

The rail line, which had been used only by freight trains since the 1960s, opened to passengers on 15 December, thanks to a £298 million project involving the

Department for Transport, Network Rail, Northumberland County Council and Northern, and diligent persistent campaigning from SENRUG.

"It is great to see the line is already having such a positive impact on the area, allowing local people to access a range of new opportunities on fast and affordable services," said Paul Henry, programme manager for the Northumberland Line.

Let's build on success

following improvements to services: a) A later last train from Newcastle to Ashington. The existing 2216 departure is far too early. b) All trains to call at Manors, which serves the Northumbria University campus. c) We need more ticket vending machines at Northumberland Line stations. SENRUG also believes the overcrowding on the Northumberland Line could be reduced if Cramlington and Morpeth on the parallel East Coast main line were brought into the Metro POP card system, as Northumberland Line stations are, thus removing the issue of Northumberland Line travel being half the price of travel from Cramlington or Morpeth.

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End of an era

South West Trains became the first company to be privatised in February 1996 and its successor, South Western Railway, was the first to be taken back into public ownership by the present government once the contract ended on 25 May 2025. How will the change affect services from a passenger's perspective? Railfuture looks forward to working with the new management team as we revisit many of the issues unresolved with SWR, such as the need for improved connections and restoration of 2019 off-peak services to meet increased leisure demands.

Inter-city expectations

Railfuture has always maintained that Cardiff-Portsmouth services, which link two major cities and call at five more cities en route, warrant inter-city standards of travel. The news this spring that Great Western Railway would be acquiring class 175 Coradia units from Transport for Wales raised hopes that they would be deployed on the route in four-, five- or six-car formations, giving superior comfort and additional capacity. Alas, all we can expect is some additional class 158s displaced from the West Country routes that are to receive the 175s.

We will be watching closely to see if the additional 158s alleviate overcrowding, but it is certainly not the service uplift we have asked for to attract new customers to rail. However, judging from presentations at conferences earlier this year, it is clear managers at GWR recognise that relying on their ageing fleet of diesel trains is not sustainable in the longer term. They are actively looking at solutions for regional services, and of course battery-electric hybrid units feature prominently in their thinking.

Another service in our region similarly experiencing overcrowding due to shortage of rolling stock has been on CrossCountry's route from Bournemouth to Manchester. Before the timetable change in May, we were informed that their trains in future would run as five-car sets or two sets in tandem using the additional coaches acquired from West Coast operations. This is very welcome news, but we still have not managed to persuade CrossCountry to reinstate calls at Brockenhurst. They indicate that they may look at this in any future service revisions.

West of England vision

The Railfuture-affiliated Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users' Group used its members' day in April to formulate policies for a new vision. The three topics for members to consider were current performance, rolling-stock replacement and the future railway landscape under Great British Railways.

Train service performance had been poor over the winter months but has shown signs of recovery. Battery-electric trains are the preferred option to replace the life-expired class 159 diesel units, but the decision hinges on whether the Office of Rail and Road retains its intransigent opposition to further third-rail electrification. Extension of the third-rail west of Basingstoke is needed but trains with on-board batteries could be a substitute. SERUG members were concerned that GBR would not have the necessary funding to make sensible decisions on infrastructure enhancements. The rail enhancement programme for the current "CP6" period has yet to receive adequate funding ... so what hope is there for a sensible pipeline of rail enhancements into the future?

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch
www.facebook.com/WessexRailfuture/



Tony Smale

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GBR Cymru?

As our guest speaker for the Railfuture Wales AGM cancelled, we asked those present about their burning issues. There was a discussion about how Transport for Wales (Rail) would interface with Great British Railways. Options suggested were TfW(R) being an agent for GBR in Wales, or there could be a GBR Cymru/Wales. Buses should be properly integrated with trains, although it was recognised that urban bus networks and long-distance coaches would need to integrate in different ways. More stations should be made accessible, with Neath and Craven Arms high on the list.

Praise for Transport for Wales

Railfuture is pleased to see that TfW's performance has improved, with fewer trains being delayed and cancelled. We shall of course be keeping a sharp eye on performance.

Mumbles Railway, past and future



Rhodri Evans and Jessika Venn at the Railfuture stall at the Mumbles Railway Festival
Picture: Railfuture

In March, Railfuture Wales held a stall at the inaugural Mumbles Railway Festival, an event to mark the launch of the world's first passenger railway service in 1807. There was a lot about history (the line was closed in 1960), but its route is still one of the busiest travel corridors in the Swansea Bay area, the four-lane road being habitually gridlocked. The most common topic of public concern was the level of service on the Heart of Wales line. Railfuture's Jessika Venn contributed to the festival's audio trail guide, building momentum for new rail or tramways on the route and in the area.

Platform stopping positions

Railfuture has written to TfW, asking for trains to stop at platform positions more convenient for passengers where possible. There are too many instances where short trains stop on long platforms away from the passengers'



A train at platform 8 of Cardiff Central, well away from the canopy and passenger entrance
Picture: Julian Langston



Julian Langston

access point or waiting area. TfW has replied that many new, longer trains will be introduced over the next 18 months. This should help, but new stop markers will also be installed where appropriate, so different length trains can stop in different places. In some places there are operational reasons why trains do not stop at places convenient for passengers, but in the main we are encouraged by the response.

Good news for Heart of Wales

Railfuture is delighted that TfW is to restore a service on the Heart of Wales line which was removed in December 2024. This fifth daily train had only been added a few years earlier. The service has been dogged by unreliability in recent years, although it has improved recently. Railfuture is among many who vociferously lobbied for this train to be restored. This will probably happen in the December timetable change.

Go-ahead for Cardiff Parkway station

Outline planning permission for the proposed Cardiff Parkway station and its associated business park was finally granted by the Welsh government in late January. The plans had earlier been approved by Cardiff County Council. The Welsh government, however, required an environmental assessment. The consent letter for the 90,000 square metre development says that the station, to be largely financed privately, must be started after 30,000 square metres has been developed and completed before the development exceeds 50,000 square metres. Railfuture has long supported this station as supplementing other stations proposed between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction. These were put forward in 2020 by the Burns Commission as providing a public transport alternative to building another motorway around Newport.

Light touch is wrong line in NW Wales

Railfuture is disappointed that a feasibility study into reopening the line between Bangor and Afon Wen via Caernarfon favours tram-train over conventional rail. AtkinsRéalis was commissioned by TfW to assess the route and published its report in January.

Railfuture believes that the priority should be Bangor to Caernarfon, and that conventional rail has the huge advantage that through trains from England could run to Caernarfon at the heart of Snowdonia. This would be much more convenient than Bangor, as a station in Caernarfon could be very close to the bus station and would provide step-free access. Local Railfuture expert Bob Saxby has studied the full rail option and concludes that through trains from Manchester, Cardiff and even London could run through to Caernarfon without needing additional units.

We believe that tram-train has been suggested because it will be cheaper to build and would undoubtedly avoid some obstacles. However, journey times would be longer (as most of the new line would be run in tram mode) and this option would not allow through trains.

Railfuture backs Caerleon campaign group

Railfuture is delighted to learn of a new group campaigning for a station at Caerleon (between Newport and Cwmbran on the Marches line) – one of our own aspirations. We have contacted Towards Restoring a Caerleon Station (TRACS), to tell them about Railfuture and encourage them to join us. We have been invited to their next meeting in May.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk

Access to public transport 'is a human right'

Access for disabled people to trains, buses and other public transport must be recognised as a human right, the transport committee of the House of Commons has ruled.

Chair Ruth Cadbury has urged rail minister Lord Hendy not to forget about disabled people in the present rail reforms.

She has asked the Department for Transport why its rail reforms have not placed a duty on Great British Railways to improve accessibility.

Campaigners say disabled people are treated as second class citizens and are unhappy that the government has failed to invite views on accessibility inclusion.

Ms Cadbury pointed out that the previous Conservative government's draft Rail Reform Bill, published in February 2024, required GBR to have regard to the accessibility requirements of disabled people. This was not mentioned in the latest consultation.

Transport for All chief executive Caroline Stickland said: "We urge the government to put accessibility at the heart of rail reforms. Transport must be accessible to us all." The DfT has denied it is downgrading its existing commitment to accessibility.

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander appeared before the committee in April and said that all new trains should have level boarding, but she added that the varying heights of station platforms would be a continuing problem. She said the DfT would be responding to the committee's comments on accessibility. With no sense of irony, she said the DfT was producing a "road map" to rail accessibility. What that means is not clear.

More than a month earlier, the transport committee published its report entitled *Access Denied: Rights vs Reality for Disabled People's Access to Transport*.

People with access needs – including non-visible disabilities such as autism, dementia, severe anxiety and learning disabilities – told the committee that the stresses caused by poor reliability and a lack of assistance discourage them from trying to travel at all. Ms Cadbury said: "It should be a source of national embarrassment that our country's transport services



Picture: Marie Addison/Northern

Lisa Williams with a passenger enjoying a hand massage on the Esk Valley line (Whitby to Middlesbrough)

'Forget me not' dementia train

More than 100 people turned out in May to ride the "Forget Me Not" train on the Esk Valley line between Whitby and Middlesbrough.

Organised by the Esk Valley community railway to mark both Dementia Awareness Week and Community Rail Week, the train provides on-train music and entertainment in a safe environment for those living with dementia and their carers.

"Our aim is to improve the rail service and to extend it to all members of the community," said general manager Lisa Williams. "People can ride on our trains safely and in comfort, enjoying the company in ways that are simply not possible on the bus or in a car."

Musicians perform on board, playing music everyone can enjoy, and complimentary hand massage is on offer as well as goodies handed out along the way.

"Our purpose is to provide for local people, who can join at any one of the 17 stations along our line, but we have been astonished at the level of interest from much further afield. We have received enquiries and entertained visitors from right across the country."

Run by volunteers with support from train operator Northern Railway, the service runs every other month. The next trips are on 16 July and 17 September, along the Esk Valley from Whitby to Middlesbrough and back.

effectively treat disabled people as second class citizens, denying them access to jobs, leisure, support networks and essential services – denying them their rights."

Progress

However, progress is being made to make the railway more accessible, and the government recognises that there are 16 million disabled people in Britain.

In March, the Railway Industry Association published a report titled *The Journey to Equality: Creating a Railway for All*, with a foreword from Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE. It highlights existing solutions from suppliers

that can be implemented to improve accessibility.

Real progress could be seen when new lifts were opened in March at Newtown station in mid Wales. Network Rail's Gail Jones said: "These improvements show our commitment to an inclusive environment. The new lifts will improve accessibility for passengers with mobility challenges and those with heavy luggage or pushchairs, ensuring smooth and pleasant journeys for everyone."

To coincide with 200 years since the birth of the modern railway and the 200th anniversary of Braille, art exhibitions created by blind and partially sighted people highlighted

the impact of sight loss on daily lives at Colchester, Norwich, and Broxbourne rail stations.

In May, the Department for Transport announced that it planned to make rail replacement travel more accessible.

Local transport minister Simon Lightwood said funding will go to four projects to help provide audible and visible information for passengers on coach services.

In France, SNCF has unveiled a new Oxygene train which offers wheelchair passengers the chance to travel in their wheelchair or transfer to a seat equipped with an assist bar and call button.



CALL FOR ACTION: Ruth Cadbury

Is there light (rail) at t

By Ian Brown

I was involved with four Thames tunnel projects when I was rail director for Transport for London. There was the Docklands Light Railway crossing to Greenwich and Lewisham, and the separate crossing to Woolwich. The big project was Crossrail (now the Elizabeth line) which involved a tunnel under the Thames at Woolwich and the line to Abbey Wood, where Crossrail linked to the South Eastern rail network.

Of course, there was also the Overground's 2010 makeover of Marc Brunel's original 1845 Thames tunnel which is now part of the Windrush line.

You might think that this was enough.

They were all part of the plan to provide an increased capacity integrated transport system for London, including levelling up east London to play its full part in the regeneration of the city. It worked, and these projects are now carrying over a million passengers per day in total.

These were all railway projects, although there were and still are many voices that say we need investment in road tunnels, for two reasons. The first is to relieve road congestion, but additionally there is another argument about wealth.

In east London, the infamous Blackwall road tunnel under the Thames was opened in 1897 with a second bore added in 1967, sixty years on. The approaches to the



Ian Brown

Blackwall tunnel are the second most polluted places in London after Heathrow Airport, according to TfL data, with daily peak hour traffic queues regularly over 30 minutes and as a result of too-regular-for-comfort traffic breakdowns. So almost exactly another 60 years on, it is time for the next upgrade.

There were choices here between public transport and providing more capacity for cars in a congested city. There was another argument though that I have heard quoted on several occasions, to the effect that richer people contribute more to the economy and they need access to their cars and so must be provided for.

If you are a tradesman with a big box of tools in the back of your van this may be true, but for everybody else you only need to take a look at who is travelling on the Elizabeth line. The profile is not solely a bunch of down and outs and senior citizens riding round to keep out of the cold. It is a good cross section of society, many of whom could be driving their cars, rather than travelling by train.

So the plan for a new Blackwall tunnel morphed over time into the adjacent Silvertown tunnel project, still a road tunnel but pretending that it is for local users. Even so, it cost £2.3 billion and needed two tunnels for a road, unlike just one necessary for a railway. The financing model was toll. Car drivers pay £4 per trip at peak time, while lorry owners pay around £10 per trip, although there are off-peak



Above: Inside the new road-only Silvertown tunnel. The left lane is supposed to be for buses and lorries, the right lane is for cars
Below: The southern portal of the Silvertown tunnel. Cyclists and pedestrians are banned
Pictures: Bus and Train User



rates and it is free for lorries between 2200 and 0600. If the tolls were applied only to the new tunnel, nobody would use it. So the tolls were also applied to the existing Blackwall tunnel the day the new tunnel opened on 7 April 2025.

This is ironic, as the toll was the potential solution to the Blackwall tunnel peak hour traffic tailbacks. It did not need extra road capacity if the price were pitched at an optimum level. So why build a new one? This might in part explain the popularity of the congestion charge scheme in London, a bit like providing first class on commuter trains. Those who can pay can enjoy greater benefits.

The Silvertown road tunnel has two lanes in each direction. One is a bus lane which is also used by lorries over 7.5 tonnes, while the other lane is for cars, vans and trucks.

Pedestrians are banned, as are cyclists. Banning cyclists from a key bit of transport infrastructure (a river crossing) is diametrically opposite to the mayor's strategy of encouraging cycling in the city, made insulting by providing new cycle lanes either side of a new tunnel that you cannot cycle through. A bus that carries bikes has been provided and is reputedly not exactly well



Picture: Bus and Train User

used. How long this "service" for cyclists will survive is open to speculation. OK, no pedestrians and no bikes.



What about buses?

TfL introduced two new bus routes through the tunnel. These are a new Superloop SL4 (Grove Park to Canary Wharf) plus an extension of London bus route 129 from Lewisham and Greenwich through the tunnel to Gallions Reach.

The benefits of a bus compared to a train

Buses carry up to 80 passengers at about five minute intervals. Could you imagine trying to write a business case for a light railway on this basis? A DLR train carries about 600 passengers.

All buses used on the 129 route are brand-new, attractive, Chinese all-electric (not hybrid) vehicles, which can cruise through the tunnel at the full 30 mph "line speed".

This is potentially a very useful route, unfortunately marred in terms of journey time and reliability by not having dedicated rights of way, except for a few bus lanes either side of the tunnel.



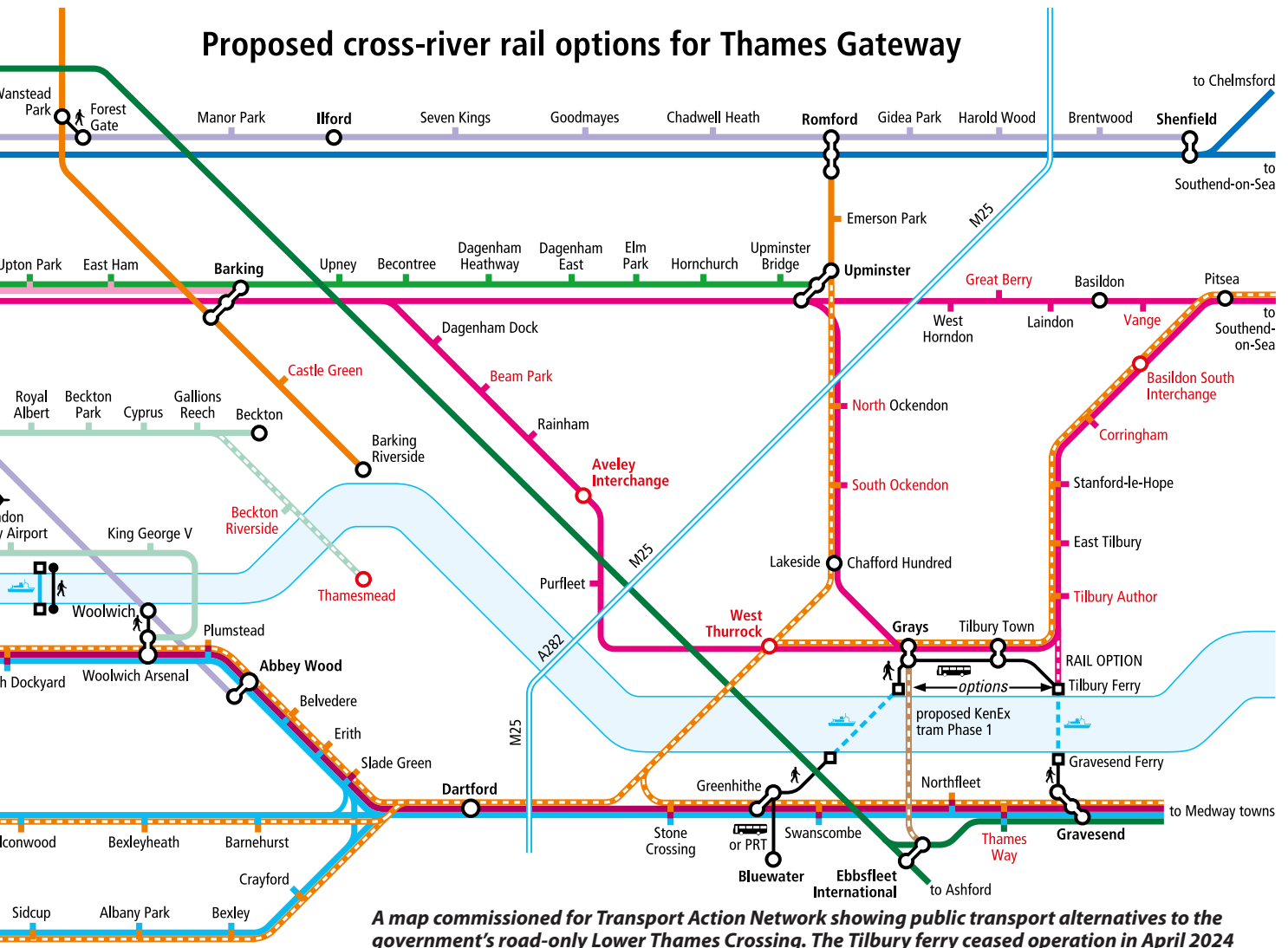
The new how the



CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: Around 1,000 cyclists invaded the new £2.2 billion Silvertown tunnel in east London soon after its opening in April, as a protest against being banned from riding through it.

One supporter of the mass trespass, which was organised by Critical Mass London said: "It is appalling that in 2025, when the mayor of London has himself declared a Climate Emergency, a new river crossing should be built which excludes active travel. The inadequate shuttle bus is a mere afterthought and is no substitute for crossing the Thames under your own steam with true independence. Silvertown tunnel is a disgrace."

the end of the tunnel?



Lower Thames Crossing electric bus service. Note bus is surrounded by cars

Congestion is particularly bad through Greenwich. So much traffic has now been diverted through Greenwich that it partially invalidates the case for building the new tunnel, particularly for longer cross-river journeys.

It is easy to come to the conclusion that the planners of this scheme lost their way. The scheme is the fruit of a 120-year issue with the Blackwall tunnel

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Picture: Ian Brown

LTC 'a dinosaur project'

By Ray King

The government is blundering on with its mistaken policy of road building, despite years of evidence that it is the road to ruin.

After significant criticism of the Silvertown tunnel, the government now plans to splash £9 billion it does not have on the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), 14 miles of road at Dartford.

Transport Action Network campaigners say the government's road-only LTC fails on every possible point. It is a dinosaur project.

Railfuture is joining other campaigners to call for rail alternatives, both passenger and freight rail services to link Essex and Kent.

TAN says rail improvements costing a quarter of the road plan would be more sensible and would provide public transport for the 260,000 households in the area who do not have access to a car.

Chris Todd, founder of Transport Action Network, told a Railfuture meeting in April: "This road plan will encourage more HGV traffic in an area already blighted by it. Small-scale improvements of around £600 million have the potential to take up to one million lorries off the road. The road will inevitably

cost more, the £9 billion will become £12 billion and, if PFI is used, the road could cost £16 billion. It will take seven years to build and will provide at most five years of relief. The government cannot afford this and should not be doing it. It makes no sense."

Transport consultant Jonathan Roberts also attended the Railfuture meeting and said: "No one has ever really thought properly of providing a railway to link Kent and Essex, with the exception of HS1 which does not provide local services. The Thames Gateway area is growing in population and popularity but there has been no serious public transport initiative, despite the massive growth of Canary Wharf."

The Docklands Light Railway, which dates back to 1988, has been extended under the river to Lewisham and Woolwich and may in future be extended to Thamesmead but more ambitious thinking is required, following the success of the Elizabeth and Jubilee lines.

"Road building is unreasonable and wrong but at present, public transport is not fit for purpose for the 2.5 million people who live in the area," said Jonathan.

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North of York

Additional faster London services are proposed in the East Coast main line timetable for December. However, the changes would have adversely affected passengers at intermediate stations, especially Northallerton and Thirsk. Following pressure from Railfuture Yorkshire and other organisations, David Skaith, mayor of the North Yorkshire and York Combined Authority, has been able to negotiate improvements in the shape of a limited York-Newcastle shuttle service that will serve these stations.

Following a well-attended Railfuture Yorkshire meeting addressed by deputy mayor Pete Kilbane, it was agreed to have quarterly "catch-up" meetings with Mayor Skaith's transport team.

CrossCountry improvements

The May 2025 timetable change has brought minor enhancements to CrossCountry services in Yorkshire, most notably on the Newcastle-Reading route. The number of weekday services in each direction has increased from six to seven, and a two-hourly southbound frequency now exists for much of the day. Northbound services are not quite so evenly spaced in the afternoon, but the two-hourly frequency has been achieved in the morning. CrossCountry says it



David Pennie

aspires to reinstate the full hourly service on the Reading-Newcastle corridor. Also from May, North-East to South-West services have seen the welcome reinstatement of the stop at Chesterfield in every service.

York Station Gateway project

Work continues on the York Station Gateway project, although unforeseen work will delay completion. In addition, LNER and Network Rail decided (despite concerns about the impact on bus services and traffic in the area) to continue with their plan to provide a multi-storey car park to replace the current surface parking on the city side of the station. Work on this is continuing.

Hopes rise for Haxby station

The planned station for Haxby (on the York-Scarborough line) suffered an initial setback when the *Restoring Your Railway* programme was stopped.

However, Railfuture Yorkshire is hopeful that this project will be granted funds when the government announces the outcome of its review of rail projects, expected in June.

Opportunity for Reform UK

The new Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority will assume powers relating to transport, allowing it to develop a single strategic transport plan for the north bank of the Humber. At the mayoral election held on 1 May, the Reform UK candidate Luke Campbell was successful, and Railfuture Yorkshire will be seeking

an early meeting with the transport team of the new mayor.

Beverley-York campaign hopes

The AGM of the Minsters Rail Campaign was held in Market Weighton on 19 April, when new chair James Connelly reported on how the campaign had been "laying the foundations" for the future. The campaign now stands at a pivotal moment and is very hopeful that the positive indications it has received from the mayoral candidates will result in funds being allocated towards an outline business case. Earlier in April, the campaign hosted an online briefing for the mayoral candidates on the reinstatement of the line, with participation from representatives from AECOM, the engineering consultancy firm (known for their work on the Borders and Northumberland lines) who had worked on the 2022 strategic outline case commissioned jointly by the campaign and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

Sheffield Station cycle hub

The refurbishment of Sheffield station's cycle hub is complete. East Midlands Railway's initiative included repairs and repainting, the installation of a cycle repair stand, replacement of the entrance doors with more accessible bi-folding doors, improved cycle storage to accommodate non-standard cycles, and enhancements such as a new poster board and better toilet facilities. The project also focussed on improving accessibility. EMR held an informal reception for



Stakeholders at Sheffield's refurbished cycle hub. In the front row, EMR area station manager Louisa Motsumi is centre-left and EMR project manager Melanie Bowler is centre-right
Picture: Andrew Dyson (Railfuture)

stakeholders on 8 May to celebrate the completion of the work.

Lord David Blunkett review

As part of the "White Rose Agreement" signed by the mayors of West, South and North Yorkshire, Lord Blunkett was commissioned to conduct a rapid review into train services and connectivity. A briefing paper giving Railfuture Yorkshire's priorities was produced. Branch chair Nina Smith received a very positive response from Lord Blunkett, who is making full use of our proposals.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch

Railfuture Yorkshire Facebook:
www.facebook.com/groups/3116771821782626/

Alternatives to tunnel vision and car culture

➔ From page 13

which has not caught up with more recent trends in the areas of active travel, cycling, and in any meaningful way, public transport. It has certainly not taken on board the results of the four rail schemes mentioned above.

So, is the spanking new Silvertown tunnel a white elephant or can its colour change? TfL is clearly keen to try and get people to use the buses through the tunnel by making them free for a year. Quite a price to pay, losing revenue on busy routes. South of the river, the free services share routes with paid services, so giving

passengers a choice whether to pay or not – a good test of price-time elasticity!

There is another version being advocated by environmentalists. Keep the bus lane (with more buses), and replace the road traffic lane with a cycle lane and a footpath (albeit quite a long one at a mile). Perfectly feasible and actually aligned to encouraging active travel.

A Railfuture perspective

A 1960s solution to a 21st century issue of road congestion is quite a serious waste of public money, so it will be important to try and make the best of it as advocated above, increasing the emphasis on active and public transport.

If there is significant aversion to £4 tolls, it would become apparent that the traffic lanes are not required. The Blackwall tunnel was free before 7 April. We will see.

There is another way too – extend the DLR from the spare space at Canning Town through one of the new Silvertown tunnels, then on to the Greenwich Peninsula. That would leave the second Silvertown tunnel for active travel and buses. I would say this wouldn't it? But other commentators are saying it too, including many in Railfuture – and even London's *Evening Standard*!

■ Ian Brown is Railfuture policy director
■ See also page 23 London & South EastRailfuture
railfuture.bsky.social



Alternative vision: Silvertown tunnel with a layout suitable for active travel and public transport



Alternative vision: One option could be to run the DLR through the Silvertown tunnel



Geoff Marshall's map shows Silvertown tunnel bus routes and the 'cycle shuttle'

Excellence on show at global centre

By Jessika Venn
and Julian Langston

Two and a half years since attending the launch of the Global Centre for Rail Excellence in Cardiff, Railfuture was invited to visit the under-construction site and witness research already happening.

Over 250 attendees from 135 rail-related organisations spent the day in March visiting the winners of phase 2 of the "Innovation in Railway Construction" competition and viewing their technologies demonstrated.

The goals were to reduce construction/maintenance costs or timescales, improve resilience, improve safety, lower environmental impacts, or gain efficiencies in materials handling or use of resources.

While the major earthworks are still ongoing, the southern end of the old reception sidings and a newly built area known as Line 4 are hosting the experiments.

Furrer+Frey, which supplies overhead line electrification equipment (OLE), was the only company to win two of the 12 awards.

CODES (cost-reducing dynamic electrification gradient system) is a means of allowing the raising or lowering of individual overhead line cantilevers. It is designed to test steeper and more undulating OLE profiles than those currently used, which could reduce the costs of electrification. However, since its social media debut, numerous enquiries have come in from around the world for installation of its equipment to solve unique local issues. One example is a housing estate accessible only by level crossing, where the fire engines are too high to fit under the OLE.

Furrer+Frey also demonstrated I-CAGE (innovative cantilever for greener electrification). This OLE cantilever component system is made from lightweight insulating



The composite twin track cantilever (CTTC) in two-track configuration, set up for weight testing at the Global Centre for Rail Excellence



Panorama of Line 4: CODES and Mimicrete to the extreme left, CTTC centre left, with ex-Heathrow Connect class 360s on right

composites, eliminating 50% of cost and 80% of weight. A composite mast is in development.

Another insulating product, from AUS in collaboration with Huddersfield University, was the composite twin track cantilever, which can be erected by a road-rail vehicle and promises a 77% weight reduction.

Two companies aim to reduce the amount of cement used in rail infrastructure, thus lowering damaging carbon emissions. Concretene/Cemex use added graphene to reduce the amount of cement in sleepers, while Mimicrete, in association with Cardiff University, demonstrated their Mimicrete vascular self-healing solution in railway practice

system. This is an add-on kit for existing concrete construction methods, allowing cracks to self-heal, preventing deterioration, extending structure lifespan and reducing the need for repairs by 70%.

Safety was covered by several of the winners' projects. Gravity sensing for rail construction from Silicon Micro Gravity is a portable device for rapidly imaging ground voids and density.

RoBoK's INTERMODAL (intelligent real-time, monitoring & detection video analytics solution for rail construction) involves standalone surveillance turrets, wirelessly networked to a computer vision system for instant detection and alerting of safety hazards. AURA 2



Mimicrete (foreground) and CODES (rear) test areas

(attaining ubiquitous railway analysis phase 2) from Focus Sensors uses existing fibre optic lengths to detect vehicle movements, intruders and ground movements, while movable CCTV is provided by the use of tethered drones in rail security from Drone Evolution. As the drones are tethered, the railway can continue to function as normal.

Reducing the costs and increasing the benefits of trackside networks from Ingram Networks is a suite of equipment designed to halve the deployment time of fibre/wireless networks. Operating costs are reduced, enabling more efficient trespass detection and high-speed on-board internet provision.

Universal Signalling won with Universal Interlocking: Next generation digital signalling as overlay. This is a full package of digital signalling software and hardware that aims to reduce costs by 90% and deployment times from decades to days. Initially it is focussing on worksite protection and control.

Energy control system for energy storage and renewables arose from a collaboration of EneRail, the University of Birmingham, Riding Sunbeams and Aartech Solonics, and is a power management system combined with energy storage to allow more efficient use of regenerative braking and other intermittent energy sources for traction power needs.

Conference call opens the door to key contacts

By Allison Cosgrove

Railfuture Scotland members took the opportunity to have a stall at the Scottish Labour Party Conference in Glasgow in February. At the same time, we were also staffing a stall at Glasgow Model Rail Show, at the same venue over the same time period, so it was a very busy three days.

We were able to meet lots of delegates to the conference at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and get their views on rail, as well as have discussions with members of the Scottish shadow cabinet, including leader Anas Sarwar and shadow transport secretary Claire Baker.

Neil Bibby, a former shadow transport secretary, also stopped by our stall, as did Michael Marra, the shadow finance spokesman. I was also

delighted to meet Michael Veitch, a former transport spokesman on East Lothian Council, who took a great interest in rail matters while a councillor. Michael was a councillor on East Lothian Council, and was an exceptional advocate for public transport. He attended the conference with a charity he now works for.

We met other councillors from different parts of Scotland – all interested in sharing their views on rail matters.

Twelve of us took part in a rota over the three days to ensure sufficient coverage of the two stalls, and I am very grateful to our knowledgeable members, who helped out with hundreds of queries from the public.

At the model show, our stall was overwhelmed at times with enquiries. There were an estimated 15,000 visitors over three days.



Scottish Labour Party leader Anas Sarwar and Railfuture members Lawrence Marshall, left, and Ron McLean, right

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West Coast main line renewal

Trains on the northern section of the West Coast main line will be disrupted over three years as Network Rail plans to renew track, overhead electric lines and signals over 150 route miles from Crewe to Carlisle.

Railfuture has urged Network Rail to divert trains over the Settle-Carlisle line during the regular closures of the WCML, especially now that train operator Avanti can call on bimode class 805 Eversos. Avanti says that all options are being considered.

The first planned disruption takes place over the first two weekends of January 2026 when both the WCML and the M6 motorway will close because a railway overbridge at Clifton, near Penrith, needs to be replaced.

Later in the year and for three years in total, however, even more disruptive work is planned for the 150 miles of route between Crewe and Carlisle as Network Rail undertakes what it calls its TriLink project. Overhead wires installed in the 1970s will be renewed, along with around 140 miles of track and 2,000 signals. Closures will take place in three blocks of two weeks affecting the main line through Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan, Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle.



Network Rail map of area affected

Stockport 'bridgeabout'

Work has started on replacing the "bridge that's a roundabout" in Stockport. The roundabout at the junction of Greek Street, Shaw Heath and Merican Way is actually a bridge that sits across the railway lines just south of Stockport station, and Network Rail says it is life expired and needs replacing. The work is expected to take a year and the roads leading up to the roundabout are all now closed with diversions in place. The railway itself will remain open except for a three-week period in August and closures in October and over Christmas. The plans include making provision for the planned future tram-train route in a new box tunnel to the west of



WELCOME LIFT: Mayor Andy Burnham, centre left, with Salford deputy mayor Tracy Kelley, to his right, and disability campaigners

Step-free welcome to Irlam

Two new lifts have been installed at Irlam station as part of a rolling programme of upgrades aimed at boosting access to Greater Manchester's rail network.

The lifts were installed as part of a £5.75 million investment to make the station easier to use for all passengers.

The improvements were funded by the Department for Transport's Access for All scheme and Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham travelled to Irlam station to see the lifts and to meet accessibility campaigners. There have also been accessibility upgrades at Daisy Hill.

Work on step-free access schemes at Swinton, Hindley, Bryn and Reddish North are all scheduled

to get under way next year, with accessibility improvements at Flowery Field, Newton for Hyde, Bredbury and Levenshulme to follow.

Mr Burnham said: "We are now beginning to deliver accessibility improvements at stations across Greater Manchester at a much greater pace than in the preceding decades, as we strive to deliver a more inclusive and accessible public transport network."

"The installation of step-free schemes at stations across our city region is key to our vision for the Bee Network as a fully joined-up public transport network, allowing people to make seamless journeys between trains, buses, trams and active travel."



Greek Street bridge, Stockport

the bridge, which would link the Mid Cheshire line on to new alignments and a new Metrolink stop west of Stockport station.

Picture: Network Rail Operations

Longer trains for Manchester

Gatley, East Didsbury and Mauldeth Road Stations on the Manchester Piccadilly to Crewe via Styal and Manchester Airport line have all had platform extensions. Currently, Liverpool Lime Street to Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly to Crewe via Manchester Airport services are regular callers at these stations, and they are served by three-car class 323s and four-car class 331s. The extensions mean the 323s can now be doubled up to six carriages to improve capacity, although it is not clear when the extra carriages will be introduced.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North+West+Branch

How Bury St Edmunds lost its full ticket service

By Ross Taylor

Bury St Edmunds is the biggest station on the Greater Anglia rural network by a country mile. It is also bigger than stations on the Great Eastern main line that enjoy an inter-city service.

The latest footfall figures show that more than 835,000 passengers passed through the station in the last monitoring year and we expect this to continue rising.

However, Bury does not have a ticket office. It was removed without any statutory consultation and is now a coffee shop!

During refurbishment in 2022 the station lost its ticket office, but passengers were told that the ticket office machine (TOM) had been retained and any tickets which could not be purchased at the station ticket vending machines (TVM) would be issued by staff using the TOM.

Sadly this does not happen, as the often single member of Greater Anglia staff is expected to man the ticket barriers, undertake station and toilet checks, assist passengers and meet contractors.

Some staff are not even trained on the TOM, so cannot possibly provide the service.

Transactions that members of the public cannot access now at Bury include railcards, refunds, advance purchase tickets, rover and ranger tickets, staff privilege tickets, season tickets and season refunds, photocards, changeovers, split-tickets, and redemption of rail warrants and travel vouchers.

We all know what happened in 2023 when the government, and the rail companies, tried to close ticket offices around the country. It was very firmly rejected by the travelling public and the policy was supposedly axed.

However, Bury's ticket office has been closed with no consultation or reference to the secretary of state.

Why has Bury been singled out for this downgrade, and what can be done to restore the full range of ticketing options that all other customers at stations with a ticket office currently enjoy?

As part of the refurbishment at Bury St Edmunds station in 2022, Greater Anglia applied for the changes to the ticket office under the "minor changes" procedure which does not require a full public consultation.

In fact, as we all now know there has been a very major change.

■ Ross Taylor is chair of Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association

Open access boosts growth on the railway

An impassioned plea to recognise the benefits of open access in the new world of Great British Railways was made in May by Martijn Gilbert of Hull Trains and Lumo which runs London-Newcastle-Edinburgh trains.

Mr Gilbert told Railfuture's mini conference at Peterborough that open access had brought new, popular services to towns and cities not well served by rail in the past.

Open access provided 1.4 million passenger journeys a year and meant that 95% less carbon was produced than if those passengers had travelled by air.

He said Hull Trains ran 97 bimode services a week between Hull and London, while all-electric one-class Lumo was providing 70 low-cost services a week.

Mr Gilbert, who is managing director open access rail operations for First Group, said a new open access Stirling-London Euston service was expected to start in June, calling at Larbert, Greenfaulds, Whifflet, Motherwell, Lockerbie, Carlisle, Preston, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes.

He said open access operations helped to accelerate the growth of train travel. All operators on the East Coast main line were experiencing strong growth, although growth was sluggish on the London-Leeds route where there was no competition.

LNER had 15% growth, Grand Central 16%,



Martijn Gilbert of Lumo and Hull Trains

compared to Hull Trains 42%. He was proud of the 52% female workforce at Hull Trains.

He said the business of open access companies was based on finding gaps in the national rail timetable.

Private sector ticketing 'needed'

Private sector ticket companies have boosted rail revenue, Anthony Smith, chair of Independent Rail Retailers, told Railfuture's mini conference. He said there was an enormous seismic shift coming with Great British Railways and the

private sector would be crucial in the success of ticket sales, otherwise it would be back to managed decline.

"It is absolutely essential that GBR maximises the revenue coming into the industry," he said. "Rail must go for growth. We have an amazing rail system that we must market better. GBR will sell its own tickets but it will have to compete on a level playing field."

He said IRR members are actively selling rail, boosting growth and keeping costs down.

He reminded Railfuture members that the separate train operators' ticket-selling ventures would disappear with GBR. It is important that the expertise that has been built up should be retained.

Members of the IRR included Trainline, Raileasy, Omio, OnTrack, My Train Ticket, Asseris, Atomised, Evolvi, Fast Rail Ticketing and Trip.com.

Mr Smith warned that, although simplification of rail ticketing was a popular target, it ran the risk of overall prices going up.

"People are flocking to rail but we still have to sell rail to British and foreign tourists," he said.

Railfuture member Tom Cairns told the conference that Real Time Trains had also launched a ticket selling service, in association with TrainSplit.

West Midlands



Picture: West Midlands Combined Authority

MAY 2025: Platform canopies are erected at Kings Heath, one of three new stations on Birmingham's Camp Hill line. It is hoped the line and the three stations, including Pineapple Road and Moseley Village, will open before the end of this year

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Inspiring AGM speakers

Railfuture West Midlands branch held its 2025 AGM on Saturday 17 May in the conference centre attached to St Martin in the Bullring, Birmingham. I was re-elected chair for one more year, and most of the rest of the committee were re-elected. Steve Boulding, our Shropshire representative, was elected secretary, as Colin Major decided to stand down due to poor health. The chair made a point of appreciating the hard work put in by Colin over the past seven years and hoping that his health would continue to improve.

The AGM had two guest speakers. Fiona Saxon, the Worcestershire community rail partnership officer gave an inspiring talk on the role of

CRPs and showed some of the outstanding art and garden work installed at many of her stations. Peter Sargent, head of rail policy at the West Midlands Rail Executive and long-time friend of Railfuture, presented an impressive set of projects in progress. Most important of these is the start of the detailed business case for the £1.75 billion Midlands Rail Hub, to provide significant extra capacity for passengers into and out of Birmingham from the Worcester, Cheltenham, Leicester and Derby directions, as well as expansion of the soon-to-be-reopened Camp Hill line service. Peter also gave some interesting indications of the work being undertaken to implement pay as you go in the area covered by Transport for West Midlands. Both speakers were



Picture: West Midlands Rail Executive

warmly received and it was a shame more branch members had not been able to make the journey to Birmingham for our event.

There has been talk about the Midlands Rail Hub for several years now, nine and counting. It is estimated that the project would allow for 300 more trains a day into Birmingham. Many observers thought it would never happen however much it was needed. Now the Department for Transport has allocated £123 million towards the

project which includes viaducts to link Moor Street to the Camp Hill line and other infrastructure work. After spending more than £100 million, we hope the DfT will give the full project the go-ahead. Local authority leaders are predicting it will be approved in time to complement HS2 completion. We will prod the decision makers in 2027 if necessary, whoever they might be.

www.railfuture.org.uk/West-Midlands-Branch

East Anglia

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Eco tourism initiative

A sustainable tourism bus service in South Cambridgeshire may emerge following action from the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton community rail partnership. The CRP conducted a feasibility study, funded by the community rail development fund and the Green to our Core fund of the local council. The project aims to connect popular tourist attractions such as Wimpole Estate, Imperial War Museum at Duxford as well as Shepreth Wildlife Park with the local rail stations at Shepreth and Whittlesford Parkway. The idea is to enhance visitor experiences, promote eco-friendly travel, and boost the local economy.

The study, conducted by transport consultants ITP, highlights the need for improved public transport access to these attractions, which currently rely heavily on private vehicles. For instance, Wimpole Estate, located five miles from Shepreth station, is poorly served by buses, and Imperial War Museum Duxford, 1.7 miles from Whittlesford Parkway, requires a walk along a busy road from the nearest station. The proposed eco-tourism bus service would offer a greener alternative for tourists arriving by train from Cambridge and London.



Paul Hollinghurst

success. Learning from other successful initiatives will also be important. Despite challenges such as free parking at attractions and weather dependency, the potential benefits of an eco-bus service include transforming the tourist experience, encouraging sustainable travel, supporting local businesses and fostering a more connected community.

The full report is available at:

<https://meldrethsheprethfoxtonrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/South-Cambridgeshire-Eco-Tourism-Bus-Feasibility-Study-Final-Report.pdf>

Norfolk and East Suffolk Strategic Advice

Railfuture East Anglia welcomes the return of strong growth across the East Anglian rail network. However, we continue to campaign for better train services, as many communities still lack adequate access. Some stations have only hourly services, while others are poorly connected to new developments, lacking car parks, bus links, or safe walking and cycling routes. While there are aspirations to improve access, coordination between local authorities, developers and the rail industry is often inconsistent.

A recent step forward is Network Rail Anglia's *Norfolk & East Suffolk Strategic Advice – Railway Improvement Options for the Norfolk and East Suffolk Branch Lines* (April 2025). This document outlines how future rail aspirations across the region – covering a geographic area including Norwich to Sheringham, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Cambridge, and Ipswich to Lowestoft and Felixstowe – could be achieved. It is well-written, thoroughly presented, and supported by data from Greater Anglia and East Midlands Railway.

There is growing recognition among local authorities, train operators and advocacy groups like ours that a minimum of two trains per hour is essential to attract more users. The report does not dispute this need but instead analyses infrastructure capacity and what must be done to address constraints. To support the case for increased frequency, the report highlights the success of the Truro-Falmouth line, where investment in capacity has led to significantly improved usage.

Each route is considered in turn, with the Cambridge-Norwich service prioritised for enhancement to achieve a consistent two trains per hour. The report notes almost one million journeys per year between Ely and Cambridge alone, demonstrating how higher frequency drives usage, particularly where a near metro-style service already exists.

One key omission in the report is the role of new stations. However, it indirectly highlights their

value. Cambridge North, now eight years old, has grown rapidly to 1.8 million journeys per year. In the past year alone, it facilitated over 200,000 journeys to Cambridge Central and around 90,000 to Ely, trips that would not have been possible without the station. A second new Cambridge station is set to open in early 2026, and we expect similar region-wide impacts.

This success story underlines our belief that new stations, particularly on the fringes of Norwich, are essential for improving access and growing ridership.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Rail+Network>

Haverhill train better choice than busway

Railfuture East Anglia has formally objected to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's transport and works act order for the Cambridge South East Transport scheme, warning it could undermine sustainable transport goals and damage existing bus services.

The revised CSET plan centres on a new busway and Park & Ride near the A11 road, intended to encourage car users to switch to buses.

However, Railfuture argues that this focus risks weakening long-distance bus routes, such as those linking Cambridge with Haverhill and Linton, and fails to support people who rely entirely on public transport.

Railfuture also highlights a conflict between the new scheme and the partnership's city access programme, which aims to cut car use and improve air quality. Earlier CSET proposals – including bus priority on the A1307 and improved cycling infrastructure – were more in line with these goals. The current plan, by emphasising car access, is likely to entrench car dependency rather than reduce it.

Railfuture continues to campaign for reopening the Cambridge-Haverhill railway, which is a more sustainable long-term solution. A rail link could handle higher passenger volumes, reduce environmental impact, and reconnect Haverhill, one of the UK's largest towns without a railway. A recent study suggests the route could serve up to 2,000 daily peak-time journeys, far more than the busway is likely to carry.

In the short term, Railfuture urges a return to the original CSET vision, focussed on bus and active travel improvements along the A1307. Longer term, it calls on local authorities and the Department for Transport to reinstate the rail line to Haverhill.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Haverhill

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia
[@RailfutureEA](https://twitter.com/RailfutureEA)



Proposed bus route

Discussions with local transport providers revealed enthusiasm for the project but also challenges, such as the commercial viability of a traditional bus service in rural areas. A pilot shuttle service using electric minibuses during peak tourist seasons emerged as a promising solution. The study analysed demographics, station use and existing services, emphasising the importance of accessibility for all visitors, including those with disabilities, and the need to improve station facilities.

A robust marketing strategy, including combined fare products and social media promotion, is crucial for the pilot service's

Severnside

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Rejuvenating Severnside branch

It is more than three years since Railfuture Severnside secretary Nigel Bray died. The branch is still reeling from the loss of his hard work and commitment, and we are in need of rejuvenation. Acting co-chair Wendy Thorne has had to step back due to other commitments, leaving me, the other acting co-chair Bruce Williamson, holding the fort. I have been working with Railfuture member John Henderson on a plan to revitalise the branch

and form a new committee. This requires a team of about six or seven people, which is perhaps where you come in. If you are interested in getting involved, then we would love to hear from you. Please contact:

severnside@railfuture.org.uk
or call Bruce on 07759 557389

Farewell to campaigner Dave

Wendy Thorne reports: "Just to let you know that one of Portishead Railway Group's most active and influential campaigners, Dave Chillistone, sadly died on Sunday

2 March 2025. Although he had been ill for a long time his death was sudden and unexpected. We will miss him terribly as he was so knowledgeable. Only a short time before, he had met again with our local MP Sadik Al-Hassain to talk about the Portishead to Bristol railway."

Dave appeared on the front page cover picture of *Railwatch* 183, celebrating the good news that the government has agreed to provide the last £30 million needed to complete the project to reopen the Portishead railway.



Dave Chillistone

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Alliance convention

A new campaign banner, which includes the Devon Metro 2 map, was launched in March at the second annual convention in Barnstaple of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance. The six-page event brochure highlighted the achievements of the alliance over the past year.

Mayor of Barnstaple Janet Coates opened the convention with Great Western managing director Mark Hopwood CBE, who appeared via a video link.

Supporting statements came from the newly elected North Devon Liberal Democrat MP Ian Roome and from Andrea Davis, then chair of the Peninsula Rail Transport Forum. As Devon County Council's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport she accepted the Railfuture Judges' Special Award in 2023.

Presentations were made on the draft business cases for modernising the existing Barnstaple-Exeter line and extending services to Bideford, and by Navantia UK Appledore shipyard stressing the importance of better public transport to support its expansion plans. The *North Devon Gazette* made good use of Railfuture's press release to publicise the event.

More information is available on the Devon and Cornwall page on the Railfuture website.

Seven more parish councils along the Barnstaple-Exeter line have joined the alliance in 2025, two making donations to the alliance. The recently formed Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station has also agreed to join the alliance. The Friends have been awarded funds from Great Western Railway for environmental improvements in and around the station. Railfuture benefited from publicity about its role in helping to set up the alliance.

Great Western has confirmed it is boosting its train fleet, with an eye to improving Barnstaple and Okehampton services.

Railfuture election videos

Shortly before Devon County Council's elections, the process to elect a new chair for Railfuture Devon and Cornwall began. Nominations had to be in by the end of May. One candidate became the first in the history of Railfuture to issue manifesto videos. The outcome of the election process will be published on the Railfuture Devon and Cornwall web page, and in the next *Railwatch*.

Community engagement

Campaigner Tim Steer made a presentation about the four-year-old ACE Rail campaign to the Rotary



RAIL UNITED: Delegates at the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance convention in March, with ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer (front centre) with two mayors to his right – host Janet Coates for Barnstaple Town Council and (left) Rachel Clarke for Bideford Town Council. The chair of Torridge District Council Doug Bushby is behind Tim's right shoulder, with Mid Devon District Council cabinet member Steve Keable behind Tim's left shoulder. Also pictured are Railfuture's policy director Ian Brown CBE, Railfuture member and NDRDA strategic adviser Peter West OBE and Railfuture director Roger Blake



Friends of Barnstaple Railway volunteers with Great Western's Gerrard Layton, second right, who came to assess them for site safety

Club of Barnstaple Link, which has welcomed him as a member. April 2025 was the fourth anniversary of the emergence of the ACE Rail campaign at a Bideford Railway Heritage Centre event to welcome the Bideford steam locomotive name plates, removed from the West Country class loco when it was scrapped in 1967.

Our plan is your plan

Four years of campaigning have seen a dozen submissions to official consultations, to ensure that the ACE Rail campaign ambitions are adopted as official policy. Both the Peninsula Transport Strategic Implementation Plan and the Devon and Torbay local transport plan have incorporated its aims.

Dartmoor line parkway station

The success of the OkeRail campaign in restoring regular daily passenger services to Okehampton will be augmented next year with the opening of Okehampton Interchange, which is supported by levelling up funds.

Integrated transport

PlusBus tickets have gone digital, thanks to great work at Traveline. Online booking of PlusBus tickets is now available for Bude, Launceston and Tavistock. Bude and adjacent Stratton have a population of around 10,500 and are 30 miles from the nearest railhead – at Okehampton. That meets the basic criteria to be featured in Network Rail Western Route's 2024 report

Connecting Communities: framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route. Of the 23 potential station locations assessed, however, Bude ranked 15th overall.



The Bude-Stratton-Holsworthy-Halwill Junction corridor is served by five daily buses each way Monday to Saturday, with three on Sunday, connecting with trains at Okehampton. Railfuture Devon and

Cornwall hopes that the opening of Okehampton Interchange station next year, broadly coinciding with the replacement of 40-year-old diesel trains by more comfortable 25-year-old diesel trains, will boost patronage to the point of justifying the extra cost of some additional connecting bus services. For some background on the campaign, see:

<https://connectbude.co.uk/2024/04/bude-okehampton-link-takes-a-step-forward-thanks-to-railfuture-funding/>
<https://connectbude.co.uk/2025/03/survey-reveals-overwhelming-support-for-bude-rail-restoration/>

Launceston Town Council aspires to be reconnected to rail services, although the town did not feature in the *Connecting Communities* Network Rail report. The size of the community, at fewer than 8,500 population, is deemed insufficient to warrant further investigation.

At present the town has four daily (Mon-Sat) bus services in each direction, connecting with the train services at Okehampton 20 miles away. Like Bude, Launceston is likely to be able to secure only modest increases to those services for the foreseeable future. However, the opening next year of Okehampton Interchange station may assist both Cornish communities. Undeterred, however, *Connect Launceston* has emerged as the rail campaign brand, and it is hosted on Connect Bude's website.

TavyRail waits for verdict

Meanwhile campaign group TavyRail was awaiting the outcome of the government's spending review in the hope of positive news. TavyRail's *Restoring Your Railway* bid had got as far as funding a strategic outline business case before the whole programme was cancelled in July last year by chancellor of the exchequer Rachel Reeves.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch

Railfuture Member of the Year 2024-25

Do you know an individual Railfuture member who has contributed to the success of the organisation? Perhaps they have raised the profile of Railfuture in their local area?

Or they may volunteer helping run their local branch? Whoever they are if you think they deserve recognition we would like to hear about them

Send a written statement of no more than 500 words explaining why they deserve to be recognised. All Railfuture individual members (not RUGs) are eligible to be nominated. This award is separate from the Rail User Group (RUG) Awards which have their own nomination criteria. The deadline for nominations to be received is 27 June 2025

The award will be presented at our AGM in July 2025

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

Let's have more freight trains for GBR future



Train drivers' union ASLEF launched a campaign in May to boost rail freight, coinciding with the new nationalised world of Great British Railways.

It wants freight train paths to be protected on the GBR network and publicly owned rail freight to be encouraged.

The union also calls for investment in infrastructure to create capacity for freight.

Specifically, it calls for the Ely upgrade to be given the go-ahead and for a rolling programme of electrification – both crucial Railfuture campaign aims.

The level of road fuel duty and rail track access charges should be reviewed to level the playing field between road and rail.

The union also calls for improved welfare facilities for freight drivers.

Rail freight growth targets should be strengthened. The 75% growth target set in 2023 was a welcome step but not ambitious enough.

ASLEF held a round table with MPs in Westminster and reported "positive feedback" from the MPs.

Falmouth Docks needs rail link

Labour MP Jayne Kirkham is calling for the reopening of a small section of line to Falmouth Docks. She said: "A rail linked port with import and export capacity, for bulk goods, such as tin and components for the renewable sector, would be a great asset to the region. I have been canvassing opinion from businesses that may use it, have garnered the support of Lord Hendy, the rail minister, and now have a meeting arranged with Network Rail to discuss potential next steps."



"Carrying freight by rail is cleaner, greener and more economical and should and will be supported by this government."

Channel Tunnel potential

The Channel Tunnel, which opened more than 30 years ago as a major pathway for trade between the UK and continental Europe, remains significantly under-used for rail freight. In 2023, just over 1,400 freight trains went through, an average of only five per working day. Now the average has dropped to four. Getlink (formerly Groupe Eurotunnel) estimates that this represents just 10% of the capacity available.



Picture: Network Rail

Freight team for international women's day

Network Rail joined freight partners to run a female-led freight train to mark International Women's Day in March, aiming to inspire the next generation of women to consider a role in rail freight.

Over 20 women were involved in running the freight train carrying limestone from Whatley Quarry, Somerset, to a freight depot in Theale, Reading.

Female staff from freight operator Freightliner rostered, drove and controlled the train, while women from freight company Mendip Rail planned the journey. Network Rail's female signallers helped the train along the route and women workers at construction company Heidelberg Materials loaded

the train in the quarry and unloaded the limestone in the depot.

The freight train comes five years after Network Rail worked with train operator Southeastern to run an all-female passenger train to celebrate International Women's Day in 2020.

The idea came from Jess Lippett, a senior route freight manager at Network Rail, who said: "Women are at the forefront of rail freight – leading the charge in ways that ensure the industry's future is as inclusive as it is successful."

Over a third of management positions at Network Rail are currently held by women.



Picture: Belga Photo Maelke Tijssens

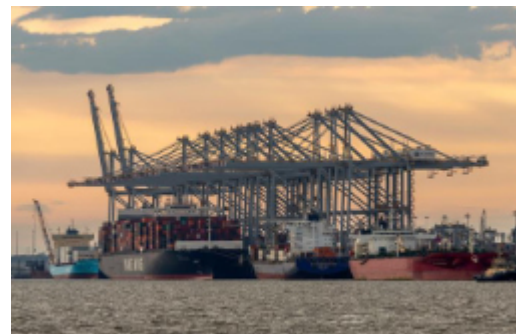
Car trains bring Ostend back to life

The Belgian port of Ostend welcomed its first-ever car train in May, marking a renewed focus on sustainable transport and reducing road traffic. It is also reviving block train operations in the port area after a 15-year hiatus.

The first train carried more than 200 cars and is the start of regular services, linking Ostend by rail to various destinations across Europe. "Ostend is an important economic

hub. Rail is the future," said Benoit Gilson of Infrabel, which reactivated tracks in the port. Focussing on rail freight transport, and modal shift, means a great added value and it also shows a good vision of the port authority."

Rail freight is likely to benefit from an influx of Chinese electric cars into Europe, predicted to coincide with the drop in demand for cars from Elon Musk's Tesla company.



Picture: DP World

£1 billion boost for London Gateway

Two new intermodal rail services were launched in May from London Gateway to rail depots at Hams Hall, near Birmingham, and Doncaster iPort.

The new links were in response to growing container volumes at London Gateway.

The port, on the river Thames eight miles downstream from Tilbury, has just launched a £1 billion expansion including a second rail

terminal. The two new services are operated by Maritime Transport in partnership with GB Railfreight, aimed at speeding up modal shift from road to rail.

Julie Garn, intermodal director at GB Railfreight, said: "These new services are a great example of what long-term collaboration can achieve, delivering practical, lower-carbon alternatives to road that benefit the wider supply chain."

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Grand Central 'Carry On until 2038'

To the widespread relief of many Railfuture members in the North East, the Office of Rail and Road has agreed to extend Grand Central's track rights from 2026, their previous limit, a full 12 years on to 2038. Grand Central has had little hesitation in placing orders for nine new units to cover its Sunderland and Bradford service requirements. These units, to be built at Hitachi's Newton Aycliffe factory, will be trimode, with electric traction available (at long last) for the majority of its routes to and from London. Diesel and battery power will be available for the rest, and there will be a 10-year maintenance contract as part of this deal.

Puzzle over open access bid

Railfuture North East members have been puzzled by the sudden announcement of a bid to run a through service from Newcastle to southern England, notably Gatwick Airport and Brighton. Unfortunately, its intermediate stops are almost exactly the same as those made by CrossCountry's Newcastle-Reading trains, whose fortunes during the last few years have been mixed, but which should be restored in full by the middle of next year. As matters stand, Railfuture North East is campaigning for these to alternate between the traditional East Coast main line (via Darlington and Durham) and the coast route via Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland, to provide a direct through train to every large town north of Northallerton at least every two hours. Our discussions with CrossCountry have not yet got very far, but we doubt if the Office of Rail and Road or anyone else would look favourably on a new application that largely duplicates what is already there. This one, however, comes from Grand Central not from CrossCountry, so Railfuture North-East will be making our views known over the next few weeks. See the next issue of *Railwatch* for clarification – we hope!

Unforgettable day for students on first-ever rail trip

Further education students from a special education needs and disabilities college were given an unforgettable day out by train operator Grand Central. For many of the students from Catcote Futures College, the trip from Hartlepool to York (see picture) was their first ever trip by train. The group



travelled on the 0924 from Hartlepool for their day out, which included a visit to the National Railway Museum.

Bishop line nets three awards

The community rail partnership which promotes the Bishop line (Darlington-Shildon-Bishop Auckland) won three honours in the National Community Rail Awards, held in Newcastle in March. The Community Creative Projects and Station Arts award went to Shildon Smart Art project. Local street artist Dan Walls and some young teenagers created artwork for the footbridge at Shildon station, where many tourists are expected to arrive en route to the Locomotion museum this summer. The Tourism & Leisure Award went to the partnership's *Explore the Bishop Line by train this summer* campaign which has already increased passenger numbers. Second place in the *Involving Young People* award went to the Bishop line rail education programme, designed to encourage younger people to use rail.

Haltwhistle shows it is somewhere very special

A series of exhibitions has been presented to rail passengers at Haltwhistle station under the title HISS – Haltwhistle is Something Special. The third exhibition was staged by local group Zig Zag, which celebrated local food, including sausages, honey, bread and beer.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North-East-Branch
X @RailfutureNEast

An all-female team ran TransPennine Express' control room on International Women's Day



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Think Green

If the line north from Didcot was electrified for four miles – as far as Culham – bimode trains would be able to travel as far as Moreton-in-Marsh (35 miles from Culham) or Banbury (33 miles from Culham) and back on one battery charge. That was the message from Rich Fisher of train operator Great Western when he spoke to Railfuture Thames Valley members at our AGM on 29 April. Mr Fisher, who is business lead for the *Green Railway for Growth* programme at GWR, described the operator's *Project Churchward* initiative to replace their older Sprinter and Turbo diesel trains, which are approaching the age of the multiple units they replaced. The new trains will use battery technology. If Didcot-Culham was electrified, it would also enable elimination of the change of trains at Didcot. The new trains could work through to and from Reading or Paddington, recharging between Didcot and Culham.



Andrew McCallum



GWR's Rich Fisher at Railfuture Thames Valley AGM
Picture: Richard Stow

Likewise, Bedwyn could have its full through London service restored and the new trains would serve the Thames Valley branches (Henley, Marlow, Slough). Although he did not mention it, they would operate Reading-Basingstoke services too. Mr Fisher also referred to the success of battery train trials on the Greenford branch and Hitachi's battery train tests over the Pennines. He said the transformation of the Cardiff Valleys with new fleets was an example for Thames Valley to follow.

Oxfordshire County Council's rail development lead Pete Brunskill told the AGM about the county's *Green Railway for Growth* plan. The council supports *Project Churchward*, which ties in with its aspiration for full electrification from Didcot to Oxford by 2030 and to Bletchley by 2035. Mr Brunskill introduced the *Science Line*,



Theale station's new, accessible footbridge

Picture: Andrew McCallum

which connects high-tech clusters around Oxford: Didcot, Culham, Cowley, Begbroke and Banbury. It was reassuring to hear both the operator and the county council adopting Railfuture's Oxford Metro idea – the aspiration for two trains per hour on all lines serving Oxford. The council welcomes collaboration between operators GWR and Chiltern to replace their train fleets.

Both believe, as does Railfuture, that the two-car class 196 trains from West Midlands that will open the Oxford-Milton Keynes services later this year will very soon be crowded and need replacing with longer trains. The 196 trains may also have to go back to the West Midlands when Birmingham's Camp Hill line reopens for passenger services. If, as seems more likely, Chiltern takes on the lease of the ex-TransPennine mark 5 locomotive-hauled trains, it will release trains to increase capacity elsewhere, including on East West Rail. Railfuture's aspirations, GWR's *Project Churchward*, Chiltern's *Right Route* vision and Oxfordshire's *Green Railway for Growth* synchronise well.

Railfuture puts rail case to MP

Railfuture Thames Valley vice-chair Nigel Rose and secretary Andrew McCallum recently met their new constituency MP (for Banbury) Labour's Sean Woodcock. Boundary changes have brought part of the Cotswold line into his constituency. Rail is not his main interest so we pressed on him the need for Kingham station footbridge to be accessible and a proper bus link between there and Chipping Norton, as well as discussing the current poor Banbury-Oxford service and crowding on these and London services. We pointed out to him the benefits for his constituents of trains for Cowley (access to high tech jobs) and urged him to get his name added to the list of MPs on the Cotswold line who are vice-presidents of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group.

High price of accessibility

At a Thames Valley branch committee meeting earlier this year, member Vic Angell spoke about the delayed and over-budget accessible footbridge at Theale station. It was announced in 2013, work began in January 2023, it was completed in spring 2024 and the footbridge opened in January 2025. The original budget of £2 million came out at £10 million. It is a fine bridge and we welcome it but it is another example of a relatively small project going way over budget and time. It took longer to build and open than the Eiffel Tower!

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames-Valley-Branch
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Fare gain

The Scottish Government is to permanently remove peak fares from September. This follows their reintroduction last year after it was claimed that a trial removal of peak fares increased usage by only 6.8%, short of the required 10% to make the scheme pay its way. Admittedly, reductions in service due to industrial disputes probably suppressed passenger numbers over this period. However, after consulting with passengers, the Scottish government says it has decided to abolish the peak fares. It will be interesting to see whether the uplift in usage will be higher this time round.

Levenmouth looks lively

A year on from the Levenmouth line reopening, passengers are now enjoying two trains an hour to Edinburgh, one via Kirkcaldy and Burntisland and the other via Dunfermline and Cowdenbeath. The line has got gradually busier, with Leven station in particular being used by many more passengers than anticipated. The summer timetable also makes for better connections at Kirkcaldy for those passengers travelling from Leven and Cameron Bridge, north of Kirkcaldy, with retimed trains to allow passengers plenty of time to get from one platform to another to change trains. In addition, Leven has attracted its first outward Scottish Railway Preservation Society's excursion, to Oban no less. Doubtless there will be many more.

East Kilbride electrification

The new ScotRail timetable includes the reintroduction of services



Jane Ann Liston

between East Kilbride and Glasgow, following the completion of the four-month-long latest phase of the £140 million major modernisation of the route. Work included lowering track near Busby, Clarkston and Giffnock stations so overhead line equipment could be fitted under bridges. The first phase of the work began in February last year. Diesel trains have been replaced by environmentally friendly electric trains. Speed, reliability and quality of service will improve as a result. The East Kilbride upgrade is a monument to Helen Broadbent, who devoted 30 years of her life to fighting the proposed closure of the line in the wake of the Beeching report. She formed a local rail development association with her husband Jack and was still serving enthusiastically on the national executive of the Railway Development Society at the time of her death in 1990.



Helen Broadbent

The couple's work resulted in the East Kilbride line becoming one of only seven routes in Scotland to be granted a ministerial reprieve. A memorial seat was provided at East Kilbride station by RDS in 1992 and a plaque was unveiled by ScotRail in 2018.

Late night train for Highlands

Passengers in the Highlands will also benefit, with the reintroduction of the late night service from Inverness to Tain, thanks to the reduction of under-used morning peak services from Elgin to Inverness. There is also a new morning service from Inverness to

Edinburgh, likely to be of particular benefit to commuters. This replaces a service from Inverness to Glasgow Queen Street.

Borders line boost

Meanwhile in the Borders the consultancy Turner & Townsend, which has extensive experience in managing complex railway-related projects, has been appointed to carry out the feasibility study into extending the Borders line beyond Tweedbank. The case has surely been boosted by the announcement of Center Parcs' proposal to locate its first Scottish resort north of Hawick. It is hoped that the results of the study will convince the governments in both Edinburgh and London to complete the line through Hawick all the way to Carlisle.

Plenty of waiting room

In North East Fife, both the Newburgh station and StARLink (St Andrews Rail Link) campaigns are still waiting to hear the response to their appraisals submitted to Transport Scotland over a year ago, along with details of the next steps. There have been hints though that there could be news on that front some time in the summer.

Gareth's Metro plan for Glasgow

Finally, railway engineer, author and presenter of the *Railnatter* podcast Gareth Dennis has come up with a proposal for an extensive Glasgow metro, which would extend as far as Wemyss Bay, Helensburgh Central and Gourrock. While leaving the much-loved subway on its own, Gareth's ideas would enhance services on the Argyll, North Clyde and Clydelink networks, by making use of much underused land and building three tunnels at Clyde Central, Sighthill and Longhaugh. It also brings about the long-desired Crossrail by linking Queen Street and Central with a new station and

walkways underground, thus reducing the congestion on the concourses at both the current stations. The scheme would also alleviate the Partick-Hyndland bottleneck and the congestion on the Paisley-Port Glasgow stretch, while also bringing public transport to areas of Glasgow, particularly north of the river, which are currently sparsely served. Let us hope that Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council are reading this column – and taking note of what Gareth is proposing.

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Friends of the Far North Line
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Cross-river rail

New cross-river rail links between Kent and Essex were the theme of two presentations before the Railfuture branch AGM. Chris Todd of Transport Action Network, supported by report author Jonathan Roberts, spoke about Essex-Kent Superlinks as a main line rail alternative to the newly authorised Lower Thames Crossing, which will be road only. Gordon Pratt then explained how the KenEx Tram proposal to link Grays and Ebbsfleet could be a first stage in creating more tram links.

See: Ian Brown article on pages 12-13



Roger Blake

The formal annual general meeting elected Richard Bowry as branch chair, succeeding Keith Dyal who died in 2022. Neil Middleton was elected as vice-chair to succeed Roger Blake, who stood down after serving 18 years in the role. Chris Fribbins proposed a vote of thanks for all of Roger's work.

Campaigning conversations

Alexandra Palace, Faversham Guildhall and Luxford Field are venues for Railfuture campaign stalls. Kent's Hoo Peninsula Railway campaign was publicised at the annual London Festival of Railway Modelling at Alexandra Palace.

We promoted rail at Faversham's annual Festival of Transport in the Guildhall. The campaign for an Uckfield-Ringmer-Lewes rail link was featured at Uckfield's Luxford

Field during the Lions Club's family fun day.

Round the table

Railfuture members have been active in the Southeast community rail partnership, as well as at meetings with operators Govia Thameslink Railway and Greater Anglia. Informal approaches have been made to Railfuture from bidders for Transport for London's Overground concession. Branch members were also invited to see work on Southeastern's Networker fleet replacement. Railfuture's Chris Fribbins, who chairs the Kent community rail partnership, received, on its behalf, the 2025 Community Rail Award for the CRP's "outstanding contribution".

Strategic responses to planners

Railfuture members contributed to responses to the House of

Commons transport committee investigation into rail investment pipelines, to the Office of Rail and Road on rail passenger assistance, to the Department for Transport on an integrated national transport strategy and on proposals to reform Britain's railways. Within the branch area, Railfuture responded to the Lewes District Council local plan, to Transport for the South East for its updated strategy, to Medway Council on a community infrastructure framework for the Hoo Peninsula, and on devolution proposals from the ministry of housing, communities and local government to create new mayoral authorities for Greater Essex, as well as Sussex and Brighton.

www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East

Chair's column by Chris Page

A railway fit for Britain's future

Railfuture responded to the Department for Transport consultation on Great British Railways. We agree with most of the DfT proposals, but what is not covered in the consultation document is more interesting. It gives little indication of how GBR will work in practice. For example, it is not clear how much control will be exercised by the DfT and how much independence professional railway managers will have. The government should set both national and transport strategic quantified objectives for GBR. The DfT and GBR should then work together to agree how these national objectives, including supporting economic growth, facilitating housing targets, environmental sustainability and social inclusion, should be achieved. GBR should decide how to meet transport objectives including meeting a required subsidy level, achieving target modal shift for passengers and freight, and meeting a decarbonisation target. As operators move into public ownership, there should be a shift from managing cost to managing margin and a no-blame culture focussed on improving reliability. Part of our response is that the new passenger watchdog should have a representative of a national rail users group, such as Railfuture, on its board.

www.railfuture.org.uk/display3999

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander has confirmed that the industry-wide *Rail Plan for Change* will be published soon to show how rail can enable economic growth. We will look at this for evidence of progress on our key campaigns below.

A better railway

Passenger numbers have almost recovered or exceeded pre-Covid levels but revenue still lags due to less commuting. Rail must attract more passengers with improved reliability, good connections, clean and comfortable trains, better wifi, welcoming stations and a secure environment with good customer service by well-motivated staff. This will increase revenue which will in turn enable improved service frequency and capacity to match demand.

Fares and ticketing

We continue to campaign for annual fare increases to be limited to the nationally recognised consumer price index, which the government uses for benefits, rather than the higher retail price index. Fares may be expensive but the complexity of the ticket system and fear of buying the wrong ticket are a greater disincentive. A ticketing review open to public scrutiny is needed. Buying a ticket must be made easier by making online and ticket machine purchases more intuitive, with more opportunities to pay as you go. Also, restrictions should be consistent.

However, this must not reduce flexibility or choice. For example, people may be able to fix their outward journey time but not their return. It must be recognised that

long-distance trains also carry short-distance passengers, and that not everyone has a credit card and a mobile phone. Contactless payment is not currently fit for purpose because it does not include the railcard discount, and some people with an impairment may need human interaction.

Modal shift

Many rail routes have under-utilised capacity for large parts of the day. Even with the current transition to electric road vehicles, modal shift of both freight and passengers from road to rail would increase decarbonisation, reduce air particulate pollution and reduce road congestion, allowing road spending to be cut. On all routes, the proportion of people travelling by rail is less than by other modes. Analysis of mobile phone data has shown that rail use is greater where rail frequencies are higher and the rail journey time is less. Surprisingly, this is still true where the road cost is less, showing that rail travellers value convenience over cost – although road travellers may not. The government has encountered political resistance to meeting fiscal targets by cutting £5 billion from the welfare budget. Alternatively, it could raise £2 billion by increasing fuel duty, restoring the temporary cut which would generally hit the more affluent rather than the poorest. This would also shift the balance of cost between road and rail for many passenger journeys and freight movements, promoting modal shift, which in turn will reduce the subsidy to rail services.

A bigger railway

Rail minister Lord Hendy has indicated that the rail package put forward for the Treasury review of projects – expected to conclude in June 2025 – is credible. It is likely that the Transpennine Route Upgrade and East West Rail will be protected, that new stations at Golborne, Liverpool Baltic and Okehampton Interchange will proceed, and that the Portishead line will be reopened to passengers. Although funding is tight, investment in new rail facilities and capacity is necessary to support government targets of economic growth and major house building. We campaign for new stations and track which will deliver this.

Electrification

Electrification of key rail routes can reduce costs and meet the government's zero carbon objectives. A rolling programme is necessary to maintain capability and skills and so deliver electrification cost-effectively. Financial constraints mean that new schemes might have to be small and delivered incrementally.

The focus should be on introducing discontinuous electrification on some routes (to enable battery trains) while also concentrating on infilling gaps in electrification to enable electric haulage for a greater proportion of freight routes.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Campaigns>



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Drop the 'Great' from British Railways

By Roger Blake
and Ray King

A new dawn for railways was welcomed in May when transport secretary Heidi Alexander travelled from London Waterloo to Shepperton on the 0614 train. She was on board a "renationalised" train taken over from South Western Railway, owned by First Group and MTR Corporation.

Now SWR trains are run by the Department for Transport via a specially created company called Department for Transport Operations Ltd (DFTO).

There was a new Great British Railways logo on the side of the train and a pledge of better services to come, but the overdose of hype was met with scepticism by many passengers.

"I would strongly recommend doing away with the word Great," said Roger French of Bus and Train User.

"It was one of those stupid Johnsonian gags and will very quickly be a hostage to fortune, with operational problems on the tracks never far away as infrastructure issues regularly arise. On top of that the underlying shortage of drivers is endemic, causing far too many cancellations." SWR is not the first operator taken over by the DfT.

LNOR, Northern, Southeastern and TransPennine Express have been in government ownership for years, running trains every day, carrying thousands of passengers.

They were run by DfT OLR Holdings Ltd (DOHL) which is now merged into DFTO.

Of course, Network Rail owns the railway infrastructure and has been government controlled since it was established in 2002.



So there might be very little immediate change, apart from the logo, with legislation to set up GBR still going through Parliament. The government says GBR will be the single "directing mind" bringing track and train together, putting passengers and customers first, rebuilding trust in the railway and operating the majority of passenger



Picture: Greater Anglia

GREAT RAILWAY PROGRESS: New station at Beaulieu Park near Chelmsford is on the Great Eastern main line

Two new stations to open in eastern England

Two new stations are set to open within the next 12 months in eastern England. Cambridge South station will open early next year to serve the biomedical campus, including Addenbrooke's Hospital, Royal Papworth Hospital, Rosie Maternity Hospital, the new regional Cambridge Cancer Hospital and the new regional Cambridge Children's Hospital. First to open

though, later this year, is expected to be the three-platform station at Beaulieu Park in Essex, three miles from Chelmsford's existing station. Developers of the planned 3,500 homes nearby have contributed to the cost of building the station. There are 500 bike spaces and 700 car spaces, together with a bus interchange.

services under public ownership and control. However, there is much that we are still waiting for.

Spending Review phase 2

Perhaps more like a non-spending review, given the reported state of the nation's finances. The chancellor of the exchequer Rachel Reeves delivered phase 1 with the autumn budget in October. Phase 2 in June is expected at about the time this *Railwatch* is published, but should set departmental budgets for (day-to-day) spending until 2028/29 and capital spending until 2029/30. The capital spending limits for 2026/27 should take into account the results of the DfT's case-by-case review of former *Restoring Your Railway* projects caught by the chancellor's cancellation of the programme 11 months ago.

Investment is already committed to the Transpennine Route Upgrade, East West Rail and HS2, so essential schemes, such as two vital junctions in East Anglia (Ely and Haughley), may struggle to be awarded funding.

Blocked pipeline

With industry-wide support, rail network enhancements pipeline statements were published in 2018 and 2019 but "annual updates" are still awaited. Little wonder that the new House of Commons transport committee has instigated an Inquiry on rail investment pipelines. It can only be a matter of time before

someone has the courage to replay to government its own rhetoric about "builders versus blockers" when it comes to the capital investment in rail infrastructure, essential to the government's growth agenda.

Restoring Your Railway

Railfuture campaigners plough on with case-making for reconnecting established communities, and newly connecting emerging communities, to the rail network in order to bring the socio-economic and environmental benefits of rail to more potential users.

One recent example of a Railfuture campaign success – after patient and tenacious lobbying by Railfuture Thames Valley regional branch and others – has been Oxfordshire County Council's commissioning of a strategic outline business case for a new station on the Great Western main line, between Didcot and Swindon, to serve the rapidly growing communities of Wantage and Grove.

Electrification and decarbonisation

The House of Commons transport committee held its first evidence session with transport secretary Heidi Alexander, which included topics such as rail reform, decarbonisation and airport expansion. A question from Didcot and Wantage MP Ollie Glover on rail

electrification prompted a response from the DfT's second permanent secretary Jo Shanmugalingam. She cited the contribution of different transport sectors to total UK carbon emissions: rail 0.4%, maritime 3%, aviation 8%, road 23%.

£1 billion investment in Wales

The results of £1 billion invested in the South Wales Metro are beginning to pay off with tram-train testing starting in April. More than 170 kilometres of railway are being electrified, including the Merthyr, Aberdare and Treherbert lines, where new trimode class 756 trains have been temporarily introduced.

A £100 million depot has been built at Taff's Well, which is the control centre for the Metro and stabling point for 36 class 398 tram-trains.

£35 million help for Bradford

Train services between Bradford and London tripled in May, thanks to government funding. There are five extra LNER services to London and the £35 million funding also provided a new platform at Forster Square station.

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