

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture: Ben Spires, Hartlepool - (@highlandrailways - Instagram)

HIGH SPOT IN THE HIGHLANDS: Page 2

Also inside: Christian Wolmar on SUV danger ● Ian Brown on light rail ● Revolt over fares
Northumberland record ● Rock and rail ● Welsh reopening hero ● Portrush to Bristol

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Lost opportunity at Leuchars

PAGE ONE PICTURE

Rays from the setting sun shining across the front of the London-bound sleeper train provide our dramatic page one picture.

It was taken on 13 May this year at the 1,340 ft Corrou station – the highest mainline station in the UK – by Ben John Spiers who lives in Hartlepool.

The sleeper train leaves Fort William at 1950, calling at Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge, Tulloch, Corrou, Rannoch, Bridge of Orchy, Upper Tyndrum, Crianlrich, Ardlui, Arrochar & Tarbet, Garelochhead, Helensburgh Upper, Dumbarton Central, Dalmuir, Glasgow Queen Street, Edinburgh, Preston and Crewe, arriving in London Euston at 0800 after a leisurely journey through Scotland and England. At Corrou, the train was hauled by GBRf class 66 743 and class 73 966.

Other sleeper trains operate from Aberdeen and Inverness to London. But passengers bound for St Andrews alighting at Leuchars railway station have been confronted by an unwelcoming boarded-up structure on the site of the former branch bay, writes Jane Ann Liston. This erstwhile



Picture: Pete Lindsay

Boarded-up sleeper lounge at Leuchars with Jane Ann Liston

Caledonian Sleeper lounge was built at the behest of the Scottish Government when it franchised the service to Serco.

Now that the sleeper has been brought under Transport Scotland control, keeping the lounge open was deemed not value for money because of the small number of passengers using the facilities.

The sleeper lounge included not just toilets and a waiting-room but showers, and also provided hot drinks and snacks, all facilities from which other station users were excluded. The lounge has been closed and boarded up, rendering it a blot on the stationscape, while

sleeper passengers must now wait outside on the platform at one of Scotland's most exposed and isolated stations.

If train operator ScotRail, also now under Scottish Government control, were to keep the station open just another half hour four days a week (Monday-Thursday) and another one and three-quarter hours on a Friday (on Sunday nights the station closes just as the sleeper arrives), then passengers could have access to shelter and toilets. Surely all that is required, until they embark upon their "journey of a night-time". What on earth is the difficulty in making sensible use of facilities that already exist?

You must believe me, campaigning saves lives

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

I am not writing about trains for once. Instead, I focus on the importance of campaigning because of a remarkable way that a campaign I was involved in three decades ago just unexpectedly has borne fruit in a personal way.

My stepson, Pascoe, now in his 40s, was calmly walking along the pavement of a main road in Liverpool eating a sandwich on a sunny day this August. Suddenly, from nowhere, a car – inevitably a sports utility vehicle – came careering towards him at high speed. He had no chance of getting out of the way and instead raised his hands as if fending off a punch, a gesture that helped prevent him being crushed under the SUV. He was thrown up on the bonnet and knocked sideways with the result that his injuries were fortunately not too serious – a twisted knee and a few bruises.

The footage of the incident from the CCTV outside a local pub is terrifying. It is difficult to understand how he escaped so lightly. When he rang me to tell me about the incident, he said: "Thank God the car did not have bull bars or otherwise I would have been hurt much more badly and even

possibly knocked forward and under the car." He remembered that 30 years ago in the 1990s I had run a campaign in the *Independent on Sunday* against what was becoming the widespread practice of fitting bull bars on vans and family cars. Famously, we featured a picture of a Ford Escort with bull bars fitted which looked utterly incongruous. The origins of these bull bars were in Australia where they are known as "roo bars" as they are intended to limit damage to the vehicle when it crashes into kangaroos stuck like rabbits in the headlights. They are surprisingly large animals which can cause serious damage. While their merits or otherwise can be the subject of discussion in Australia, roo bars have no place on British streets where encounters with marsupials are highly unlikely. My campaign was stimulated by an incident involving the death of a five year old killed in a collision with a car fitted with bull bars. This story attracted considerable correspondence from parents whose children had been hurt or

killed in similar incidents. We ran articles every week and it was not long before the issue was picked up by a group of MPs who pressed for legislation to ban the bars. The MPs encountered opposition led by a newly formed pressure group, the Association of Bull Bar Manufacturers, but the manufacturers were clearly on a

sticky wicket. They could not really argue against the reality of dead and maimed children. Legislation was soon passed to ban bull bars. Obviously I cannot claim sole responsibility for this success but there is no doubt that, without our campaign, bull bars might well have been fitted more widely. This tale illustrates why it is

worth fighting for the right cause and in the right way. The battles over Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, for example, can also be presented as ways of saving child injuries and deaths, as recent statistics demonstrate persuasively. Similarly, the 20 mph limit in residential areas across Wales has saved lives. In the Netherlands, the whole focus on creating safe cycling routes was

triggered by a campaign by parents whose children had been killed on their bikes. We should not be scared to use populist tactics as they are often used against us.

I cannot resist one (sort of) railway example. The roads minister, Lilian Greenwood, who has been far more pro-roads than one might have expected from her previous life, has sanctioned the spending of £7 million to fill in the 2.3 kilometre long disused Queensbury Tunnel in West Yorkshire. Campaigners are busy collecting signatures for a parliamentary debate to try to save the tunnel. They argue, quite rightly, that the tunnel could be a way of attracting walkers and cyclists to the area, and would bring benefits three times the cost of the repair works which, in any case, would not be very much more expensive than filling it in.

It just needs imagination and a "can do" attitude. Indeed, I have just cycled along the Lon Las Cymru, the cycle route through Wales which has become a boon for tourism. This path generated several hundred pounds for local pubs and hotels that otherwise would have been spent elsewhere or stayed in my piggy bank. Queensbury Tunnel, as with all these examples, is worth campaigning for.



Christian Wolmar

Light rail on a winning streak

By Ian Brown

It is easy to compare heavy rail with light rail as we sometimes do with beer.

There is lager, of course, together with the undisputed joy of a glass of real ale, promoted effectively over the years by members of CAMRA.

"A pint of heavy please," is the normal way to order ale in Scotland.

However, not everybody wants real ale on every occasion in all circumstances, evidenced by the huge and growing popularity of other drinks.

In some quarters Railfuture is seen in similar terms. Members know main line rail (heavy) makes sense and we want to promote it. But we should also be awake to the advantages of all rail modes (including light).

In the real world of business cases, we have to be astute in testing what transport alternative is best for a particular situation.

This usually depends on the volume of passengers anticipated. Light rail generally comes out well where passenger demand is in the range of 2,000 passengers per hour up to about 12,000 or even higher as newer, larger vehicles are introduced.

Main line rail can achieve much higher volumes than that, although there are fewer transport corridors where this is necessary.

This suggests that light rail can provide complementary rail options.

The light rail option in areas of still significant demand has seen many new light systems built recently right across the world.

Just look at the map on page 4 showing the massive growth of metro, light rail and tram systems in Europe. Most of these are new, upgraded or extended systems.

Is there another reason for Railfuture's support for light rail development in Britain?

Integrated transport

Main line rail does not really work in isolation. Its competitor, the car can go almost anywhere. People need to gain access to the railway and where this has to be the car, we have a problem.

People may want to stay in their car as long and as far as they can.

Adding to this problem, we have in Britain a system where rail operators want to maximise their revenue at a stroke by pricing station parking as high as possible.

If we really want to maximise the use of rail and achieve Railfuture's campaigning objective of a bigger, better railway, we must campaign for integrated transport with light



ROTHERHAM: Sheffield's supertrams run on to the main line as tram-trains



NEW YORK AROUND 1910: The elevated steam service and the trams on Canal Street in the city's Bowery district were replaced by an underground high capacity rail system – the Subway

rail comprising a significant component. One of its big advantages is that it provides access in many of our cities and towns, via lower density transport corridors, to the main line rail networks.

Light rail has had a slow rebirth in Britain

In the United Kingdom, all tram systems (apart from the Blackpool Coastal Tramway) had been closed down by the 1960s.

In some cases, such as in Sheffield, modern trams were replaced by anything-but-modern buses, so making more room for the car.

In 1951, Sheffield could boast a 48 mile system but in 1960 the city's trams were axed. Only three survived as museum pieces at the National Tramway Museum in Crich. It was 34 years before the modern

Supertram made its comeback in the city.

The last tram in London ran in 1952, but the last tram to run in Britain was in Glasgow in 1962.

Manchester's tram system carried 328 million passengers in 1925 on a 292-mile network!

Manchester, with Britain's first and largest modern on-street light rail system, currently carries 42 million people on a 64-mile system.

Government leadership of light rail in Britain has been non-existent. From 2010 to 2013, transport minister Norman Baker injected new enthusiasm for trams when he was under-secretary for regional and local transport. Despite the uninspiring Department for Transport team, we now have modern light rail systems in six

major British conurbations: Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, the West Midlands, Edinburgh and Croydon, plus a refurbished system on the Fylde Coast. These came about as a result of far-sighted leadership in the city regions, in direct contrast to the indifferent DfT. The modern systems have interchanges with the national rail network but all have a long way to go before they can truly be referred to as integrated city rail systems. They all had a protracted and difficult birth, but all have been successful, and all except Croydon have seen progressive extensions. **2025, a gear change, new prospects for light rail**

I felt it was good for Railfuture's profile when I was invited to chair

Turn to page 4

Trams fit neatly into a rail future

From page 3

the 2025 Annual Light Rail Conference, which this year attracted 350 paid delegates.

It was held in the UK's light rail desert of Leeds in July, at the excellent Leeds University conference facility.

In the past, these conferences have explored the case for light rail and promoted best practice, all good but set against the background of a lack of investment in the UK.

This is in direct contrast with just about everywhere else in the world.

At last year's conference, Mayor Tracy Brabin electrified the audience with her farsighted plans for light rail in West Yorkshire, sometimes referred to as the "land of endless transport studies".

We invited her back this year to make the keynote speech to describe what is actually being achieved by her West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

She returned armed with a £2.1 billion boost for local transport funding in West Yorkshire as announced in the government's June spending review.

This investment will lead to two new light rail lines. The Leeds line will connect key employers such as the university and hospitals.

There will also be an urban line connecting the two great cities of Bradford and Leeds.

Both of the light rail lines will be fully integrated into West Yorkshire's rail and bus networks.

The 2025 government spending review

Yes, the government has finally got the message that light rail is a key component in providing an integrated transport plan for our cities.

The policy will solve transport problems but is also designed to address economic, social inclusion and environmental issues and to create new opportunities.

In her 2025 spending review, chancellor Rachel Reeves announced major investments in the city regions.

The tone changed from "we have no money" to finding an answer to the question: What are the most cost-effective ways to address these issues? The answer was light rail. Let us hope this enlightened attitude lasts.

The spending review announcement was £15.6 billion



Current metro (blue), light rail (purple) and tram systems (red) in Europe

Map: Urban Transport Group



West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin, left, and Ian Brown, right, at the 2025 Annual Light Rail Conference
Picture: Conference organisers

for multi-year funding to upgrade local transport networks. That is an amazing doubling of the previous rate of spending. Light rail scores with an impressive list of committed light rail schemes including:

- Two new light rail lines in Bradford and Leeds.
- Extension of the Midland Metro to a new sports centre.
- Extensions of Manchester's Metrolink including into Stockport.
- Renewing the South Yorkshire Supertram network.
- Tyne and Wear extension to Washington.
- Planning for a new mass transit system for Derby to Nottingham. This was billed by government in their press statement as "the

biggest ever investment in local transport". It is a good start by transport secretary Heidi Alexander in restoring the government's flagging credibility on light rail.

How did this suddenly happen?

Are there any reasons why light rail is such a key component of government investment plans? Can campaigning make a difference?

The key ingredient is that light rail must be the credible option in delivering against stated objectives (to address economic, social inclusion and environmental issues) probably with stress on the economic objective.

The second question is whether the industry is capable of delivering new schemes at anywhere near approved prices and timescales. Do not forget the financial problems of

HS2 lurking in the background. But the government has been reassured and now knows that light rail schemes are much less risky than mega schemes such as HS2. They are also very low risk in terms of whether passengers will use such systems.

The evidence bank is that passengers love light rail and will use it in droves, world wide. The big change is campaigning. Devolution and elected mayors driving the case for investment in transit schemes are now the key factors, as we saw in London with Crossrail.

In Manchester, Andy Burnham has taken a very effective high-profile role as mayor, improving public transport by leaps and bounds.

Now, in West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin is intent on delivering real improvements on public transport for Leeds, Bradford and the rest of West Yorkshire.

Our role at Railfuture in campaigning for light rail as part of integrated transport solutions is to provide the evidence for local authorities to make informed proposals.

Railfuture, with its branch structure and supporters who know rail's potential right across the country, is very well placed indeed to play an enhanced role in creating bigger, better integrated rail transport systems, not only in urban areas but right across England, Scotland and Wales.

Let us grasp this opportunity through Railfuture's branches.

■ Ian Brown CBE FCIL is Railfuture Policy Director

Reserve your place for a battle over rail fares

Fears of a big rail fare rise next year were prompted by a retail price index figure of 5.8% in July.

Not only is the figure higher than expected but the government habitually increases rail fares by an additional percentage point.

The insulting practice is exacerbated by Labour following Tory policy by freezing fuel duty for motorists.

Railfuture's media spokesperson Bruce Williamson won coverage in much of the media by challenging the government in August.

He said: "The government dare not add another 1% on top of the inflation figure. When you have got increasing food prices it is making life harder for your average person who is trying to get to work."

Pointing out that fuel excise duty – the tax paid on fuel at the pump – has been frozen for 15 years by successive chancellors, Bruce said: "It is about time rail travellers got a break rather than motorists being sweetened up every time."

Railfuture survey

One of the many worries of the rail industry is that cutting fares attracts so much new custom that it cannot provide enough capacity on trains writes Neil Middleton. The industry



- 33% Leasing and maintaining trains
- 25% Staff
- 17% Infrastructure maintenance costs
- 10% Day to day business costs and admin
- 8% Payments to government
- 5% Fuel and energy
- 2% Train operator profit

This graph by Statista shows how rail fare revenue was divided up in the privatised railway. The government is nationalising part of the railway, which it says will give passengers a better deal. It remains to be seen how passengers feel about that when fares go up in January. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn promised to cut rail fares by a third in his bid to become prime minister in 2019

uses seat reservations to manage capacity. Steve White, managing director of South Eastern Railway, is responsible for running Javelin trains on HS1 to Kent.

He said: "We might reach the point where reservations on high speed would actually be net beneficial to protect our customers."

"We need to find ways to inject more capacity or control the level of crowding we see on particular services."

We all have different tolerances to having to stand on trains. For me, it is a case of "Can I stand in comfort?"

perhaps by leaning against a partition, when I can then use my phone or tablet. By contrast, if I am strap hanging I can do very little.

Few people are prepared to stand for long periods.

Personally, I will take the first train from London Bridge to my home (around 40 minutes) if I can see a seat or think I will be able to stand comfortably. Otherwise I might well wait for the next train. Having to stand all the way from London to the Kent coast would put me off travelling altogether.

South Eastern is one of a number of

operators that does not use seat reservations at all.

Some operators have a poor system for using reservation data to constrain selling of Advance and other quota-controlled tickets.

On many trips, I walk past lots of empty seats marked "reserved", sometimes quoting a start point of a station earlier in the journey.

I feel fairly safe in sitting in one of these "reserved" seats and I suspect I am not alone in doing so.

Yet we are seeing distinct moves to sell more quota-controlled tickets, most controversially with LNER's Simpler Fares offering.

We need more information than my impressions to argue for change. So, Railfuture members, please complete our travel survey whenever you travel on a train that offers seat reservations.

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

These data will enable us to be more effective in lobbying operators and other stakeholders.

Take LNER's Simpler Fares. When we look into prices for a specific journey, the suggestion is that the train is full for at least part of its journey. Is that actually true on the day? The survey will help tell us.

East Midlands

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Belper report

A report has been produced by Friends of the Derwent Valley line with help from Railfuture to argue the case for more frequent stops at Belper on the Midland main line, prioritising northbound stops by East Midlands Railway services to Chesterfield and Sheffield. The report presents evidence of significantly suppressed demand, for example, in comparison with Alfreton and Dronfield footfall. This is due to Belper-Sheffield and Belper-Chesterfield journeys requiring passengers to double back via Derby at most times of day, taking more than twice as long for the journey as on a direct train, and there is no direct bus service. Direct rail services would attract many travellers who currently rely on congested roads in the area. Estimates of likely extra annual revenue for EMR exceed £500,000 for those two journey destinations alone. EMR has not ruled out further investigation of these proposals, part of the next agenda between the Friends and EMR. Meanwhile, Belper Town Council has been strongly supportive, asking the Friends to develop an



Anthony Kay

autumn survey to assess demand within the town, which they have offered to publicise and host via their website.

Meeting with MP

In June, Railfuture's Ian Clark and Steve Jones met Catherine Atkinson, MP for Derby North, who is a member of the House of Commons transport select committee. A wide-ranging discussion included the following topics: the formation and future objectives of Great British Railways; Network Rail delay attribution; the need for a steady flow of rail investment, rather than boom and bust, which in particular affects Derby's Alstom works; EMR rolling stock issues, including the further delays to the introduction of bimode Aurora trains until 2026, while EMR are due to lose some of their Meridian units later this year; and Belper main line services.

AGM speakers

The guest speakers at the AGM of Railfuture East Midlands in June were Adrian Hugill (engineering director) and David Jones (stakeholder manager) from CrossCountry Trains. Adrian's presentation covered XC's programme of refurbishment of its fleet of class 170 Turbostar and class 220 and 221 Voyager trains. As well as providing new seats, tables, carpets, lighting and other

passenger facilities, the refurbishment will reduce the mass of the vehicles by 350kg, so cutting fuel usage and emissions. David's presentation was on recent and planned timetable changes. In our region, these include more calls at Chesterfield with improved bus links from there into the Peak District and improved stopping patterns at smaller stations.

Nottingham footbridge

The latest development in the saga of the footbridge across the middle of Nottingham station is that access to platforms from the footbridge has been closed between 1900 and 0600 since 18 August. The aim is to prevent fare evasion, and East Midlands Railway also notes that 62% of antisocial behaviour instances occur during these hours. However, passengers can face a very long walk if changing trains between platforms when access to the middle footbridge is closed. Railfuture continues to propose a new footbridge towards the east end of the station as a long-term solution to the problem.

Midland main line electrification

Railfuture members have been busy lobbying MPs and local politicians about the government's decision to pause electrification of the Midland main line. Catherine Atkinson has been forthright in the transport committee about how damaging

this decision is. The only response from rail minister Lord Hendy was that there is no money. James Naish, MP for Rushcliffe, has met ministers and has contacted the Treasury about other possible funding models. Toby Perkins, MP for Chesterfield, has said he is pursuing the matter with Lord Hendy, and that the East Midlands should not be at the back of the queue for rail investment. Claire Ward, mayor of the East Midlands combined county authority, has expressed disappointment about the pausing, but has yet to take any further action on the issue. Rail Forum and the Railway Industry Association have also written jointly to Lord Hendy to make the case for a continuous pipeline of rail electrification work.

Joint Railfuture meeting

A joint meeting of Railfuture's East Midlands, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire branches will be held at Nottingham Central Library on Saturday 4 October, 1200-1600. The meeting is open to all members and prospective members, and will focus on how Railfuture can work with devolved authorities and organisations such as Midlands Connect and Transport for the East Midlands.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch
X @RailfutureEMids

We can't keep up with demand on the

By Ray King

"We cannot keep up with the demand on the Newcastle-Ashington line," Keith Anderson, head of trains and stations, Northumberland Line, told Railfuture's AGM in Newcastle in July.

"People who use this line absolutely love it. It has the highest satisfaction level in Northern's area. It has been more successful than was ever envisaged. If we can do this here, we can do it anywhere."

There are about 16,000 journeys a week and the Ashington ticket vending machine ran out of tickets three times a day on some days.

Punctuality has been excellent but providing enough capacity on the trains has been a challenge.

The two-car Sunday trains have been doubled to four cars and 10 drivers are assigned to the line, which has created 40 jobs.

The success of the line is a great tribute to campaigners such as Dennis Fancett, chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, but also shows how important it is that Railfuture's campaign for a bigger, better railway must continue nationally.

"Members are more important than money to achieve a successful reopening," said Dennis. The Department for Transport constantly asked: "How many people back you?"

He admitted SENRUG had "not really cracked using social media" but stakeholders had to be found. He warned that Network Rail is



Picture: Northern

Railfuture AGM Newcastle 2025

unlikely to be much help. In future, regional mayors with authority to take action on transport may be crucial but the current regional mayor "has not found time to talk to us".

However, use of the Northumberland Line is five times greater than the forecasts.

Dennis said SENRUG was now campaigning for a better service on the line from Newcastle to Berwick-upon-Tweed, which is technically feasible, but it is difficult to find the right process to engage with Network Rail and train operators.

He was also critical of bus companies, including Arriva North East, "who do not seem to believe in serving rail stations".

At one time, people were walking

UP AND UP: A major milestone was marked in early August as half a million journeys were made on the 16-mile Northumberland Line since it reopened in December with Northern services every half hour.

"Transforming an old freight line into a railway which can be used by thousands of passengers on a daily basis has not been easy," said Northern's Paul Henry, "but it has made a huge difference to people in Northumberland."

Work on Blyth Bebside station is almost complete, while stations at Northumberland Park and Bedlington are expected to open in 2026.

Glen Sanderson, leader of Northumberland County Council, said: "This is a fantastic achievement. These amazing figures reflect how important the line is for many people for so many reasons."

The project involved the Department for Transport, Network Rail, Northumberland County Council and Northern.

The picture shows (from left): Glen Sanderson, Dennis Fancett, Jean Wright and Melanie Mann of NL Story, County Councillor Caroline Ball, Calvin Clark and James Derrick of NL Story, Ashington and Blyth MP Ian Lavery and Northern's north east regional director Jason Wade.

Lottery winners

May: M Savage, J Ward, S Hyland, G Smith (2), I Appleyard

June: M Hanson, R Grainger, E James, S Hyland, G Smith, W Morrison

July: R White, D Peters, D Fleming, D Brady, M Groll, P Fox

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/

Campaign for local train service on scenic North Sea coast route

Rail campaigners are hoping to build on the success of the Northumberland Line by calling for a local rail service along the scenic North Sea coast. Northumberland County Council is expected to commission a re-visit of the earlier feasibility study into a Newcastle to Berwick-upon-Tweed service. "If at some future point

an Edinburgh-Berwick local service is established, they could be merged," said Dennis Fancett of SENRUG. "Once the two services are operating, they could be merged, because it would save turning trains round at Berwick." The stations at Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill have just one morning and one evening train

per day, and no local trains run between Chathill and Dunbar. New local stations are desperately needed at places such as Belford, and possibly Beal at the start of the Holy Island causeway. Travelling by train on this route alongside the North Sea provides glorious views and serves several long-distance walking routes.



Graphic: SENRUG/RAGES

Northumberland Line. People love it

Ashington on the Northumberland Line. Many other places throughout England, Scotland and Wales are calling out for their own rail links to be improved. Railfuture still has lots of work to do.

High fares and the lack of a rolling programme of electrification are probably the most significant issues. Board member Roger Blake reported that Railfuture's fighting fund is waiting for applications from groups with good ideas.

Railfuture Yorkshire's Nina Smith suggested that people could be paid to do some of Railfuture's "donkey work" and finance director Jerry Alderson said that, although employing people carried many risks, he was open to paying for specific jobs to be done – on a contract basis.

All vacancies on the Railfuture board have been amicably filled so there was no need for an election in 2025. The current line-up of the board is: Chris Page (chair), Ian Brown, Jerry Alderson, Pete Myers,

Owen O'Neill, Roger Blake, Allison Cosgrove, Neil Middleton (vice chair) and Mike Southgate.

Railfuture president Christian Wolmar told the AGM that campaigners should be proud of the hard work they are doing to promote rail and could feel rewarded by the fact that the Northumberland Line is a great success. He said the old-fashioned economic idea that infrastructure has to pay for itself immediately was being replaced by an acknowledgement of the economic and social benefits of rail in providing a green way to travel to work and education.

"Transport is the glue that brings society together," he said. "It is fundamental to everything we do."

Have we struck a chord?

Join us online at www.railfuture.org.uk



Benefits of Railfuture membership include our quarterly magazine Railwatch, branch newsletters and Railfuture events. The more members we have, the louder and stronger our voice is heard.



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Railfuture's draft new leaflet. Please help your branch to distribute it

He cited China as an example, with the almost unbelievable strides it has taken to improve its railway and build 30,000 miles of high speed rail in less than 20 years, recognising that some parts of the network will never be profitable but are still essential. Both the UK and USA are failures when it comes to high speed rail, he said. "Even though I was always against building HS2," he said. "I now believe we have to finish it, even though it risks sucking investment away from worthy projects such as light rail." The creation of

Great British Railways is surrounded in mystery, and the loss of former transport secretary Louise Haigh is a great blow. He said: "She knew exactly what was needed. Now, lots of questions remain unanswered but we must hope that it will start

to provide a much more rational approach to the railway."

AGM guest speaker Steven Watkins of the transport and health group said rail's environmental advantages over road and air were so enormous that rail should be promoted.

Existing motorways should be converted into a high speed railway network with vehicle-carrying trains. Reopening Carmarthen-Aberystwyth should be seen as an extension of the M4 motorway.

Rail could and should replace air travel. Train and cycle should be recognised as a transport mode and cycle vans should be provided on all trains. Rail must make itself more accessible because 15% of the population are now disabled.

Speaker Simon Walton, of the Borders Rail Campaign and editor of Railfreight.com, called for Network Rail not to stand aloof from the planning process but to be more positive and proactive in promoting modal shift from road to rail.

BOOK REVIEWS BY RICHARD LYSONS

Rails Around Manchester

by Mike Rhodes ISBN 9781398121034 Amberley £15.99

I make no excuse for reviewing yet another book about Manchester's railways. I am involved in both community rail and rail user groups in the north west. Manchester – as the author rightly says – has the "largest provincial railway network outside of London" yet still has far too many factors discouraging rail travel. My local station has two trains per hour for six days a week, while on Sundays we are limited to one train every two hours. Perhaps I should alter the title of The Boomtown Rats' song to *I Don't Like Sundays*.

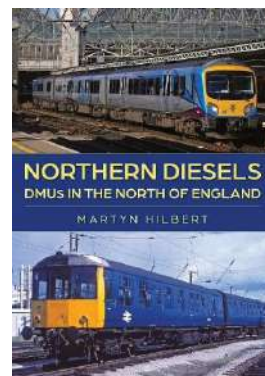
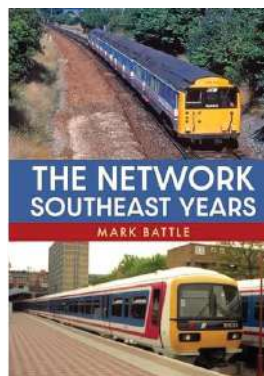
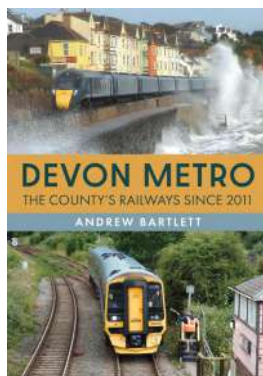
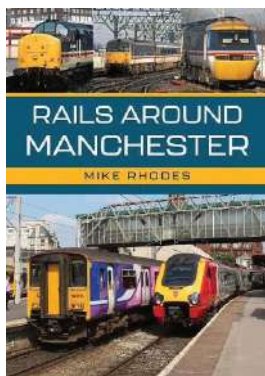
Despite several initiatives in recent years – such as the Airport Extension and the Ordsall Chord – the Manchester area lacks the cohesion of London or Merseyside's network. The Bee Network may help, but we really need full electrification and more reliable and regular services.

There seems to be a problem in north-west England with "Central" stations e.g. Blackpool and Manchester – their former importance was implicit in their names. Rhodes' book is a useful guide to what we have lost and what we still need.

Devon Metro – The County's Railways Since 2011

by Andrew Bartlett ISBN 9781398123595. Amberley £15.99

Apart from a couple of journeys over the years, Devon's railways are virtually unknown to me. I must



confess that I had little previous knowledge of the branch lines centred on Exeter. Andrew Bartlett's book about Devon County Council's plans for a rapid-transit style network – as given away in the book's title – is fascinating.

It is heartening to read about the opening of new stations and improved services and facilities. Devon may not have the population of Greater Manchester but its residents deserve and need a reliable and coherent rail network. The final part of the book has the pessimistic title of *The Future Put On Hold*, where the author clearly expresses the frustration of the county's MPs and residents at the lack of progress on a Devon Metro network.

The Network Southeast Years

by Mark Battle ISBN 9781398104525 Amberley £15.99

Mark Battle's book, *The Network SouthEast Years*, is an entertaining and nostalgic look at the eight-year life of this organisation. The book

includes some fascinating images of the NSE brand for train exteriors and interiors, stations, maps and marketing literature. I particularly like the latter images, reminding us of the powerful impact of attractive printed leaflets, posters and timetables. There are lessons to be learned from this well-researched book, both for current transport planners, and also rail campaigners. Recommended.

Northern Diesels

DMUs In The North Of England by Martyn Hilbert ISBN 978-1398124431 Amberley £15.99

I enjoy Martin Hilbert's books as his outstanding photographs are always accompanied by informative and pithy captions. Hilbert's latest book's title is self-explanatory. For many of us in the north of England, our main experience of local and regional rail travel is on diesel multiple units. Most *Railwatch* readers will be able to quickly name the umpteen routes that still rely on diesel trains. Hilbert chronicles the period from the late 1970s to the

present day and provides an invaluable history of those times. We still have a long way to go.

A handsome quartet of new titles from Amberley

If other publishers of rail books would like their new titles to be reviewed in *Railwatch*, please contact the editor in the first instance. I know that they are out there and I have (politely) asked some of them, but have not heard anything back (yet). Thanks as always to Philip Dean, publicity officer at Amberley.

Also received: **Crews: The BR Blue Years** by Michael Hitchen ISBN 978-1398121478

Euston To Birmingham - 1837 To Rail Blue by Robert Hendry ISBN 9781398123953

Class 43 Locomotives In Scotland – The High Speed Trains by Colin J Howat ISBN 9781398124592 All £15.99 each and published by Amberley.

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

Rail-bus links vital

I read with considerable interest the reply by David Dixon regarding rail services on the Morecambe branch line (*Railwatch*184).

Most certainly, better coordination and integration between rail and often parallel but slower bus services can be a great help to public transport users. As Northern Station Adopters at the intermediate station of Bare Lane, we display a copy of the bus timetable for Stagecoach service 100 (Lancaster-Morecambe-Heysham) which serves our station, to assist local passengers.

For the foreseeable future, because of train crew rest day working issues, the Sunday service on the branch is a mixture of four train services each way from and to Leeds, supplemented by eight buses from and to Lancaster (at three minutes past the hour) and eight buses from and to Morecambe (at 38 minutes past the hour).

The buses run direct to the rail stations and it would be interesting to know how many people are using them and what they think of running direct between stations. The normal buses only run to the bus stations and necessitate a walk. If, however, the buses did normally run between the rail stations, it could take up to 30 minutes from Bare Lane to Lancaster at busy times, coping with the traffic on the circuitous road system, as opposed to six minutes on the train.

It is important to point out that many passengers using the rail line are connecting both in and out of main line services at Lancaster. In order to do this effectively, they would need to allow more time if using a connecting bus in order to ensure a reliable connection. Although it does not always work smoothly, using the train is a generally quicker and more guaranteed way of making those important connections.

While acknowledging the pathing issues on the West Coast main line, it is not this that is causing cancellations on the existing branch shuttle timetable. It is simply the lack of available Northern crews (both drivers and conductors) and the diagramming for such crews. For example, the 1418 Leeds-Morecambe service changes crews at both Skipton and Lancaster and the journey on to Morecambe depends on another driver making his way up from Preston on an Avanti service which is coming from Euston. It is no wonder that this can regularly cause cancellation of the Morecambe leg of the journey, both out and return. Each single cancellation is in effect two cancellations! However, there are now growing pressures coming



Picture: Alstom

TRAIN CENTRAL: Derby's Litchurch Lane depot with some of The Greatest Gathering exhibits

Building on a proud rail past

By Neil Middleton

This was the scene of an ambitious event marking the 200th anniversary of the world's first passenger train service on the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

The Greatest Gathering was hosted by train maker Alstom for three days in early August and was billed as "the world's largest-ever collection of historic and modern rolling stock".

More than 140 locomotives and railway vehicles from different eras were displayed.

The Gathering was part of Railway 200, a nationwide year-long celebration, and it is the first time Alstom's Litchurch Lane Works – the only facility in the UK that designs, engineers, builds and tests trains on a single site – has opened its doors to the public in nearly 50 years.

More than 40,000 train fans attended the event – and I was one of them.

I started by being frustrated at the booking stage by the ticketing application crashing because of high demand. Looking back, perhaps I should have been really pleased that so many people wanted to celebrate the railway's success.

Ticket acquired, I was impressed to see so many families and children – not just enthusiasts and rail professionals. That will be my abiding memory – all

types and ages enjoying the railway. Seeing the displays and engines was great. In my school days, I was regularly on trains hauled by class 52 Westerns and seeing one again was great for a bit of nostalgia.

There were also more modern exhibits, including the class 93 and 99 from Stadler. One great modernisation saw diesel and electric replace steam, but the Greatest Gathering reminded me that modernisation is continuous, with enormous leaps in technology regularly occurring. Comparing a class 99 with a class 14 (an early days diesel) shows they are totally different. The class 14 probably has more in common with a steam engine than with latest generation of motive power. Their automation and computer controls are alien to previous generations.

We must all pay tribute to Alstom – the key element in The Greatest Gathering. Its UK MD Rob Whyte commented: "The Greatest Gathering showcased the power of collaboration across the industry, celebrated innovation and heritage, and – perhaps most importantly – inspired the next generation to pursue a career in rail. Inspiration like that is truly priceless if we are to change the image of rail and the rewarding careers on offer."

You can watch Alstom's three-minute summary of The Greatest Gathering at

<https://www.youtube.com/@alstom>

from the pending Eden Morecambe Project for a much improved service on the Morecambe branch line to cope with expected visitor numbers, initially using battery powered trains running all the way to Heysham, until such time as the short branch is electrified to the main line and thus better connected to the wider electric rail network across the North West.

As part of continued improvements to the West Coast main line, a third line (or even a loop) has been suggested running parallel to the existing main line, to allow Morecambe branch trains to run largely unhindered for most of the way to and from Lancaster. These improvements would allow more through, interval services on the branch line, using Morecambe as a

railhead terminus and possibly running through to Liverpool or even Crewe. Passenger use would undoubtedly increase as a result. Because of the nuclear power stations, the Morecambe branch line is required to be open and available 24/7 along its full length. Given this, it is unlikely to remain viable if confined to five or six daily trains from and to Leeds and

Heysham Harbour, as David suggests.

It is surely far better to link it more effectively with the wider North West rail network and integrate the local Stagecoach bus services (which are very good) to connect with the trains (at Lancaster, Bare Lane, Morecambe and Heysham), and provide people with a convenient and frequent means of getting to their own local residential, employment and leisure areas within the Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham catchment. I wonder if anyone is looking at a wider, strategic public transport plan for the area? The future for the Morecambe branch ought to be a very positive and bright one.

David Alexander
Northern Station Adopters
at Bare Lane.

Black hole in North

I found a black hole of my own when I took a look at the government's transport plans for the North of England. I am a firm believer in public transport and it is great to see investment in light rail in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, and heavy rail in Tyne and Wear and the potential new line between Liverpool and Manchester, but one part of the north has been massively left behind: South Yorkshire.

We need our Supertram extending, both to areas within Sheffield such as Meadowhead, the Northern General Hospital and Ranmoor, but also as tram-trains to Penistone, Doncaster, Stocksbridge and Chesterfield.

We also need to start electrifying and further upgrading key cross-country links such as the South TransPennine route (via the Hope Valley line and the South Humberline main line), so we can have faster, more frequent and cleaner services.

Instead, we have been given a measly sum of £1.5 billion, with only £500 million to renew our tram network and the rest to save our buses. South Yorkshire has once again been short-changed by the government, while vital rail hubs such as Doncaster and Sheffield continue to soldier on without much-needed investment.

From our universities and hospitals to advanced manufacturing and steel, the Northern Powerhouse cannot succeed without Sheffield, and it is time both the government

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



Picture: Northern

Family friendly

A newly qualified conductor was pleasantly surprised when she realised the first driver she would be working with was her dad.

Ella Phillips, 18, and her father Daniel, 50, took charge of the 0604 Northern service from Skipton to Bradford Forster Square on her first working day in June.

Ella, who lives in Baildon, completed three months of training with Northern and showed her dad the schedule for her first shift.

"I could not believe it," she said. "It was a bit nerve wracking thinking that if I mess up my dad will be watching. But I also knew that if anything went wrong and I needed help, he would be there. He is a really good person to work with."

Supervisor Donna Phillips said: "She is quite young to have a big responsibility like this, but she has obviously taken all her training on board and knew exactly what she was doing."

and the rest of the North remember that. We got left behind when electrification of the Midland main line was cancelled, we got left behind with High Speed Two, we got left behind when the *Restoring Your Railways* programme was axed, and we are being left behind now.

Thomas Atkin-Withers, Dalewood Road, Sheffield S8 0EE
Thomas26011@protonmail.com

Trackbed query

I was pleased to read in *Railwatch* 183 that Portishead is likely to have passenger trains again after more than 60 years without.

The cover of *Railwatch* 183 showed the Portishead Railway Group committee on the old trackbed.

I was intrigued that the rails had been removed but the sleepers and chairs were still in place. Does any *Railwatch* reader know why?

Paul Aitken, Crossmyloof Gardens, Glasgow G41 4AX

Editor's note: Peter Maliphant of Portishead Railway Group explained some of the background. "Avon Valley Railway were allowed to take the rails in 2024 because they were not suitable for modern trains that will operate on the reopened Portishead line.

The sleepers are all 70-plus years old and are in very poor condition and rotting away. They are of no use other than as wood chip fuel perhaps," said Peter. He presumes that AVR did not need the chairs.

Avon Valley Railway is based at

Bitton station and has relaid three miles of track between Oldland Common and a new platform at Avon Riverside. It shares its route with the Sustrans Bristol and Bath Railway path and cycleway.

Mixed seating

I was interested to read the plea from Michael Willmot for more social seating in railway carriages (*Railwatch* 184).

I have mixed feelings about this, having done most of my travelling on trains that had coaches whose seating was largely table-based.

As a solitary passenger, it was great to be able to have somewhere to rest my newspaper when the service was not very busy. Yet on crowded trains it was certainly no fun to be stuck at a table seat with a group of rowdy individuals.

Given such circumstances, I hope there remains a good proportion of airline seats, aligned of course to windows.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Caught short

Michael Willmot's article in *Railwatch* 184 rang a bell with me as I am old enough to remember when standard class IC125 coaches were designed for families with tables for four throughout – before they were converted to "cattle class". I also fondly remember hearing: "Mum/Dad I need a wee."

This caused me to investigate the ratio of toilets to carriages in modern rolling stock. Historically, in

Mk 1 and Mk 2 carriages, there were two toilets per coach and this also included the 44-seat Mk1 miniature buffet coaches – a ratio of 2 to 1.

IC125 carriages also had two toilets per coach in both standard and first class – again a ratio of 2 to 1.

So what about modern trains?

In my case, the following evolves around electric and diesel units on services radiating to the south-west of Waterloo plus the class 700 electric units and class 800 Great Western hybrids.

A three-car class 159 diesel has three toilets – a ratio of 1 to 1.

A four-car class 450 and 458/4 electric has two toilets per four carriages – a ratio of 1 to 2.

A 12-car class 700 electric has five toilets – a ratio of 5 to 12.

Unfortunately South Western Railway's flagship 10-car class 701 electrics have only two toilets – a ratio of 1 to 5. This is wholly inadequate.

Apart from the class 159s with their 1 to 1 ratio, the only modern rolling stock which exceeds the 1 to 1 ratio appears to be the class 800 which has a ratio of 10 to 9 – 10 toilets in a nine-car formation.

I am sure all train operators will claim the number of toilets is adequate. I disagree and the issue is worse because there are regular complaints about toilets being out of order – especially on the CrossCountry diesel trains.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
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tony.smale
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Recovering from disruption

For our chair Mike Southgate, information for passengers at times of service disruption has been a constant agenda item at regular meetings with rail managers. He reports that the situation does not seem to be getting any better, citing an example of a journey home via Waterloo in July when few trains were running. Many passengers would have got home sooner and in less crowded conditions had all staff been briefed about which trains were running. A robust contingency plan might see fewer travellers inconvenienced. Mike put these and many other points to South Western Railway's stakeholder manager, who later reported



Tony Smale

back on Mike's delayed train. The manager also reassured Mike that the operations team is now "more focussed than ever on the way services are managed during disruption". Various improvement actions are in the pipeline. We are only months into the new era of public ownership so perhaps it is a little early to expect big changes. With SWR at the bottom of the Transport Focus league table for customer satisfaction, improvements are overdue.



Mike Southgate

Summer collapse

At the start of the summer season on the Salisbury-Exeter route, the phenomenon of "soil moisture deficit" caused clay embankments to deform, requiring a 40 mph speed limit along a 12-mile section west of Yeovil. For a period, services beyond Yeovil were reduced from hourly to one every two hours and journeys from Waterloo to Exeter were taking over an hour longer.

The Railfuture-affiliated Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group was dismayed by the situation, not least because a similar trackbed failure occurred in 2022 near Gillingham (Dorset). The group said that service disruption this time was worse because of some short-formation trains of three-car length instead of six-car. Maintenance problems with the 30-year-old units was blamed. The cost of remedial work to embankments will have to be found from existing budgets, and the group fears this will have a negative impact on maintenance work elsewhere.

Open access bid for Waterside Line

The Railfuture campaign to restore passenger trains to the Waterside Line between Totton and Hythe took an unexpected turn earlier this year when Alliance Rail announced its open access bid to run services from the branch into Southampton and on to Waterloo. Initially, the service would start from Marchwood but the aspiration is to reopen a further station at Hythe.

Railfuture has been in contact with Alliance Rail, offering advice and support. Alliance expects a decision from the Office of Rail and Road later this year, but in the meantime it has conducted train gauging trials and is looking into depot facilities. A complete recast of the South Western Railway timetable is planned for December 2026, and Alliance is confident that paths can be found.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch
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Plaid positivity

Railfuture members had a constructive meeting with Plaid Cymru's transport spokesperson, Peredur Owen Griffiths, as part of our lobbying in the run-up to the Senedd elections in May next year. We discussed under-investment in Wales and questioned whether Transport for Wales was spending limited resources effectively. A bench for the planned St Clears station should not cost £4,200. We also pointed out that Welsh railways are not isolated from England. Issues such as congestion on Manchester's Castlefield Corridor affect passengers from North Wales. We agreed on several points, such as the poor deal Wales is getting from the reallocation of HS2 funding following its cancellation north of Birmingham. We also both want to see more freight moved by rail.

Plaid Cymru believes the existing rail service is poor. We suggested that changing TfW's "client" from the Welsh Government to passengers would help address this. The current flawed targets system also needs updating. Is it right that 20 or more passengers



Julian Langston

from a slightly late train miss their hourly connection in order for TfW to meet performance targets? Full devolution of Welsh infrastructure and control of all transport spending, alongside safeguarding potential future rail routes, are on Plaid Cymru's wish list.



Peredur Owen Griffiths

A meeting with the Welsh Conservatives has been arranged for the autumn.

Railfuture calls for bus-rail integration

Railfuture has responded positively to the Welsh Government's draft bus bill, which paves the way for overhauling the current fragmented franchising system. It is proposed that TfW would operate long-distance services, while local authorities would control local buses. We supported creating "a properly integrated public transport network by comprehensively reforming the buses along a London-style model". We also called for the bill to require integration of bus and rail timetables, and for long-distance bus routes into rail "deserts" to be operated as virtual trains, with through ticketing, delay repay, good service and passenger information.

Railfuture campaigning works for Cardiff

The UK chancellor's comprehensive spending review in June was mixed for Wales, with £445 million over 10 years being promised for rail infrastructure that is not devolved to Wales. The bulk of this is for five new stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction, to provide an enhanced local service between Cardiff and both Bristol Temple Meads and Cheltenham. Railfuture is

particularly pleased that Cardiff West junction is to be upgraded, as we wrote to senior politicians calling for this at the beginning of 2025 (*Railwatch* 183). Our lobbying does help. We also welcome investment in replacing level crossings, important if the North Wales main line is to get more frequent trains, and upgrading the connection to Padeswood sidings on the Wrexham-Bidston line (to fill gaps in the passenger service).

On the downside, less than £50 million per year is a pittance for Wales.

Railfuture Wales 'meet the public' initiative

Following Railfuture's stall at the Mumbles Railway Festival in March, we have made more use of our new equipment by taking our stall to two more events in May and July. Both were well attended, and we handed out leaflets as well as copies of *Railwatch* and *Rail Wales*. We talked to numerous people about Railfuture and what we do, as well as hearing about their local issues. We hope to gain new members from these "meet the public" events, and more people now know about Railfuture.

Merseyside problems with class 197 trains

Railfuture attended a presentation given by TfW to rail groups as part of the Merseyside Dee consortium. TfW outlined difficulties with new trains, including the late delivery of class 197 units from CAF and the technical problems with the class 230 units (converted from London Underground stock) for the Wrexham-Bidston line.

On the Heart of Wales line, active travel class 153 units (more space for bikes) are being introduced, although publicity will wait until they are "bedded in".

Rail users, including Railfuture, will be unhappy if TfW orders more class 197 trains, as the ride is poor and they are unreliable. We would prefer more Stadler units (similar to those already in use in South Wales) or more mark IV coaches.

Caerleon campaigners join Railfuture

This summer, Railfuture attended a meeting of Towards Restoring A Caerleon Station (TRACS). Caerleon is on the Marches line just north of Newport. We had the chance to tell the group about Railfuture, and we are delighted they decided to join us. We were impressed by their enthusiastic committee. They are a new group, but they have already carried out an online survey to gain an idea of how much use a station would get. The survey confirmed enthusiasm from local residents and can be used as a basis for detailed studies and a business plan. Outline plans were drawn up by Capita Symonds in 2010 for a station near St Cadoc's Hospital, 400 metres south of the original station. This was part of a Network Rail study, which showed that a future Cardiff/Newport-Abergavenny local service was possible. Research the following year estimated that the station could generate 92,400 annual trips.

As well as serving the town of 8,000 people, a reopened station would be close to a school with up to 500 pupils and the Roman fortress site of Isca Augusta. A partnership, including Newport City Council and Cadw (the Welsh equivalent of English Heritage), hopes to double the number of tourists visiting Caerleon from the current 60,000 per year, and rail could play a big part in carrying them and mitigating the severe congestion on local roads.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk

In tune for a bigger, better railway

By Roger Blake

One test of the effectiveness of Railfuture's influence is to see it reflected in official announcements.

So how did we do? Chancellor Rachel Reeves backed funding for the Transpennine Route Upgrade and East West Rail (a long-running Railfuture campaign led by Chris Wright and our affiliate Oxford-Bicester Rail Action Group).

Funding was also approved to regional mayors, who are expected to deliver rail and other public transport solutions. Railfuture campaigners need to align themselves with those mayors and their advisers, and lobby to embed local rail development in their mayoral ambitions.

Coming after the review was the new National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority's infrastructure pipeline. Railfuture has been among those calling for the enhancements pipeline to start flowing again.

We have to ensure that enhancements improve the existing railway, but also ensure a bigger railway, in line with Railfuture campaigns to help communities marginalised by not having a railway of their own.

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander's backing for five key rail upgrades is expected to connect another 50,000 people to the rail network.

The go-ahead for Portishead-Bristol reopening is music to the ears of Railfuture's Wendy Thorne and the Railfuture-affiliated Portishead Railway Group, which has campaigned through thick and much thinner for more than 20 years.

Concerning though was the number of schemes not mentioned at all, notably Ely and Haughley junctions in East Anglia, which are essential to achieve the government's own rail freight growth target.

The Treasury is also ready to accept that old-fashioned cost-benefit approaches must not stop projects which aid the general development of housing and transport schemes.

Look out next year for an updated Green Book, which will be a guide to what schemes the government wants to make progress on.

Over the past few months Railfuture has responded to:

- The Planning Inspectorate on Gatwick Airport's northern runway project
- The new Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority's draft local growth plan
- The Greater London Authority on its pathway towards a new London plan
- East Sussex County Council's draft rail and freight strategies
- The City of London and Network Rail's proposals about Liverpool Street station
- South Gloucestershire Council on changes to the new Charfield station
- Medway Council on its draft local plan for 2041
- Transport for London on its proposed extension of the DLR to Thamesmead via Beckton Riverside

Roger Blake is Railfuture's director for infrastructure and networks

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



Picture: Trainline

Fast forward with rock and rail

Rock star Sam Ryder signed a Great Western train at Paddington station in June to encourage people to travel to Glastonbury by rail.

Many of the 200,000 people who went to the Somerset festival paid attention to the "I came by train" campaign, which argued that taking the train is 67% less polluting than going by car.

Great Western Railway ran more than 55 trains from Paddington to Castle Cary over the three days of the festival. The special Train Ryder unveiled by Sam Ryder remained in service throughout the summer. The artist and singer

said: "I'm proud to be part of a campaign that celebrates travel that's better for the planet. Rebranding a train in my honour and riding it to Glastonbury with my guitar? That's a bit of me. Riding by rail is a natural part of my life already. Let's ride the rails this summer!"

Fellow artists Self Esteem, Annie Mac and Greentea Peng also used their platforms to promote greener travel to the festival.

A survey from Trainline, which backs the "I came by train" movement, showed that 58% of music fans are interested in switching to rail.

Tram-train campaign for Edinburgh

A new campaign has been launched to reopen Edinburgh's South Suburban rail line with tram-trains which could also run on the tram network.

Services on the rail line could link into the proposed north-south tram line from Granton to the Royal Infirmary.

Campaigners say tram-trains could bring the South Sub – which lost its passenger trains in the 1960s – back to life.

The initiative comes after a study by civil engineering postgraduates at Heriot-Watt University earlier this year proposed four tram-trains an hour in each direction and 11 stations, including five new ones, along the route.

Rob Falcon, chair of the new campaign group Tram Train Edinburgh, told the *Edinburgh Evening News* that linking the South Sub and the north-south tram line would allow people to make all sorts of journeys

between different parts of the city where there were currently no easy links.

"All of us want the north-south tram proposal to go ahead and we think the South Sub proposal is extremely complementary to that," he said.

"There would be a connection station at Cameron Toll. You would be able to make journeys from the west or east by the South Sub, change there and go to the hospital or equally you would be able to go from Princes Street or Newington down that north-south tram route, change there and go to Fort Kinnaird.

"So it provides a lot of interesting additional connections."

City transport convener Stephen Jenkinson told the *News* that the two schemes could complement each other. Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove welcomed the plan. She said: "It would greatly

ease congestion in Edinburgh to have this alternative route available."

The South Sub opened in 1884 and had seven stations along the route, but closed to passengers as part of the Beeching cuts. It is still used for freight and occasionally as a diversionary route.

Tram Train Edinburgh says Network Rail has confirmed that the line has the capacity for a frequent tram-train service.

In a briefing paper, the group says: "Campaigners have argued for the reopening of this useful public transport corridor for many years, but the adoption of tram-train technology now makes the proposal far more practical than previously.

"The proposal envisages tram-trains running from a new station at Portobello which would be sited beside the existing mainline railway."

Wait for it – Senedd’s resp

More than 13,000 people appealed to the Welsh government to reopen a strategic rail route in west Wales.

But the response of the government after a June Senedd debate in Cardiff was that reopening the line from Bangor to Carmarthen must remain a dream – because it would cost £2 billion.

Carolyn Thomas led the debate after 13,000 people signed a petition calling for the line to connect north and south Wales.

Ms Thomas paid tribute to Elfed Wyn ap Iwan who launched the petition and made an epic 10-day trek on foot from Bangor to Cardiff, following the old railway as closely as practicable.

Ms Thomas referred to a feasibility study – published in February – which found that a third of the 27-mile Bangor to Afon Wen route was deemed to require minimal intervention, but a quarter of the route would pose major challenges.

She said: “If we are looking to use a greener method of travel, reinstating and reopening this railway would be a step in the right direction and would be beneficial for all of the communities along the railway, as well as for Wales as a nation.

“While the feasibility report focuses on light rail and trams, campaigners would prefer heavy rail, which would allow for faster speeds. They believe passionately that the economic, social and cultural benefits of reopening the railway would make the cost worth paying.”

Ms Thomas told the Senedd the

campaigners would like to see a further study on the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen section of the line.

She added: “All of us here are aware that reconnecting and reopening a rail link between north and south would be an enormous undertaking.

“The feasibility report commissioned by the Welsh Government has made this clear, but it also points to a way that it might one day be possible.”

Janet Finch-Saunders, the Conservative Senedd member for Aberconwy, said reopening the Bangor to Caernarfon line would bring a huge benefit to people in Caernarfon and help tourists visiting the castle, a UNESCO world heritage site, to travel more easily to the town directly by train.

Plaid Cymru’s shadow transport secretary Peredur Owen Griffiths said travelling from the north to the south of Wales through England is not only inconvenient “but symptomatic of a transport system that has been neglected”. He called for powers over rail infrastructure to be devolved from Westminster to Wales.

However, Labour’s Lee Waters said reinstating rail is “very expensive”.

He added: “We all deeply regret the decision to get rid of these railway lines in the first place. It shouldn’t have happened. But now it has happened, the cost of restoring them is very significant.”

Of the £2 billion cost quoted, former transport minister Mr Waters said: “That is £2 billion we do not

have to spend on all the other transport priorities we have in Wales.”

He pointed to a light rail and coach alternative – costing an estimated £4.5 million to set up and £2 million a year to run. It would reduce the current north-south travel time by 90 minutes.

‘Give us our £4 billion’

Plaid Cymru’s Siân Gwenllian, who represents a vast area of north Wales, warned that “not a penny” of the £445 million announced in the UK spending review would come to west Wales. She said £4 billion was “owed” to Wales over HS2.

Responding to the debate, Transport Secretary Ken Skates said the Welsh Government is committed to improving transport links in all parts of Wales.

He said £1 billion was being invested in the valleys lines and south Wales metro, as well as £13 million for the Network North Wales project.

He added: “We are rolling out £800 million of new trains across the whole of Wales. That will deliver an 80% increase in the number of trains being used.”

Turning to the petition, he said the funding required to reopen former lines – as attractive a proposition as it may be – would be enormous.

He accused Plaid Cymru of misinformation on the £4 billion “owed” from HS2, arguing it would be more accurate to say Wales should have received £430 million by the end of this financial year.



ON HIS EPIC TREK: Elfed salutes Aberystwyth

People, not profit, says Carolyn

Carolyn Thomas, who led the Senedd debate on rail reopening, has been a Member of the Senedd representing North Wales since 2021.

Carolyn was a postal worker until 2020 and a member of the Communication Workers Union, while also representing Treuddyn on Flintshire County Council as an independent.

After joining Labour in 2015, she said: “I joined the Labour party to fight against austerity and the impact on public services. I have also highlighted the devastating impact of universal credit and social injustice.

“I have campaigned for public bus transport, investment in highways funding, the music service, investment in children’s play areas, early years funding and for the natural environment.” When she was deputy leader of Flintshire County Council, she



Carolyn in the driving cab of Tfw’s ‘Made in Wales’ class 197 train when it was showcased at Chester in 2022

delivered a petition to the Senedd, calling for buses to be run for people, not profit, and calling on the Welsh Government to regulate commercial bus companies and allow local authorities to run their own bus

Office of Carolyn Thomas MS

services. In the Senedd, she has continued this campaigning focus on public transport, highways, and community services. She was one of three Labour MSs to support introducing rent controls in Wales.

She is a supporter of public ownership and has called for energy companies and the Royal Mail to be returned to public ownership, saying that privatisation had wrecked Royal Mail because of an “unhinged profit-obsessed mantra”, weakened services and prioritised profit over people.

The mother of three has also been an outspoken critic of carbon capture and storage as a “false solution”. She has described an underground carbon capture pipeline being planned for North Wales as an “exhaust pipe” which will serve to entrench fossil fuel reliance.



Response to rail campaigners



Picture and map: Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn

stwyth with Cardigan Bay in the background. He said: I want to see communities which have lost touch with each other reconnected again by rail



Heroic Elfed walks the line

Father of two Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn walked more than 200 miles from Bangor to Cardiff as part of a campaign to reopen rail links between north and south Wales. Elfed was determined to show how poor public transport is in west Wales, with the only rail route from Bangor to Cardiff involving a massive detour via England. Elfed, 28, is a member of the Traws Link Cymru campaign group, which wants to see the rail network re-established in west Wales.

He is also the Plaid Cymru councillor for Bowydd and Rhiw, Blaenau Ffestiniog. The walk took him to Barmouth, Machynlleth, Aberystwyth, Lampeter, Carmarthen, Swansea, Bridgend and Cardiff Bay. Elfed said: "I really want to see the railways reopening because I want to see the communities that have lost touch with each other from the time of Beeching to be reconnected again. "Connections between communities have distanced since the railways were axed. Rural Welsh communities need to be reconnected, which would be a

positive development for the economy and the language as well. "It is ridiculous that we have to travel in the shape of a reversed C if we want to go from Bangor to Cardiff – from Bangor to England and down the Marches towards Cardiff. It's crazy."

Elfed, married to Anwen and father of three-year-old twins Iorwerth Prysor and Gwynant Edw, added: "I want them to be able to maybe catch the train in Penrhyndeudraeth to go to Cardiff rather than having to have a car. "I want to develop Wales into a confident and prosperous country to live, so that we connect Wales internally, rather than existing, as some cupboard under the stairs for Westminster as it is at the moment."

The petition was presented to the Welsh Parliament Petitions Committee on the day Elfed arrived in Cardiff at the end of his journey two years ago. He said: "Altogether I walked 206 miles. I had to catch the train from Llanelli to Bridgend because my feet were blistered through

and I had more or less gotten what I believed to be trench foot." When he arrived in Cardiff, he said: "I am just so happy to be here at last and to see how much interest people have in the campaign." After the Senedd debate, he said: "I'm not disappointed with the way the discussion went because I didn't expect any revolutionary change from the current path of the Welsh Government – but I believe we will succeed in the end. We need to just keep on chipping away and putting our ideas forward – keeping our eye on the promises made by parties for the 2026 Senedd elections. We also need to keep calling on the Westminster government to provide the proper amount (in the billions) that should come to us in Cymru – and for the devolution of rail infrastructure." Dwyfor Meirionnydd MS Mabon ap Gwynfor said: "Elfed's done us a great favour with this walk by raising awareness about the need to reopen the railway lines here in Wales."

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David Pennie

Ticket progress

Railfuture welcomes action by train operators to help passengers affected by cancelled trains. Northern Trains, TransPennine Express and East Midlands Railway have entered into a tripartite agreement whereby the three operators will automatically accept each other's tickets if trains are cancelled.

Passengers holding valid tickets are now able to travel on any EMR, Northern or TPE service within two hours before or after their cancelled train.

The arrangement covers both pre-planned cancellations (p-coded) and trains cancelled on the day due to unplanned disruption.

It builds on a previous agreement between Northern, TPE and EMR that applied on Sundays only. The new arrangement covers all days of the week. Customers affected will be able to travel via any reasonable route, as long as it is an option in journey planners.

The arrangement will be of particular benefit to passengers travelling between Liverpool and Sheffield, where EMR and TPE each provide half of the express services, complemented by Northern stopping services, and between Sheffield and Nottingham, where EMR and Northern each provide half of the services.

It should be noted that the agreement relates specifically to cancellations and does not cover delays.

Passengers holding tickets for services that are delayed will not automatically be able to use another operator's services unless a specific dispensation is granted. Nevertheless, this is still a very welcome initiative that will provide

greater certainty to passengers at times of disruption.

Better station information

In another welcome move, East Midlands Railway has begun to reprogramme its information screens at stations, to increase the quantity and quality provided. Train formations are now displayed in diagrammatic format, allowing passengers to find on-the-train wheelchair spaces, bicycle spaces and first class accommodation (where provided). Carriage letters form part of the diagrammatic display, enabling passengers with seat reservations to identify where to find their carriage.

At the time of writing, only EMR and CrossCountry formations had been added to the system, but EMR confirmed to Railfuture Yorkshire that discussions were ongoing with TransPennine Express with the intention of adding identical information for their formations. On this general theme, detailed train formation information is useful for everyone, but invaluable for disabled passengers, the elderly or infirm, or anyone travelling with luggage. Such information can be seen at many stations, but provision tends to be erratic and presentation is often inconsistent. Railfuture's national passenger group is working on ways to improve the passenger experience and this is one area in which it is hoped EMR's positive approach will be mirrored elsewhere.

Plan for York third line paused

As part of the June 2025 Spending Review, the Department for Transport has paused the York area capacity and performance project. Already under way with completion scheduled for May 2026, this was designed to improve the York northern approaches by adding a third line from Skelton Junction, which would keep Harrogate line services off the East Coast main line. These works are paused "until the

wider strategy for the ECML – aligned with Northern Powerhouse Rail aspirations – can be developed further".

There would have been big gains from this scheme in terms of reduced disruption – for passengers on the main line as well as for those using the Harrogate branch. It might not on its own have provided capacity for extra main line services, but the improved reliability would have been significant. Platform capacity at York is extremely tight and delays quickly snowball. It is feared that linking the scheme to wider ECML and Northern Powerhouse Rail plans may cause years of delay, wasting money and causing ongoing frustration to rail users and train operators.

Doncaster-Scunthorpe service

Railfuture Yorkshire has been approached by Lee Pitcher MP, newly elected for the Isle of Axholme and Doncaster East last year, to meet to discuss the future of the Doncaster-Scunthorpe line. The service on this line was cut in half following Covid and serves a number of small stations and settlements.

Haxby station gets go-ahead



Network Rail image of a future Haxby

Railfuture Yorkshire Branch welcomed the go-ahead for this £24 million station (on the York-Scarborough line), following more than 15 years of lobbying. York City Council is contributing £4 million to the project. Haxby was one of the few new stations to be given the go-ahead in the government's June spending review. An additional 20,000 people will be within three kilometres of the new station site, with bus links and cycle paths to be provided.

Hope for £15 million investment

The York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority's strategic transport plan is currently in development. The authority is commissioning a consultant to work with its transport team on the plan. Stakeholder engagement (including Railfuture Yorkshire) will be taking place on the draft, followed by public consultation in the new year. It is hoped to release some of the £15.4 million allocated to next year's local transport funding for projects, including the Selby Gateway scheme, which involves important station

improvements and a new eastern entrance. A business case for increasing the York-Scarborough service to half-hourly (as sought by Mayor David Skaith) is being prepared, although TPE say that this will not be possible until 2028.

Mayor backs Hull electrification

Luke Campbell (Reform UK) was elected mayor of Hull & East Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority in May. One of the authority's principles includes enhanced connectivity to create an integrated low carbon transport network. The devolution deal includes a settlement for transport of around £100 million over four years and involves the authority being brought into Northern Powerhouse Rail. Following positive pre-election indications it is hoped that some of the transport funding may be allocated towards an outline business case for the Beverley to York line reinstatement. The mayor has agreed local performance indicators and monitoring arrangements for the authority's Northern Rail routes. His ambition is for quicker journeys and extending electrification of rail lines to Hull and East Yorkshire –

something Railfuture has long pressed for.

Mayor Campbell has delayed joining his mayoral colleagues in the three other Yorkshire combined authorities by signing the White Rose Agreement, which commits them to working closely on business investment, promoting Yorkshire, and improving transport links. He has cited differences over the

objective of achieving Net Zero as the core reason.

Accessible stations

Improvements to Leeds station formed part of the government's June spending review announcements. This included much improved accessibility to platform 17. We are keeping in touch with Network Rail and are expecting an update in the autumn. We continue to be consulted on proposals for improving accessibility at stations across Yorkshire – including those being resited as a result of the TransPennine upgrade. Recent issues have included communication problems for disabled passengers travelling from Hebden Bridge, and the delayed installation of the much-needed passenger lifts at Todmorden. Consultation meetings are shortly to begin on plans for improving accessibility at Hatfield & Stainforth station.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch

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

SUVs are 'urban land hogs'

More than 1 million cars that are too big to fit into parking spaces are sold in Britain each year and the numbers are growing, according to Clean Cities. In London alone, the proportion of SUVs has increased from 3% to 30% over 20 years.

Drivers of these SUVs are unable to see children aged up to nine who are directly in front of the vehicle. SUVs also produce more toxic gas and particles from tyres because of their excessive weight.

"In London, SUVs now take up as much space as an entire inner-city borough," said Oliver Lord of Clean Cities. "That is tarmac we could be using for homes, parks or safer streets. If we want cities that are safe, breathable and accessible, we have to get serious about tackling the rise of these urban land-hogs."

In Paris, increased parking fees have reduced the number of SUVs using surface parking by two thirds.

■ **Clean Cities say they are Europe's largest network of organisations on a mission to build public support for cities to shift from polluting vehicles to active, shared and electric mobility.**

Union backs battle for rail freight

Rail union ASLEF is urging Labour MPs to support the campaign to boost rail freight.

The union held a roundtable session in Parliament, hosted by Luton South MP Rachel Hopkins.

Along with rail campaigners, the union has pointed out the 16-year-long massive subsidy of road freight by the freeze on fuel duty.

Road freight costs are now 8% lower than in 2015, while rail freight operators have seen costs rise by 60%, with the cost of electric traction rising by 272% since 2015.

The union wants to see road fuel duty and rail track access charges reviewed to level the playing field.

ASLEF supports Railfuture's call for investment in Haughley and Ely junction upgrades and electrification of track to depots to allow diesels to be replaced by greener electric traction.

Freight paths need to be protected as the emerging Great British Railways takes over, increasing control of the network.

Freightliner wants to increase rail freight by 300% by 2050, in line with the public appetite for action to tackle climate change.

ASLEF also wants to see more investment in the only publicly owned freight operator, DRS.

Easington MP Grahame Morris is encouraging fellow MPs to back his early day motion on rail freight.

After sending every Labour MP in Westminster its *Rail Freight Future* document, ASLEF said: "We want investment diverted from road to rail. We do not need more of the same old road solutions from the Labour government."

Maggie Simpson of the Rail Freight Group said the government's infrastructure and industrial strategies are failing rail.

She said: "There is not a long list of railway investment schemes and rail is not recognised as a key industrial sector worthy of specific support."



Picture: Freightliner

Freightliner has agreed a five-year contract with Breedon Group to move aggregates from quarries at Dowlow, Derbyshire, and Shap, Cumbria, to depots around Britain. The picture shows the symbolic first train of the contract at Breedon's Ashbury depot, near Gorton, Manchester, which is also a concrete plant.

Freightliner has deployed class 70 diesel locomotives for the contract, allowing the use of longer and heavier trains and using redundant coal wagons converted to box wagons by WH Davies at Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, in cooperation with rolling stock company Porterbrook.

Freightliner also runs trains for Breedon from Derbyshire's Hope Cement Works to Dagenham (Essex), Theale (Berkshire), Dewsbury (West Yorkshire) and Walsall (West Midlands), as well as container trains from Felixstowe, Southampton, London Gateway and other deep-sea ports to the national network of inland terminals.

Rail's container share boosted by port operator

Rail's share of container traffic from Southampton has increased from 20% to 30%, thanks to port operator DP World offering cheaper rates to customers who use rail.

It is now hoping to boost rail freight's share to 40% by next year, continuing with its modal shift programme.

DP World's modal shift programme was launched in 2023 and in the past 12 months has helped to remove 64,000 lorry loads from Britain's roads.

Shifting freight from road to rail has major environmental and economic

benefits and is better operationally for the port operator.

DP World was recognised as business of the year in the 2024 Rail Freight Group Awards for its proactive role in reducing carbon emissions and promoting rail freight.

Four new daily rail services have been launched from Southampton to Birmingham, Cardiff, East Midlands Gateway and Doncaster.

Another freight flow started in June, using the newly reopened East West Railway from Oxford to Bletchley, to a new strategic rail freight

interchange in Northampton. It marked the first time East West Rail infrastructure has been used for commercial freight, after many months of signaller training and train driver learning since the £1.2 billion railway was completed in October 2024.

The inaugural journey was part of a dual first, as it also saw the entry into service of Maritime Transport's Northampton Gateway terminal.

Network Rail completed work at Easter to join the 35-acre freight depot to the West Coast main line via the Northampton loop.



The People's Picture

This mosaic image was projected on to the cliffs of Dover to preview a Climate Action lobby of MPs in July by more than 5,000 people. The mosaic was designed by artist Helen Marshall and based on photos shared by people to illustrate what they want to protect

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Wrexham-Bidston update

The Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users Association reports that although there are welcome promises of improvements to come for the line, passenger confidence continues to be undermined by the current poor service. During the summer of 2025, many trains ran late or were cancelled, notwithstanding the relaxation in the line's timetable in December 2024 to improve timekeeping. TFW's acceptance of one in four trains running late as "healthy" is alarming and nowhere near the level of performance rail users and the association expect. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, problems with the class 230s continue to cause many of the delays and cancellations. TFW has worked hard to improve this fleet over the past year or so, but the trains remain prone to in-service failure. At times, class 230 fleet availability can fall below the 60% required to maintain the Monday to Saturday timetable. Class 197 trains can sometimes be used, but if they are not available, up to one in three services are cancelled. The association continues to appeal to both TFW and the Welsh Government for action. Association officers are also being regularly briefed by TFW managers and the engineers at Birkenhead North depot. Railfuture agrees with Network Rail about raising line speeds where the infrastructure already allows it, mitigating some of the delays that currently blight the service.

Wigan-Bolton electrification live
Following regulatory sign-off, electrification of the 6.5-mile route between Wigan and Bolton was brought into service on 27 July.

Platform extensions at Ince, Hindley and Westhoughton allow for longer trains with more seats. The £100 million project gives train operators greater operational flexibility and aligns with upgrades to the Wigan Springs train maintenance facility.

Northern Powerhouse Rail

Government sources are reported as ready to revive the Northern Powerhouse Rail project. Plans are expected to be announced before the Labour Party conference in Liverpool from 28 September to 1 October. There has been lobbying and pressure from Northern political leaders, such as Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham and Liverpool City Region mayor Steve Rotherham, along with business leaders. UK chancellor Rachel Reeves said in her June spending review that Labour would "take forward our ambitions" for Northern Powerhouse Rail. It also appears on the National Infrastructure Pipeline published in July but there are no specific details or costs. See:

<https://pipeline.nista.grid.civilservice.gov.uk/main>

Tram-train extensions approved

Plans submitted by the Bee network committee for extension of Manchester's Metrolink network were approved at a meeting of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in August. The committee argued that by 2050, further expansion in central Manchester will need to be underground. Mayor Andy Burnham said this will need three new routes in tunnel: north-west to south-east, north-east to south-west and north to south. Plans for extending the network to Stockport from the East Didsbury terminus will be submitted to the



Picture: Liverpool City Region

Upgrade for Liverpool's commercial heart

Moorfields station – a key gateway to Liverpool's commercial heart – is having a £1 million upgrade, funded by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and supported by Merseyrail and Network Rail.

The works, including new cladding, energy-efficient LED lights, new signs, a covered staircase and secure cycle storage, start this month and should be complete by the end of the year.

The project is the first phase of a broader modernisation plan for the station. Steve Rotherham, mayor of the Liverpool City Region, said: "This investment is about improving things in the short term – creating a cleaner, brighter, and more welcoming gateway for the thousands of people who travel into the district every day. It is a meaningful first step towards a bigger transformation. We are continuing to raise standards across our network."

government imminently and plans for tram-trains along the Oldham-Rochdale-Heywood-Bury route will be completed by next summer. Greater Manchester Combined Authority aims to have tram-trains as a key feature in future extensions to the network. These ideas include improving access to Manchester Airport from the west and the east direct to Stockport, and will include extensions into areas presently under-served by the network, which include Salford, Wigan, Leigh, Bolton, Middleton, Trafford Waters and Port Salford.

Victoria needs cheering up

Major improvements are needed to Manchester Victoria station, according to TravelWatch North West, which has carried out a survey into the day-to-day reality for passengers using the station. "Many changes to the station over recent years are mainly cosmetic as they do not directly benefit the passengers," said TravelWatch chair David Butterworth. "The lack of waiting rooms and benches is a serious concern, along with inadequate and cramped toilets. Passengers waiting for trains have to endure a gloomy environment."

Northern Stakeholder manager Owain Roberts responded with news that additional seating had recently been added to platform 6, and works around platform 2 would go ahead after appointment of a new contractor.

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



Picture: Northern

By train to the rollercoaster

Train operator Northern has joined Blackpool Transport to offer a new combined train, tram and bus ticket. The ticket was launched in June by (left to right) Blackpool Transport's managing director Jane Cole, Councillor Mark Smith and Northern's Alex Hornby to make the most of convenient interchange between train and tram at Blackpool North in particular. The tram system was extended to Blackpool North last year in a £23 million project. The ticket is now available on Northern's app and website and from most of Northern's 500 stations, including Preston, Manchester, Leeds and York.

Bus and tram stops are directly outside Blackpool's two main rail stations, with frequent services to key destinations such as North Pier, Pleasure Beach, Starr Gate, Fleetwood and Cleveleys.



Picture: Lancashire County Council

Funding gap halts Preston's new station

Planning for Cottam Parkway started 10 years ago to serve Preston's growing north-west population, giving passengers a five-minute journey time into the city centre and a 20-minute journey time to Blackpool. However, the £24 million price tag has grown to £55 million, according to the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

The UK Treasury's spending review in June allocated £28.4 million to Lancashire County Council for the station on the South Fylde line, subject to approval of a business case. However, the station is stuck until the funding gap can be closed, even though design work has been completed and theoretically work could begin quickly.

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Cash for Midlands rail hub

Funding for the next stage of the Midlands Rail Hub was confirmed in Chancellor Rachel Reeves' July spending review. The detailed business plan focused on Bordesley West chord, Moor Street platforms, Snow Hill platform 4 and the most significant bottlenecks, especially Kings Norton junction. Since then the Treasury has confirmed funding for developing a business plan for Bordesley East chord, associated track to Moor Street and conflicts in the Water Orton area.

The aim of the projects in the west is to allow extra trains to run towards Worcester, Hereford, Bristol and Cardiff. The funding should also enable a return to six trains per hour from Redditch and Bromsgrove to New Street, Four Oaks and Lichfield Trent Valley.

Trials on Metro extension

The eastern extension of the Birmingham Metro has been completed from Corporation Street to City University and trials are currently being undertaken at night. The next stretch to open will be along Digbeth and Deritend High Streets. Connecting this to the City University extension will have to wait until HS2 has cleared the way for trams to go under Curzon Street station.

George the station cat

West Midlands Railway has named one of its Stourbridge Shuttle class 139 trains "George the Station Cat" to celebrate International Cat Day. Alongside the name plate, the plaque features a portrait of the well-loved ginger tom cat who resides at Stourbridge Junction station.

Railfuture line-up

At the Railfuture West Midlands AGM in August, Steve Wright was re-elected chair. The rest of last year's committee were also re-elected with one exception. Colin Major stood down as secretary because of poor health and Steve Boulding, our Shropshire representative, stepped forward to take over this role. We also gained a new committee member (actually, the return of a long-standing former member) Phil Davis. Phil is currently a councillor in Birmingham and will be able to give us only some of his time this year.



Work continues on the 140-mile London-Birmingham route of HS2, despite the Birmingham-Manchester leg being scrapped in 2023 by former Conservative prime minister Rishi Sunak. In July, the 14,500-tonne HS2 "box", pictured above, was slid into place under the A46 Kenilworth bypass road. A 3.5 mile tunnel at Bromford, Birmingham, is expected to be completed later this year. In the London area, two tunnel boring machines are expected to start work next year on the route from Old Oak Common to Euston

He plans to stand down from the council in May and can then become involved with Railfuture to a greater extent. He will be moving to the Black Country in the near future and will give us representation there, much needed since the unfortunate death of our former chair William Whiting.

Contact with rail managers

The chair of Railfuture West Midlands will be meeting newly returned CrossCountry Trains stakeholder manager Sally Gillespie who was a useful contact before she went on maternity leave. Discussion is now planned on a

wide variety of topics, including the dispute with the RMT union, Voyager refurbishment, disruption planning, and CrossCountry's plans in the run-up to nationalisation (especially Reading-Newcastle).

Inspiring performances

Railfuture was fortunate to obtain two guest speakers at rather short notice. Fiona Saxon, Worcestershire community rail partnership officer, and Peter Sargent, West Midlands Rail Executive's head of rail policy and strategy. Both gave inspiring presentations. They helped us identify areas for Railfuture West Midlands to target. We are hoping to recruit a Railfuture member to

represent Coventry and another for Worcester. Volunteers welcome. We are also looking for one or two people to help us communicate better with members, the local press and the general public.

Jewellery anniversary

The 30th anniversary of the Jewellery line between Snow Hill and Smethwick is being celebrated by the West Midlands Rail Executive, which has appealed to Railfuture members to come forward with any pictures of the opening or construction of the line. Please contact us if you can help.

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



Picture: CBT

Coventry gets ready for its VLR future

Local transport minister Simon Lightwood is seen chatting to the driver of Coventry's Very Light Rail project vehicle during a June visit to the "successful" trial track between Greysfriars Road and Queen Victoria Road.

The VLR trial in Coventry is continuing and it is expected

that a city network will be installed.

The VLR assets of Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation have been sold to Dudley Council after it went into administration. The VLR Centre, run by BCIMO, remains operational.

Warm words on accessibility are not enough

The government was accused in June of failing to recognise the importance of improving access to the railway. House of Commons transport committee chair Ruth Cadbury said the government had responded to calls for action with "warm words" and a "disappointing lack of urgency". She said: "This cannot go on. We need a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and inadequacies in our transport services. A root and branch change in attitudes is necessary. We

will hold this government's feet to the fire and not let accessibility be forgotten about."

The government's promise of an updated integrated national transport strategy does not answer demands made by the committee in a report in March which highlighted, among other things, the need for action on level boarding on rail platforms. However, the DfT did call for train operators to treat accessibility as a fundamental

expectation that should be prioritised, and it called for an "accessibility charter".

■ More than 11 million people in England are at risk of transport-related social exclusion, warned Katie Day of Transport for the North at a conference in Manchester in June. She said solutions could unlock £118 billion in economic benefits by 2050. "We need to focus on people, people, people," she added.

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Paul Hollinghurst

Meeting the mayor

A delegation from Railfuture East Anglia met with Paul Bristow, the newly elected mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and his combined authority team to discuss our shared ambition to enhance the rail network and services across the region. The meeting provided an opportunity for us to set out our aspirations and explore how these align with the mayor's manifesto priorities. It was a constructive two-way discussion covering:

1 Peterborough to Ely enhancements

More frequent services, earlier morning and later evening trains, reopening the railway to Wisbech and the Ely area capacity enhancement scheme, which still awaits government funding.

2 Soham, West Curve and Newmarket

Improved services, direct trains from Soham to Cambridge (including reinstatement of the west curve), double-tracking around Soham and between Newmarket and Cambridge to allow more frequent services and a new station in East Cambridge.

3 Busways, light rail, Haverhill, Cambourne, East West Rail

Exploring alternatives to the busway schemes proposed by the Greater Cambridge Partnership, reopening the railway from Cambridge to Haverhill (as either heavy or light rail), prospects for light rail in Cambridge, a new East West Rail station to serve St Neots and potential for East West Rail to improve Cambridge-Peterborough connectivity.

4 Waterbeach

Provision of a turnback platform at the proposed new station for Waterbeach new town to allow cross-Cambridge services to terminate there and retention of the existing station to continue serving Waterbeach village.

5 Foxton and Ashwell & Morden park and rides

Pressing forward with the stalled plans for a park and ride at Foxton and exploring the potential for another at Ashwell & Morden.

6 New stations and ticketing

Supporting the mayor's aspirations for new stations at Alconbury Weald, and Peterborough North and South, alongside Railfuture's ambition for a Cambridge eastern entrance and integrated ticketing across the region. The mayor emphasised his determination to

make the railway network work better for the region, with a particular focus on improving connectivity between Peterborough and Cambridge. This corridor is currently poorly served with only an hourly service, ending at 2100, and Sunday services starting late in the morning. A half-hourly service running from early until late is urgently needed. The mayor also expressed his frustration at the lack of government support for the Ely area capacity enhancement scheme, which is vital to unlocking the future growth of the network. We look forward to working closely with the mayor and contributing to the combined authority's forthcoming rail and connectivity strategy, for which Railfuture is being included as a consultee.

Some of the material presented at our meeting, including a regional map showing our aspirations, can be viewed here:

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

East West Rail charter

Railfuture has been campaigning for East West Rail for more than 30 years, so the rebuilding of the route from Bicester to Bletchley is a major achievement. The line was approved for trains about a year ago, and the training of signallers has been completed. Sadly, the regular passenger service to be operated by Chiltern Railways has yet to begin – without even a trial or introductory service – and no start date has been announced.

In the meantime, the route has seen occasional use: a revenue-earning freight train, a VIP service and around four enthusiast charters. Several Railfuture members joined the *Thundering Shed* charter on 17 May, which ran non-stop from Oxford to Milton Keynes before terminating at Northampton. The journey was fast and comfortable, offering a chance to see the HS2 works and speeding past Winslow station. The sooner it opens to the public the better, as it will help drum up public support for the next phase.

Serving Waterbeach: New town station

Waterbeach is a village of 6,000 residents five miles north of Cambridge which is being expanded with a new town being built on its eastern side. The current village station is on the Cambridge-Ely line, served by at least two trains an hour in each direction, Monday to Saturday (hourly on Sundays), carrying approximately 400,000 passengers a year. Most travel to and from Cambridge and many carry on to London. It is expected that when Cambridge South station opens in January, many more passengers

will use the service.

About two kilometres north of Waterbeach station, a new station is funded to serve a new town, also called Waterbeach, under construction on former Ministry of Defence land. Eventually, the new town of Waterbeach will be home to about 30,000 residents, more than Ely. The 20,000 residents of Ely make about one million single rail journey to Cambridge Central alone each year. So, the Waterbeach new town station is essential as nearly all its residents will find work amongst the thousands of jobs existing and being created around Cambridge's North, Central and South stations. The journey times from Waterbeach station to each of them is minutes compared to the hour often imposed by the extreme congestion encountered on Cambridge's road network. When the plans for the new station were approved about 10 years ago, it seemed sensible to go along with the proposal to close the village station and transfer all use to the new, even though only about a third of the village would be better served by it. Since then things have changed. The village station's platforms have been expensively upgraded to handle eight car trains and frequency has been hugely improved, but more importantly government policy has decreed that the Cambridge region will become a major industrial knowledge-based centre that will inevitably lead to a huge increase of population, well above the approximate 200,000 now living within the city's continuously built-up area. At least 44,500 new homes are expected to be built. Most will be along each of the railways radiating out of the city, including along the new EWR line to Cambourne and Tempsford. There need to be additional services, and Waterbeach New Town station must be developed with proper turn-back facilities to accommodate a service of four trains per hour to Cambridge stations, with two stopping services per hour serving Waterbeach Village. We have extensively circulated this amended plan, but so far the local authority seems reluctant to engage with the railway. This is a shame as planning for the future, rather than relying on plans made 10 years ago as in the Waterbeach case, is essential.

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

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X @RailfutureEA

Sevenside

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All to play for

The government brought good news for rail in Bristol and west Somerset in June – the go-ahead for the Bristol-Portishead line. There is also £150 million for other rail projects, most of which will be new stations and tracks in the north of Bristol, where old industrial sites are being redeveloped. Another £200 million is for a "mass transit system" design for Greater Bristol, a great opportunity for rail. All to play for.

New Somerset stations

Wellington station in Somerset and Cullompton station over the border in Devon were also confirmed by

the Treasury in June. They had been cancelled in the previous review! The Langport Transport Group is campaigning for another new station – at Langport/Somerton. Neither are large towns, but they are the focus of a large area that is poorly served by rail at present.

Accidentally Wes Anderson

Do you like the films made by director Wes Anderson? Trains were a feature in his latest film *The Phoenician Scheme*. Mr Anderson creates scenes with vivid colours, clean, bold lines, and cartoon-like simplicity. Temple Meads and Frome stations feature on the website *Accidentally Wes Anderson*

which identifies places that look as if Wes has designed them. When you see the front of Frome glowing in the setting sun, you can see why it was chosen.

<https://accidentallywesanderson.com/places/>

Nothing for South Coast routes

No new infrastructure is planned for the Bristol-Southampton-Portsmouth or Bristol-Weymouth routes, except for a feasibility study for lifts and bridge at Castle Cary. Both routes suffer from antiquated trains, signalling and real-time communication. Cancellations are frequent. On a recent Sunday, all trains to and from Weymouth were cancelled. The Melksham-

Chippenham line has a roughly two-hourly service; at least one is cancelled most days. In 2024, only 170 passengers a day used Melksham station. The Treasury's response is likely to be road building – a new Melksham bypass. Our next campaign challenge.

Let's meet!

Railfuture Sevenside is planning a get-together for its members. The meeting will be held at 1400 on Saturday 18 October at The Railway Inn, next to Yatton station. Guest speaker, to be confirmed, will be a BBC presenter who has been working on a rail documentary.

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New leadership

A press release about Tim Steer becoming the new chair of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall was used in 10 local media news items and a video of his acceptance speech led to radio interviews. At Devon County Council, a complete change of cabinet took place in May which affected Andrea Davis, who collected Railfuture's Judges' Special Award on behalf of the county council in 2023. The former deputy council leader has also lost her role as cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport but she retains her own seat in North Devon, and continues as chair of Exmoor National Park Authority.

Railfuture's consultation responses were incorporated into the 2025-40 local transport plan of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, which will become the official transport authority in April.

Out and about

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall chair Tim Steer visited Truro, to see the new MP for Truro and Falmouth Jayne Kirkham. She is keen to see the Mid-Cornwall Metro completed between Falmouth and Newquay, via Truro and Par. She also wants the restoration of a rail link for freight at Falmouth Docks, to take advantage of the possibility of transporting lithium from Cornwall.

Tim has also been invited to participate in the North Devon and Torridge Maritime Network, furthering his call for reinstating main line rail services across North Devon and into Bideford. Tim continues to maintain established close working relations with officers and elected members at Bideford and Barnstaple town councils.

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, instigated by Railfuture' in 2023 has taken part in several "meet the people" summer events.

Stakeholders recognised the 171-year history of King's Nympton station and its renaming in 1951 from South Molton Road.

Bideford Railway Heritage Centre hosted the Alliance, at Bideford's Summer Fair and then at their Gala Day.

Peninsula projects pipeline

The South West peninsula had mixed fortunes from government announcements subsequent to the chancellor's comprehensive spending review in June. Transport secretary Heidi Alexander's July statement to Parliament "Transforming the UK's road and rail networks" was quickly followed by the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority's Infrastructure Pipeline. It had been foreshadowed by the Treasury's 10-year infrastructure strategy



Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station welcomed the return of the 5th North Devon Scout Group following their February visit, for a safety briefing, towards their 'Platforms for change' badge. The Scouts helped the Friends with their environmental work around the station and then took a Great Western-funded train trip to visit Eggesford Forest. At the station, two Scout leaders were honoured with 15-year service certificates, consolidating ties between the railway and the community



Railfuture Devon and Cornwall branch secretary Alan Clark (fourth left) and Tim Steer (fourth right) represented Railfuture and Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station at an event at Crediton station, to celebrate a heritage project in the waiting room and an equal access initiative at the Station Tea Rooms. Grants for the projects came from GWR and the Community Rail Development Fund



RAIL 200 CELEBRATION: Supporters of Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance helped King's Nympton celebrate its history in August. The picture includes Martin Pailthorpe of the station's Friends group (holding sign), Railfuture's Tim Steer (centre with green lanyard), Barnstaple mayor Janet Coates (foreground with chain of office) and North Devon MP Ian Roome (on Janet's right). The station opened in 1854 as South Molton Road. It was renamed King's Nympton in 1951

published the previous month. There were green signals for two new stations between Taunton and Exeter, at Cullompton in Devon and at Wellington in Somerset.

"Pausing" works to strengthen the lineside cliffs near Teignmouth as part of the South West Rail Resilience Programme has prompted a petition calling on the

Picture: Leon Morey



BIDEFORD GALA DAY: (left to right) County councillor Mark Barry, Tim Steer and Bideford mayor Peter Lawrence

Picture: Crediton Courier

government to reinstate the work. TavyRail campaigners were disappointed that their arguments for government funding to develop the scheme for a reinstatement of the Tavistock-Plymouth line, via Bere Alston, were not mentioned in the spending review.

TavyRail chair Richard Searight said: "To say that we were surprised at the government's lack of interest in the South West and therefore the Plymouth-Tavistock line restoration, would be an understatement. We were flabbergasted.

"We thought the government wanted growth. Railways are one of the best ways to create growth – except, apparently, in the South West."

There were cautionary signals for three Access for All schemes at Bodmin Parkway, Castle Cary and Yeovil Junction. South Devon MP Rebecca Smith, whose constituency covers parts of both Devon and Plymouth and who sits on the House of Commons Transport Committee, was understandably frustrated.

Making the case for consistent investment in rail, Railfuture gave evidence to the Commons transport committee's "rail investment pipeline" inquiry which concluded in July.

The investment pipeline was also discussed at the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance's Barnstaple convention in March and at a workshop in Bideford in September.

The Bideford workshop was for representatives of enablers of a study for extending main line services to Bideford: Torridge District Council, Railfuture, Devon County Council, and Bideford and Barnstaple town councils. GWR supplied data for the study Reports of Barnstaple's rail campaign are proving popular on Devon Live.

More information on the website: www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch

Picture: Roger Blake

Picture: FOKNS

North East

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Children sing to Edmondson's tune

Rail tickets were written out by hand when the Newcastle-Carlisle railway opened in 1838. Soon after though, the station master at Brampton, Thomas Edmondson, devised a system of pre-printed tickets, numbered and stored in special racks. The system enabled receipts to be checked against ticket sales, ensuring few travelled without paying. The "Edmondson card" became the essential feature of booking offices for at least 150 years. So in July, children at primary schools in the Brampton area, helped by singer songwriters, not only wrote new songs to commemorate this long-lasting feature of rail travel, but performed them in Lanercost Priory to an invited audience. The Edmondson system came into general use with the creation of the Railway Clearing House in 1842 and survived until 1990.



Peter Walker

Tyne Valley Railway publicity

Staff at the community rail partnership helped to publicise Tyne Valley line train services, by producing and distributing colourful leaflets showing train times and information on Ranger and Rover tickets to encourage more sustainable travel around the North of England. At Corbridge, a large and colourful banner saying "Welcome to Corbridge – a bridge to Hadrian's Wall", serves to hide the "unsightly mess of a redevelopment site".

MPs launch inquiry into how to meet public needs

How investment can be planned in the best way to meet the needs of the public is the subject of the latest House of Commons transport select committee inquiry. Their main concern is with "joined-up journeys" by improving integration between transport modes. The inquiry aims to support people to make better journey choices with the aid of real-time journey planning tools, co-ordinated timetables and travel hubs. It will pay special attention to older and younger people and those with accessibility problems. The committee welcomes written evidence submissions from those with expert knowledge of the transport manufacturing sectors but does not mention passengers, those who actually use public transport and have plenty of expertise on "joined-up journeys". The inquiry will remain open until midnight on 16 October 2025, with nine separate questions, some of which can be properly answered only by passengers rather than transport providers. Railfuture groups which advocate for more use of rail services and individual members with first-hand experience should ensure they contribute to the inquiry alongside experts from the "transport manufacturing sectors".

First Ashington, and now....a Washington rail link?

Consultants ARUP have begun to survey land to extend the Metro network south of the Tyne to link Pelaw with South Hylton. This would provide a second route between Newcastle and Sunderland, as well as much-needed rail facilities in and around Washington. A large curve would be needed to link South Hylton, the present metro terminus, with Washington, on the former Leamside line. (See track diagram on page 20 *Railwatch* 175 April 2023.)

Seaham linked to London by Grand Central trains

From December, four trains each way will call additionally (and temporarily) at Seaham, on the Durham coast, and will serve a five-star boutique hotel, after an appeal to the Office of Rail and Road. Welcome though these extra calls are, it is a pity other towns on the coast section have not, so far, benefited from stops. Railfuture believes there should be extra stops at such stations as Stockton, which could be a souvenir of the 200th anniversary year of its existence.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North-East-Branch

X @RailfutureNEast

20 railwatch October 2025

Thames Valley

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Thanks, Martin

Railfuture Thames Valley salutes our very long-serving member, Martin Smith, who stood down from our committee in July. He had served continuously for more than 65 years on it and its predecessor organisations, starting with the Railway Development Association. When the Thames Valley branch was formed he became its secretary, a post he held for many years. He remains a member and wishes to be kept in the loop. His wife Janet, also a member, died in August so our thoughts have been with Martin of late. Branch vice-chairman Nigel Rose writes: "I first met Martin when he was representing the Railway Development Society at transport meetings in Reading when I was on the local committee of Transport 2000. His knowledge of the vital local issues at a time before the rebuild of Reading station was always impressive. When I moved to Oxfordshire and joined the Railfuture branch he was a key player in all the meetings with Oxfordshire County Council. I wish him well in his retirement."



Andrew McCallum



Martin Smith (in blue jersey) on Railfuture's stand at the Oxford Green Fair in 2018 with Richard Stow
Picture: John Elvin

Thanks to MP for Banbury

In *Railwatch* 184 we reported our vice-chairman Nigel Rose and secretary Andrew McCallum meeting their MP (Sean Woodcock who represents Banbury). A few weeks later in his regular column in the *Banbury Guardian* he led by saying "constituents have regularly told me about issues" to do with Chiltern and that he had been in touch with the Department for Transport and met the Rail Minister regarding crowding. Of course he is not going to name constituents and if others have raised the same matters that we did that is all to the good. Since then it has been confirmed that Chiltern are taking on all the former TransPennine Express mark 5 trains, which Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes as they will bring a significant

increase in capacity.

Swindon stakeholder conference

Railfuture Thames Valley was represented at Great Western's stakeholder conference in Swindon in June and useful contacts were made. The networking opportunities are as valuable as the formal presentations. This year, Gatwick Airport's surface access manager Hannah Godfrey, who also chairs the North Downs line partnership, impressed with her commitment to more capacity and some overnight services on the Reading-Gatwick line.

Railfuture wins new friends

Also in June, Thames Valley branch chairman Richard Stow gave a talk about Railfuture, its history, and its campaigning locally and nationally to a well-attended meeting of Wokingham Methodist Railway & Transport Club.

From the questions and discussion afterwards it was clear that it is a well-informed and committed group. We gained some new members as a result and we recommend giving talks to such groups as a way of spreading the word.

Backing for Wantage Grove

On 31 July, Andy Holding of our affiliate, Wantage Grove Station Supporters Group, convened an exceptionally productive meeting mainly regarding economic benefits of Wantage Grove Parkway station, attended by Paul McSweeney from Harwell Campus, Olly Glover MP and Richard Stow, chairman of Railfuture Thames Valley. Paul stressed that the projected growth of Harwell and other local science campuses within the next five to ten years will bring further demand for public transport to the local area.

A new station would boost access for employees and investors. Olly Glover MP said he had raised the matter with the science minister Patrick Vallance, who was receptive to the idea of extending the Cambridge-Oxford corridor to Wantage. Richard Stow for Railfuture noted that the project for a station has universal support, and that a new station would deliver tremendous economic benefits both locally and for the UK economy, adding to the significant benefits of upgrading the Oxford transport corridor. Harwell Campus is, by some margin, the largest employment site in the area and it is very welcome to have it officially represented. It is hoped to have another meeting when the business case statement for Wantage station is released later this year. The study is being undertaken on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

Oxrail 2040 plans up for discussion

Oxfordshire County Council's rail development lead Pete Brunskill hosted a consultative meeting with Railfuture Thames Valley and other interested parties in September for us to feed into their forthcoming *Oxrail 2040: Plan for Rail*. We are delighted that he is keen to hear from our members in person and hope to report in the next issue.

Oxford Green Fair

Railfuture Thames Valley will have a stand at the Green Fair in Oxford Town Hall on Saturday 29 November. If you are able to be in Oxford that day, come to see us.

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

X @RailfutureTV

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

railfuture.bsky.social

Portrush to Bristol by train and ship

By Bruce Williamson

I found myself in Portrush, Northern Ireland in July, doing a job in connection with the Open golf tournament. I had to install some specialist kit, and once having done so and having no interest at all in golf, I set about finding my way home to Bristol. A colleague had given me a lift to Portrush, but he was staying on.



The easiest option would be to fly, but wanting to keep my carbon footprint down and “fly the flag” for rail travel I decided to chance my arm with the rail and sea options. None of them looked great.

My job ended at about 1030 in the morning but, with a combined journey time of about 19 hours at best, there was no way I was going to make it home before midnight.

All options, including flying, depended on me getting to Belfast, so I decided to travel there first and, once there, review my options.

I arrived at Portrush station just a few minutes too late for the 1102, so I went for a wander round the town and bought an ice cream as it was the middle of a heatwave.

Portrush is a very pretty seaside town, and the station is centrally located. The original station frontage is now a pub and retail unit, but immediately behind it is a modern version, with a large sign saying “Portrush Train Station” just to wind up the pedants among Railfuture members who cling on to “railway station” in spite of “train station” being accepted by most young people – and the media.

I got there in plenty of time for the next train and my first pleasant surprise: a ticket to Belfast, some 67 miles away, was just a tenner. What would it cost in Britain for a similar journey? Probably at least twice that.

Feeling modern

The train, an NIR class 4000 built by the Spanish firm CAF, has the look and feel of a modern British train with air conditioning and USB charging points. It left on time and after a short journey I had to change at Coleraine. A short wait for the connection and another similar train.

The carriage I boarded was a bit warm – the air conditioning was not working – but fortunately it was just that carriage, so I moved down the train and was much more comfortable watching the Irish countryside zoom past. I was promised a spectacular scenic ride by an Irish friend of mine, but it was just the same sort of unexciting scenery you would see in England. I arrived in Belfast Grand Central at 1350 shortly after passing the



PRETTY PLATFORM: Flowers grace the station at Portrush



THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY: The train I missed at Portrush disappears from my view as it proceeds past the surviving semaphore signal



COMFORTABLE: My diesel train from Portrush towards Belfast

famous Harland and Wolff cranes, and I headed for the customer information desk to get some advice on my next choice of journey option.

Combined rail and sail tickets offer some enormous savings compared to buying tickets separately, but I found the online search options are a bit of a nightmare. The ferry companies’ websites redirect you towards thetrainline.com which seems to have a bit of a problem with crossing the Irish Sea. You choose your starting station and destination, time, etc and it comes up with an error message saying “ticket not available – please refine your search” which is spectacularly unhelpful.

Is the ferry not running? Has that crossing sold out? Is the ferry’s system down? Engineering works? I felt I had to talk to a human at a ferry company. The adviser at Belfast suggested the Stena ferry to Liverpool which is what I was leaning towards. It is a long

overnight ferry compared to the others, so I could sleep on the ferry rather than ending up stranded at a railway station in the small hours.

I don’t mind a bit of a walk, but the ferry terminal is four and a half miles from the railway station so I needed to get a bus. There is a bus. Just the one. It was scheduled to run about four hours later, and despite Belfast’s new Grand Central Station supposedly being an integrated transport hub with plenty of bus stops, the bus does not run from the railway station.

So I had to find the bus stop about 10 minutes walk away, then find a way to kill four hours. I found a touristy bar, made some new friends, sank a pint or three, then went to get my bus. It arrived on time, I tapped in with my debit card (£2.30) and a few minutes later the bus dropped me right next to the ferry terminal.

I asked at reception “Can I get to Liverpool?”

“Yes” (so not sold out, then, phew!)

“Can I get a combined rail sail ticket?”

“No, we do not do them” (thanks for letting me know that, trainline).

“Can I get a bed?”

“No, we are sold out”.

Damn. It was now 1900, and I did not have the time or energy to reconsider my route options, so I resigned myself to an uncomfortable night, which is what I got.

I was able to find a bench seat to lie on, but it became incredibly cold in the night, despite being a heatwave and me wearing two jumpers. The guy next to me came toolled up with a sleeping bag and a pillow. He told me he did it twice a week. I’ll settle for once in a lifetime.

At Birkenhead, all us foot passengers were bussed from the ferry to the terminal, and after passing through security, the same bus took us to Hamilton Square station on the Merseyrail network, free of charge.

I had never been to Liverpool before, but I was not in the mood to visit Penny Lane or the Cavern Club. I just wanted to get home.

The underground train delivered me efficiently to Lime Street, and I thought the best route would be to go via Birmingham New Street, but I wanted to confirm this at the information desk. I was right, but there was an alternative via Wales, slower but quite a lot cheaper.

Connections that worked

I might have been tempted, but on this occasion I was not paying, so Birmingham it was. The 0808 West Midlands Trains service arrived on time in New Street at 0948, then the 1012 CrossCountry got into Temple Meads at 1139, a few minutes late but still OK for me to catch one more local train to get me close to my front door.

Overall the journey took me a smidge under 24 hours, and cost about £200 with a railcard. This was undoubtedly much slower than flying. I probably would have been home within seven or eight hours overall, and one can hardly blame anyone for choosing to take the aeroplane.

Price comparisons are a bit harder, because airlines use dynamic pricing, meaning that the fare can fluctuate wildly, but flying would probably have been cheaper too. An Irish Sea tunnel would probably halve the overall journey time and make rail competitive with air, but I think we are all going to have to wait a long time for that.

Much to my annoyance, after I got home I noticed a message I had missed from a friend in Dublin. I could have spent the evening there and made the rest of the journey the next day, which would have been more pleasant.

Pictures: Bruce Williamson

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Progress on fares

Two big changes are coming into effect on ScotRail. Peak fares have been abolished for good, after being removed for a trial but reinstated with the claim that there had not been enough of an increase in passengers. The trial was undermined by industrial action during this period. The latest news is very welcome, and removing uncertainty should result in an increase in passengers throughout the network.

Jane Ann Liston



Secondly, the last remnants of Covid measures have gone, with alcohol consumption now being permitted again on trains and drinks available to purchase on board. It has been suggested that the ban on alcohol had contributed to a fall in passenger numbers on some routes, so it will be interesting to see if they now pick up.

Glasgow Queen Street renewed

The renewal of one of Scotland's busiest stations is due to be completed, several years after the main works were finished. More shops, at present sadly lacking on the Glasgow Queen Street concourse, will be appearing which passengers will doubtless welcome. They would also welcome the removal of the 50p charge to use the station toilets, to bring them in line with the likes of nearby Glasgow Central and other major ScotRail stations such as Dundee. Is it too much to hope that this inconvenient and archaic charge will also be removed?

Carry on campaigning

Meanwhile, campaigning for rail expansion continues throughout Scotland. The Campaign for North

East Rail announced that a new line to Fraserburgh and Peterhead should be the next enhancement, claiming its circumstances compared favourably with the current Borders line to Tweedbank. At the other end of the country, a series in *The Herald* spotlighting Dumfries and Galloway examined the case for restoring the railway from Dumfries to Stranraer and Cairnryan, as an alternative to dualling the A75.

Railfuture Scotland, described as an influential think-tank, was quoted as saying: "For the sake of the economy and wellbeing of the south west, restoration of the Galloway line is long overdue and is the only rational way to deal with the excessive traffic on the A75. "Anything else would be flying in the face of all current thinking on how to tackle climate change." However, the Scottish Government decided not to pursue this solution, due to "cost, environmental concerns and a shift in focus towards decarbonisation and urban connectivity". A rail line would offer a more environmentally friendly mode of travel, a shift from road to rail would certainly lead to decarbonisation, and joining Dumfries with the Loch Ryan ports would definitely improve "urban connectivity". So this dismissal of the rail solution seems strange.

Greens back Fife rail boost

Mark Ruskell MSP is updating the Scottish Greens *Breaking the Circle* report on Fife railways. Published in 2018, the proposals included extending the line from Alloa to Dunfermline, the Levenmouth branch, stations at Newburgh, Halbeath and Wormit and a line to St Andrews.

As Transport Scotland has still not responded formally to the St Andrews Detailed Options Appraisal submitted 18 months



Picture: Network Rail

Spades were formally pressed into the ground in July, to start work on an £18 million station at Balgray in the south of Barrhead on the Glasgow-Neilston line. Funding is coming from both UK and Scottish governments. The new station, opening next year, will give Barrhead commuters another route into Glasgow city centre while also improving access to the Dams to Darnley Country Park and Balgray reservoir.

The picture shows, left to right, Craig Lafferty of Story Contracting, Network Rail's Margaret Gibb and Jeremy Spence, with Caitriona McAuley and Michaela Sullivan of East Renfrewshire Council

ago, it is possible that this report will be published before StARLink has received the promised details of the "next steps".

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CRAG (Capital Rail Action Group)
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London & South East

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New approach

I was appointed chair of Railfuture London & South East at the branch's AGM in April. It follows several years of the position being vacant. Following the AGM, committee members have been reviewing activities. Six divisions have now become five, with the absorption of Eastern Division into London Metro Division. Newsletter editor Roger Blake has passed on the baton, having edited *raile* since 2010 and *inter raile* since 2018. The newsletter will evolve with contributions expected in future from each of the divisions.



Richard Bowry

The branch has also begun a review of its campaigning approach and how to combine branch and division activity.

Recent action

Our campaigning recently has included submissions relating to the Liverpool Street station redevelopment and the extension of the Docklands Light Railway to Thamesmead. Another gave our views on the Mayor's *New London Plan*. We have also responded to a local authority's rail and freight strategy and attended stakeholder meetings with train operators, including Southeastern (as was), Govia Thameslink Railway and Great Western Railway. We are working hard to maintain good relationships with rail user groups, and have recently attended meetings organised by four of

them. We are approaching those not affiliated to us, in an attempt to persuade them to join Railfuture. We have also participated in community rail partnership meetings, in which Railfuture members already have a role.

Government spending review

The government's June spending review was not particularly kind to the south east of England, although it appears funding will be found for the extension of the Docklands Light Railway to Thamesmead.

Hope for Ebbsfleet and Ashford

There is new hope of some cross-channel rail services calling in Kent (Ebbsfleet International and/or Ashford International), following a number of open access operators expressing keen interest in competing with Eurostar, the

current monopoly operator. Some have expressed interest in Kent stops, and this may prompt Eurostar to rethink the continuation of its "temporary" suspension of such stops in 2020 because of Covid. Five years later, action is needed. A decision on the availability of space at the Eurostar Temple Mills Depot is imminent, which could be the determining factor as to whether new open access operators pursue their interest.

All change for train operators

Operationally, the passenger services of South Western Railway were nationalised on 25 May and c2c on 20 July. Greater Anglia is next in line for 12 October 2025.

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

Chair's column by Chris Page

Spending review

The long-awaited outcome of the Treasury review of rail projects was drip fed in a series of government announcements, not just in chancellor Rachel Reeves' comprehensive spending review. There was good news, disappointments, still some unknowns – and some clues to government priorities and attitudes to rail.

The trailer

On 4 June, the chancellor announced £15.6 billion for local transport projects in England's city regions – including new light rail lines in West Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, Manchester, West Midlands and possibly Bristol. This is a significant amount and a vote of confidence in rail from the government. The key threads here are the government's recognition that light rail delivers greater "bang for bucks" in terms of economic benefit and shift from car to public transport and the government's commitment to supporting the mayoral authorities. As explained in Ian Brown's article on page 4, light rail is no longer the poor cousin in the UK: these projects will provide opportunities for UK train builders, while the shallower track form of Very Light Rail as trialled in Coventry offers significant savings in construction. Taken with the potential for heavy rail services to be devolved, Railfuture will be looking for light and heavy rail services to become part of an integrated public transport network, with integrated ticketing, in each of the mayoral authority areas. Mayors are important stakeholders for Railfuture to influence.

The main feature

The focus of the spending review on 10 June was on housing and health, but unusually the chancellor recognised that capital spending on transport, particularly railways, was essential, especially if new housing projects were to be sustainable. Overall, Department for Transport funding for transport operation reduces by 5%, on the basis of lower franchise subsidies as traffic recovers from Covid and an expectation that Great British Railways will cost less. Network Rail is making tactical efficiency gains and operators are now managed on subsidy not cost. However, GBR must create a customer-focused culture giving freedom to professional railway managers to make decisions that deliver increased traffic with a better commercial return and a seven-day service. A minimum level of funding is provided for HS2, enabling a slimmed-down Euston station but not removing the bottleneck at Handsacre – an example of limiting the rate of spend to save borrowing costs. As a minimum, HS2 must go to Crewe. Continuing funding is included for East West Rail and the TransPennine Route Upgrade. Despite being renamed Northern Powerhouse Rail, the latter will be a good scheme if plans are implemented to extend via Manchester Airport to Liverpool and address rail congestion in Manchester. New

funding is allocated for the Midlands Rail Hub and a Leeds station capacity upgrade. The £22 billion four-year funding settlement for Transport for London will allow it to run its services and to upgrade the Piccadilly line with new trains but not new signalling, thus limiting its capacity. There will be new trains for the Docklands Light Railway, and the door is opened to talks on new Bakerloo line trains. However, the three capital investment rail schemes proposed by TfL are not funded: the DLR extension to Thamesmead (even though it is needed for the housing there which has been funded), the Bakerloo line to Lewisham and the West London Overground project. The government focus on urban rail schemes aligns with the government's housing growth priority.

The credits

The detailed outcome of the Treasury's project review arrived six years late in the rail enhancements project pipeline announcement on 8 July. The previous rail network enhancements pipeline, published in 2018, was intended to be updated annually but this never happened. New stations at Wellington, Cullompton and Haxby will proceed, as will reopening the line to Portishead. There is more funding to complete the over-running Botley Road scheme at Oxford, and for performance and capacity schemes on the East and West Coast main lines.

However, there is no mention of improvements at Ely and Haughley, needed to increase freight traffic from the port at Felixstowe. There seems to be funding where there is either a government priority or no choice, but not where the benefit is substantial but spread widely. If the government is not convinced of the need for modal shift, perhaps some funding from the owner, Hutchinson Ports, would help?

The critics

Rail minister Lord Henty and Alex Hynes (director general for rail services at the DfT) came under fire from the Commons transport committee for pausing Midland main line electrification north of Wigston and resilience of the main line at Dawlish. Bimode trains and the high price of electricity weaken the business case for electrification. This is disappointing, but the government has learnt from the experience of trying to implement too much electrification at the same time than skilled resources can manage. A pipeline of incremental electrification schemes is needed to build skills and reduce costs before HS2 and light rail schemes are ready to go.

Our campaigns need to have a business case, at least in outline. In the autumn budget, we will look for evidence of government commitment to modal shift and to reduction in electricity prices as more electricity comes from renewable sources.

www.railfuture.org.uk/campaigns



railwatch

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Plane stupid approach to climate change

By Ray King

The government is backing colossal expansion of airports and flying that will smash hopes of achieving its pledges on carbon pollution – in defiance of public opinion.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander could look for better examples of political behaviour on mainland Europe.

France has banned domestic flights where trains can do the journey better. Germany has also encouraged replacing flights with high speed trains.

The UK government, however, seems intent on implementing dangerous policies despite being given excellent advice from its own Climate Change Committee, which says airport expansion will breach UK carbon budgets for net zero emissions by 2050.

More than 60% of the public agree that airport expansion is the wrong priority. Half the population does not fly in any year yet the government's mood music is all pro-flying, says Polly Toynbee of *The Guardian*.

The government should ban private jets (which are 30 times more polluting than standard flights) and frequent flyer bonuses.

Imposing a levy on frequent flyers (six or more flights a year) could help to make things fairer for everyone by raising £6 billion and cutting carbon dioxide by 30%, says the New Economics Foundation in a new report called *Flying Fair*.

Yet the government is currently overseeing a transport system where a return ticket from London to Edinburgh by air can cost £60, compared to an LNER return which can cost £182.

Flying Fair calls on the government to develop a tax system which balances competing objectives and varying levels of priority need for air travel.

It says the public understands the climate imperative and is open to the price of flying rising, but the public also wants infrequent travel and the family holiday to be protected from blunt tax measures.

The aviation industry itself and its



Picture: HS2

HS2's 'last mile' viaducts into Birmingham

This is just one of five viaducts which are needed to carry HS2 over its last mile into Curzon Street station at Birmingham

The 1,631-tonne steel bridge was moved into place over Lawley Middleway, part of the city's ring road, in August. Parts of the other four viaducts on the approach to Curzon Street can be seen in the background.

To minimise disruption to road users, the huge span was moved during night-time road closures. The steel span was constructed on land next to Digbeth Canal over the past two years. Despite the political wrangling over the project, construction continues

across 140 miles of route, with over 33,000 people now working on the programme. The longest tunnel (10 miles under the Chilterns) and the shortest (Long Itchington Wood) are both structurally complete.

The second bore of the Bromford tunnel in Birmingham is expected to be complete later this year. Next year, machines will launch on their final tunnel bore towards London Euston.

If politicians get their act together so that HS2 is extended to serve Manchester Airport, there will be no need for the disastrous expansion of London Heathrow Airport which the government is mistakenly toying with.

heaviest users should shoulder the lion's share of the transition cost by:

Increasing emissions charges on EU routes so they align with the government's Jet Zero strategy.

Levying a carbon tax on non-EU routes to enforce the "polluter pays" principle and eliminate the imbalance between EU and non-EU travel incentives.

Increasing charges on luxury travel to correct the incredibly low proportional ticket taxes applied on the most damaging forms of travel.

Offering a "first-flight" discount to all UK residents to protect the family holiday. With this approach,

the price of a UK resident's first short-haul flight of the year need not increase.

Implementing a new charge on the tax return of ultra-frequent flyers taking six or more flights per year to encourage sustainable choices from extreme emitters.

The newly nationalised rail industry could be given "rules of engagement" to dissuade people from travelling by air.

Railfuture chair Chris Page has asked the government to clarify what Great British Railways should be aiming to achieve.

New roads under fire

The Transport Action Network has appealed to Labour Party members to prepare constituency party motions at the Labour conference in Liverpool at the end of September calling for a halt to damaging road building.

TAN, led by Chris Todd, said the government used the June spending review to greenlight as many road schemes as it could, regardless of cost and value for money. TAN said the government seems to have been captured by right-wing think-tanks, funded by vested interests, egging it on to

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build anything, everywhere, all at once, with little or no thought as to whether it makes any sense.

Professor Greg Marsden of Leeds University has called for investment in active travel as a way to reduce transport emissions. He believes action on modal shift is woefully inadequate.

The government has failed to approve many low cost and high value rail schemes, such as Ely Junction which has a benefit-cost ratio of 4.89, far higher than any of the roads waded through. By contrast, roads generally muster an average BCR of only 1.8.

Railfuture in the News

A busy week after July's inflation figures were released in August made the media very keen to hear Railfuture's point of view, writes Bruce Williamson. We were quoted on the front page of The Metro as well as making it into The Independent, The Guardian, Daily Mail, London Evening Standard and The Sun, and were interviewed on LBC News. The Guardian interviewed us again on the same subject three days later. By the end of the week, Railfuture had been in the news every day, and on 23 August two different Railfuture representatives were interviewed for Breakfast on BBC One, this time talking about CrossCountry strikes, with our quotes being used on news bulletins throughout the day on TV and on BBC Radio 4. All this and more, as always, on our web page Railfuture in the News.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture-in-the-news

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