

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture: STUART WALKER/AVANT WEST COAST

Bimode magic

New technology meets historic infrastructure:

A bimode Evero train emerges from Blea Moor tunnel on the Settle-Carlisle line. Trains can now be diverted over the non-electrified S&C from the West Coast main line during engineering work

More information:
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Also inside: Christian Wolmar's advice to campaigners • Northumberland Line success
Ian Brown on all-new BR • Fares revolt • Edinburgh tram-trains • Minster line • Esk Valley anger

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World Cup win for Northumberland Line

Northumberland County Council



ANOTHER NEW STATION: Children from *The Dales School* helped at the opening of the new *Blyth Bebside* station with, left to right, *Northumberland Councillor Denise Nicholson*, *Northumberland County Council deputy leader Richard Wearmouth*, MP *Ian Lavery*, *Northumberland Line programme manager Neil Blagburn* and *Northumberland County Council chairman John Ace Benyon*

The newly opened Northumberland Line chalked up two new successes in October. Blyth Bebside, the fourth new station on the line, opened and Ashington station, which reopened last year, was named "Britain's most life-changing station", with more than 24,000 people voting in a contest run by the Rail Delivery Group.

Ashington stood out for its remarkable comeback after a 60-year hiatus, transforming local travel by connecting residents to work, education, family and friends. Its reopening has helped drive regeneration and new opportunities.

"As we celebrate 200 years of rail history, Ashington shows how investing in stations can transform lives – linking people to opportunity,



CELEBRATION (left to right): *Ashington community member Bryan Shotton*, *Ashington town councillor Paul Wright*, *Northumberland County Council rail officer Mark Ellis*, *Northern's programme manager Paul Henry*, *station manager Andy Harmieson*, *Northumberland County Councillor Caroline Susan Ball*, *conductor manager Dan Holmes*, *Northumberland County Council deputy leader Richard Wearmouth*, *historian Alice Loxton*, *historian and TV presenter Tim Dunn*

pride, and possibility," said Jacqueline Starr of the Rail Delivery Group. "It is a brilliant example of how the railway continues to change Britain for the better."

Tricia Williams, Northern's managing director, said: "I am delighted, as it shows that Ashington is having such a positive impact on people's lives after being open for less than a year."

Rail minister Lord Peter Hendy said: "Stations are the beating heart of our railway network, linking communities from coast to coast and making travel seamless and accessible for millions of people every day."

Keep on running to improve our campaigning

Every rail campaigner knows that it is rare to achieve overnight success. Sensible suggestions for expanding the network or improving services are sometimes met with indifference or opposition. But with grit and determination, much can be achieved, as Railfuture has shown many times over the years. Here Railfuture president Christian Wolmar takes a wider look, showing us all how we can shape up for a healthier rail future.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

This is a bit of a cheek, but we need to talk about health. Because, actually, we all need to work to stay fit enough to ensure we can keep on campaigning.

When I speak at railway meetings across the country, I am struck by the fact that many of those attending have mobility issues. And while some are obviously suffering from ailments, quite a few are perfectly healthy. They are just not moving enough.

I will put my cards on the table. I am a bit of a fitness freak. At 76, I am very lucky still to be able to run weekly five kilometre parkruns and even a half marathon every year. I am helped by the fact that I have

been blessed with good genes. My father was Russian, my mother Swedish, both coming from largely peasant societies in the 19th century where fitness was a prerequisite for survival.

I have been fortunate, too, in not catching any nasty lurgies, though I have been through a cancer treatment that appears successful. But it is not all luck. In my fifties, I decided that my cycle commuting and my cricket matches were not enough to stop my girth from expanding. I took up running, starting with exhausting 1,000 metre runs up Parliament Hill in north London followed by a big bacon and eggs breakfast at the café. It took a while, but then I got the bug, running three times every week with my friend Liam, my daughter and her dog, mostly over Hampstead Heath.

I used to have a bad back which required regular appointments with the osteopath. Those symptoms disappeared within weeks, and so did some of that excess fat. I could undoubtedly lose more but pints, buns and curries

make life worth living. My cycling is important too. I use a bike to get around London, to business meetings or to the tennis club, which means I cycle a good 30-40 miles per week, without ever breaking sweat. Just ambling along. Yes, we all have lots of excuses. Bad knees, stiff back, warm bed, rainy weather, being busy, and so on. But actually

getting out there and getting active is not a choice for us oldies. It is essential. If you cannot run, most of us can walk to some extent, and if that is too difficult there are things you can do from a sitting position. Rowing or swimming are options. Getting a punchball can help you express your anger at those politicians who fail to

understand the value of what we are doing. Of course I have to emphasise my good fortune. Not everyone has good knees, a functioning ticker and an efficient digestive system. Some of you may simply not be able to do exercise and that is fine. But many more could. The most important thing is to keep moving. I reckon TV remote controls have killed more people

than the 14th century Black Death. So have bungalows, as stairs are a great form of exercise. The longest living groups of people live in hilly streets.

You can start slowly as I did, perhaps using the excellent free "Couch to 5K" NHS programme available online. Or you can simply start walking on trips to the shops instead of driving, or get that rusty bike out of the garage.

The big upside to being fit is that you can eat much more. You may have seen me scoff biscuits or down pints at the pub. I have stayed the same weight since losing the excess when I started running more than 20 years ago.

Railfuture needs fit and active campaigners. Yes, we need new blood but we should also ensure that the old blood keeps flowing. So put away the remote control, turn off the TV and get out there. Perhaps get a dog!

Rant over, but if I have persuaded one of you to get out more, it will have been worthwhile. And I am ready for the flak.

■ For a signed copy of my book, *The Liberation Line*, the story of the railwaymen who rebuilt the railways in Europe after D Day, email me christian.wolmar@gmail.com and I will provide bank details, or you can order through Amazon.



Christian Wolmar

The all-new (Great) British Railways



Ian Brown argues that it is high time to get on with implementing Great British Railways – and abolish the stupid word “Great” in its title



Remember the Rail Review?

Keith Williams’ Rail Review was commissioned in May 2018, triggered by new timetable chaos particularly on Thameslink and Northern at the time.

Four years later, Mr Williams concluded that the railways were too fragmented, too complicated, too expensive to run and that there was no single accountable body to take responsibility.

Railfuture members are keenly aware of this and have been all along. So was the industry itself, though given the contractual money-go-round not everybody in the industry was keen to recognise this. Many voices advised caution. Let’s get it right by doing it slowly, they said. The cash cow was to be milked as long as possible.

In January this year, the government’s consultation on the Railways Bill outlined plans to set up Great British Railways as an arm’s length body, responsible for rail services and infrastructure. Railfuture responded to this consultation:

[Railfuture GBR Consultation response April 2025.pdf](#)

The Railways Bill

In May, the government announced that Great British Railways would be created around 12 months after legislation was passed:

“GBR will end years of fragmentation and will have a relentless focus on driving up standards, including simpler fares and ticketing. It will have the independence and tools to deliver improvements to rail services and plan and run the railway on a long term basis in the interests of its passenger and freight customers and taxpayers.

“Instead of having 14 separate train operators, passengers will once again simply be using ‘the railway’. They will travel on GBR trains running on GBR tracks – all run by a single body focused on their interests. This will mean fewer delays, a better experience, and a



Picture: ANDREW BUTCHER

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT AT CLAPHAM JUNCTION: South West Trains disappeared into the history books when First/MTR took over from Stagecoach in 2017. In May this year, South Western Railway transferred into public ownership under DFT Operator Ltd which now owns seven train operators. DFTO will take over West Midlands Trains next year and is expected to assume control of Avanti and CrossCountry by 2027



Picture: WIKIPEDIA

PITLOCHRY: ScotRail has been in the public sector since 1 April 2022, reporting to Transport Scotland, an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Its initiative to remove peak fares was a major success and a good result of devolution. These InterCity 125 trains, which date back to the 1970s, are to be replaced by Meridian class 222 trains dating from 2003 and ‘cascaded’ from England. The big test for the future will be investing in new bimode trains for the ScotRail network. The procurement process has started

timetable that better serves their needs.”

The Railways Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 5 November so we are looking at the start of 2027 before it is implemented. The benefits quoted in official spin will come only if the organisation is set up properly with the right people and the right financial incentives.

Railfuture finds it worrying that so many politicians, and indeed the railway press, think that the job will be done when the legislation is in

place. It will not. This is enabling legislation – an important first step. Then the real work starts.

Transfers to the public sector

In the meantime the government has launched its rail public ownership programme, making an announcement that services will transfer to public ownership upon contract termination, either after an intermediate break clause or at contract renewal, or if a contract defaults. The Department for Transport will not be buying out contracts or forcing transfers to the

public sector using the legislation. The first English transfer was South West Trains on 25 May, followed by c2c on 20 July, then Greater Anglia on 12 October. West Midlands Trains will follow on 1 February and GTR on 31 May, with Chiltern Railways and Great Western Railway following before the end of 2026.

Four operators – Northern, LNER, TransPennine Express, and Southeastern – were already in the public sector. Given contract

[Turn to page 4](#)

On track for a Great Railway future?

From page 3

renewal dates the whole transfer process should be complete by the end of 2027.

When a franchise changes hands following a competition, the staff transfer across with the same conditions under the Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations. The management changes though.

However, in most of the current transfers, the existing management team has carried on. This differs from when franchises changed hands in the privatisation era.

It is not surprising then that services have, so far, carried on much as before. Station signing brands may have disappeared but the trains remain for now as if nothing has happened.

These former DfT franchises (now direct contracts) will transfer to a new state-owned operating company which will be a subsidiary of DfT Operator Ltd. The service providers will gently mutate into public sector operators.

Scotland and Wales

Scotland already has a devolved rail service operator. What is planned for Wales is more tricky given the fact that the Marches line connects up the north, central and south Wales networks. Joint governance arrangements will be required for the Marches route so services interact efficiently. A partnership memorandum of understanding will be developed between GBR and Transport for Wales for the Welsh Marches area.

Freight services

Privately operated open access freight services are a success story and the current arrangements must not be wrecked by these new arrangements. Rail freight is network-wide and needs to be planned as such. Railfuture contends that more government effort is needed to promote modal transfer from road to rail and to ensure investment in the network is enough to facilitate rail freight growth. We are concerned that GBR needs to focus more on freight, as well as boosting the government's own (frankly modest) freight growth target. It is Great British Railways, not just Great British Passenger Railway.

Network Rail

GBR will take over most of the railway, replacing Network Rail and individual passenger operators. Network Rail



POSITIVE FUTURE: A new tram-train on a test run at Waun-Gron Park in November. Transport for Wales started off badly as a devolved operator in terms of operational quality but has invested heavily in new trains as well as electrification of the Welsh Valley lines. Things are now improving so Wales, like Scotland, should be a good example of how devolution can bring improved rail services. The new electric tram-train network focused on Cardiff and the Welsh Valleys will be a game changer, directly responding to Welsh Government aspirations for wide-reaching reform of rail services

Picture: IAN BROWN



Rail freight needs the confidence to invest in new technology such as GBRF's new bimode electric locomotive to improve both efficiency and service quality. The class 99, pictured at Innotrans, Berlin, in 2024, not only provides 'last mile' capability but can operate in main line service in either electric or diesel mode. One of the first UK workings was from Wellingborough to South Wales, illustrating the network potential of these locomotives

currently maintains the railway, operates the signalling and control systems, provides train planning, runs the major stations and, importantly, undertakes major projects to upgrade the railway to provide more capacity.

The wording suggests GBR is completely new, not a rebadged Network Rail. However, the government would be wise to build on the strengths of the Network Rail organisation and its operational project delivery safety regime, albeit along specific regional routes aligned to principal train services.

Current operational safety arrangements must be respected,

but there is more to be done on personal safety for staff and customers.

Implementation

So we have the principles and we should have the enabling legislation in place by the end of next year. It is not as clear as it should be how investment will come into the industry in a less haphazard way, with the aim of promoting efficiency of project delivery which is essential for electrification schemes and capacity upgrades.

We are only at the starting grid on implementation.

These are the six key questions Railfuture will be asking:

- 1 Will the spin on the customer interface be followed up by an organisation focused on customer needs? We will need evidence.
- 2 Is there anything in the plans which will actually deliver a coherent, flexible and value for money fares system?
- 3 How will the structure actually improve operational service quality both for passengers and for freight customers?
- 4 Will the industry be equipped to invest in efficiency and improved relations with rail staff and trade unions?
- 5 Will devolution be truly part of the plan, so allowing devolved authorities to participate and invest in the future of the railways and indeed make informed choices between modes? How will devolved structures in GBR align with devolved mayoral strategic authorities?
- 6 Will there be a secure industry funding stream to ensure service delivery and investment in future growth?

We have our work cut out over the next year but Railfuture, given its nationwide coverage through our branches and our group contacts, has every opportunity to ensure these questions are addressed. We intend to campaign to ensure the resulting railway does indeed live up to the government spin and deliver a bigger better railway.

■ Ian Brown CBE FCIL is Railfuture policy director

Picture: JULIAN LANGSTON

Campaign success as more stations set to open

By Roger Blake

Successful campaigning often comes down to long-term personal commitment.

That personal commitment was clear in the reopening success of the Northumberland Line.

Much of the credit must go to Dennis Fancett of the Railfuture-affiliated South East Northumberland Rail User Group.

He could look with pride as Blyth Bebside, the fourth of six new stations on the line, opened in October. He played a central role in advocating the socio-economic benefits of reopening.

Blyth Bebside (see page 2 of this *Railwatch*) followed the opening in December 2024 of Seaton Delaval and Ashington and then Newsham in March.

Work continues on Bedlington and Northumberland Park.

Further south, campaigning by Railfuture Thames Valley (see page 20) has also paid off.

In October, government funding towards restoring passenger services along part of another long-standing freight line (the Cowley branch in Oxford) was confirmed.

The announcement came almost 11 years since Chiltern Railways ran a demonstration train along the line to a temporary scaffolding platform near Cowley. Local authorities, the rail industry and members of our Thames Valley regional branch



The announcement of government backing for reopening the Cowley branch was made at Oxford Parkway station in October. The Ellison Institute of Technology is contributing up to £35million for the new Littlemore station which will serve its new campus now under construction. The two new stations will be called Cowley and Littlemore.

Among those in the picture are, left to right: Lord Hendy, Oxford East MP Anneliese Dodds, Treasury chief secretary James Murray, Ellison Institute's Lisa Flashner, Oxford City Council leader Susan Brown and Network Rail's Marcus Jones

joined forces in advocating the economic benefits for Oxford.

October also saw the opening of the new Beaulieu Park station in Chelmsford on the Great Eastern main line (see back page).

Railfuture has similar aspirations elsewhere. We await news on the strategic outline business case commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council for Grove and Wantage parkway station on the

Great Western main line.

In the past few months, Railfuture has been advocating rail development throughout the country.

We responded to:

- Oxfordshire County Council's consultation for OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail

- The local transport plan for Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

- The local transport plan for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority

- The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere draft strategy for 2025-35

What makes rail's case convincing?

Blyth Bebside was pushed up the agenda through Northumberland County Council.

Cowley was pushed up the agenda by Oxfordshire county and Oxford city councils.

Beaulieu Park was achieved by Essex County Council playing a dynamic leading role.

In each case the railway is an enabler of economic growth with jobs and homes. The railway also provides sustainable transport capacity, connectivity and choice in the face of unsustainable congestion, car-dependency and carbon emissions.

In England, local councils are being reorganised into two-tier areas, with devolution from central government to sub-regional government which will have strategic planning powers.

On the railway, infrastructure and train operations are being brought together with the proposed creation of Great British Railways.

Railfuture's local campaigning members will have to realign with the new institutions, their people and policies.

- Roger Blake is Railfuture's director for infrastructure and networks

East Midlands

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Mini-conference

A joint meeting of the East Midlands, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire branches of Railfuture was held on 4 October at Nottingham Central Library. Carew Satchwell, head of rail strategy at the East Midlands Combined County Authority, talked about "Mayoral combined authorities working to improve rail services". Carew highlighted the realities of working within a political environment, plus the new mayoral authority's role in influencing rather than controlling rail services in the region. The authority is building the necessary relationships with industry and other organisations including train operators and the neighbouring combined authorities. Railfuture president Christian Wolmar gave an online presentation, asking: "Will GBR be great?" Though the parliamentary process for setting up GBR will take a while, much is going on behind the scenes to reintegrate the railway. An



Anthony Kay

important change will be the absorption of Department for Transport staff into the operating railway as monitoring of train operator contracts is replaced by direct operation.

Railfuture East Midlands committee member Stephen Chaytow spoke on "improving cross-boundary rail services between the East Midlands and Yorkshire". He outlined the work of the East Midlands and Yorkshire branches' cross-boundary team in identifying opportunities to develop inter-regional services. It is important for Railfuture and others to understand the way the political wind is blowing, especially as the new combined authorities and mayors gain experience and influence. Lively Q&A sessions followed each presentation, and it was clear there are great opportunities for Railfuture branches to work together to pursue rail improvements.

The meeting was preceded by a visit to the Nottingham tram depot and control centre. The depot maintains the trams, which are of two different types, and is the base from which the infrastructure is maintained. The control room looks

after day-to-day running, plus management of incidents and special events. We are grateful to Nottingham Express Transport for showing us around and answering a wide range of questions.

Belper and Clay Cross

Railfuture and Friends of the Derwent Valley Line have jointly submitted questions to the transport and digital connectivity committee of the East Midlands combined authority about improving rail connections at Belper and opening a new station at Clay Cross, a town with a population around 10,000.

Following the report submitted to East Midlands Railway by Railfuture and the Friends arguing for the benefits of providing regular stops at Belper on Midland main line services, the Friends are now surveying residents of Belper and the nearby town of Ripley on their travel habits and experiences, to gather further evidence of the need to provide main line connections from Belper to Chesterfield and Sheffield.

East Midlands community action

East Midlands Railway held its annual community rail and station

adopters conference in Nottingham on 10 October. Railfuture was well represented, with numerous members of the East Midlands and Lincolnshire branches attending as representatives also of several community rail partnerships and station adoption groups. Railfuture also had a publicity stand where groups could promote their work.

As well as a business update from EMR, there were interactive workshop sessions on Remembrance led by The Veterans Charity, and by EMR on community funding and the December timetable changes.

The informal networking was valuable for making and renewing contacts and sharing ideas, as well as flying the Railfuture flag.

Christmas social

Railfuture will hold its Christmas social meeting at the Canalhouse in Nottingham (around 200 metres from Nottingham station) at 1200 noon on Tuesday 9 December. All welcome for informal chat about railway matters and anything else.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/
East+Midlands+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch)
[X @RailfutureEMids](https://twitter.com/RailfutureEMids)

Count to ten – reasons to be angry



By Neil Middleton

There are at least 10 things I do not like about the LNER's "Simpler Fares" trial.

Or perhaps, I should say here are 10 factors Railfuture believes need to be included in any reasonable analysis of the two-year-long trial.

LNER's "Simpler Fares" trial introduced the Flex fare (plus or minus 70 minutes) in February last year and abolished off-peak fares. Initially it covered journeys between King's Cross, Newcastle, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh. The trial has since been extended to include additional stations near to those three stations.

The trial is expected to run for two years, so in the next few months it is likely that managers and politicians will be drawing their own conclusions.

Before rash decisions are taken, Railfuture is raising the following 10 concerns:

1 The fares may be simpler, but the decision making is more complex. If you cannot be certain of the trains you will catch (to within 70 minutes) – both outbound and return – then you cannot be certain of being able to travel at a reasonable price. You might need to pay an expensive Anytime fare (and 70 minute Flex tickets are not always available).

2 For some of us, that decision making is just about price and convenience. For others, factors such as health conditions and caring responsibilities mean that we cannot have a high degree of certainty far enough in advance to take advantage of cheaper Advance and Flex fares.

3 The price to travel at short notice during times when Super Off Peak tickets used to be valid has often increased. The suspicion is that LNER's net income has increased as a direct result of this change. Has it?

4 When I am on an LNER train service (and indeed many long distance services) I see a lot of empty seats with the seat occupancy

indicator showing they are currently reserved. All LNER's cheaper tickets are quota controlled. But I think the data used to determine availability (and lower prices) is not robust enough. I suspect that seats are actually empty on the day, when LNER's systems predict they will be occupied.

5 As I travel on LNER and other operators, I have to understand how each works. They are all different but at least with LNER all the fares are sold on the same web page.

6 The Flex ticket is difficult to buy as most rail retailing sites do not sell it.

7 The proportion of Flex tickets sold is lower than the previous portion of Off Peak. Is LNER losing customers for whom flexibility is essential? It seems to me that a Flex ticket is often priced at more than the old Super Off-Peak ticket.

8 I often hear of services with full Standard class and a relatively empty First Class section. It is frustrating that I cannot get a good price for an upgrade. LNER could have more fare revenue, and I could have a more comfortable journey.

9 Has overcrowding really reduced? It is one of the aims of the trial, but I do not take LNER trains often enough to tell, particularly around 0900 or 1900 on Mondays to Thursdays (when the old off-peak tickets started being valid and overcrowding was common).

10 Given the loss of the most flexible ticket, why can I not swap my ticket to another date, paying a price differential if relevant? LNER could choose to be like easyJet, and not like Ryanair. It is essential that the LNER trial is properly assessed – considering these and other factors before a decision is made on its future – especially as it is could be used as a blueprint for all long distance fares.

To me, a key point that has come to the surface in studying this and exchanging views with other Railfuture passenger group members is that simpler fares should not be about the product the rail industry sells.

Rather, Simpler Fares is all about decision making by passengers. Can they/we make simple choices between services, cost and flexibility and be certain we can travel at an affordable price?

■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture vice-chair



The Scottish Government is being urged to double track and electrify the Highland main line.

In a Scottish Parliament debate, MSPs from different parties united to call for modernisation of the Perth-Inverness line.

Green MSP Ariane Burgess led the debate in October, accusing the government of being stuck in the past, and calling for change.

She said the existing service is slow, overcrowded, and punctuated by annoying stops in passing loops to let other trains go by.

Ms Burgess said: "The evidence is clear that dualling and electrifying the line could cut journey times, improve reliability, and reduce emissions. It would be a game-changer for our Highland communities."

Transport Scotland's 2020 decarbonisation plan identified the line for electrification by 2035, but accepted it might have to be "discontinuous". But the decarbonisation target has been put back to 2045.

Following the completion of the Haymarket to Dalmeny and East Kilbride projects, there are no more electrification works in the pipeline.

Former Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard warned that dualling and electrifying the line was not on the near horizon and asked: "If we can dual roads like the A9, why can we not dual railways like the main line to the Highlands?"

He said a number of stations were unstaffed and Pitlochry and Kingussie were facing cuts to booking office opening hours.

The SNP's Jamie Hepburn said: "The rail line that we are debating is a social and economic lifeline for the Highlands. There have been decades of underinvestment in our railways under previous United Kingdom governments"

Transport secretary Fiona Hyslop said Transport Scotland would publish a "decarbonisation refresh" in due course, setting out plans for further elimination of diesel trains from Scotland's railway.

Friends of the Far North Line has urged people to support the Green initiative for electrification.

Convener Ian Budd said: "If this were done it would bring great benefit to the Far North line for passengers and for transferring freight to the railway."

"The Friends are delighted to hear cross-party support for, and understanding of, the need to bring railways in the Highlands up to the level of capacity, speed and comfort enjoyed elsewhere in Scotland, to address what we refer to as the Highlands railway deficit."

"Although the motion specifically referred to the Highland main line between Perth and Inverness and many of the comments reflected that, mention was made of the other Highlands railway routes, which include the Far North line."

Lottery winners

August: M Adams, G Smith, W Thorne, M Kneen, R White, I Kemp

September: D Saxby, P Sherwood, M Edgell, A McFie, G Smith, I Clatworthy

October: M Groll, D Fleming, R Grainger, W Buttigieg, J Barfield, P Fox

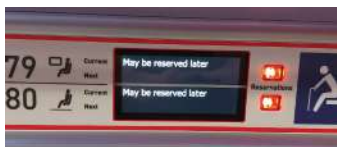
Join the Lottery

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/



LNER's seat occupancy indicator

The Ghost of Marples behind Beeching

By John Barfield

Dr Richard Beeching is often cast as the villain who emasculated Britain's railway by closing 5,000 miles of line and more than 2,000 stations.

The man ultimately responsible though was 1960s minister of transport Ernest Marples, who was accused of being bored by railways but in love with motorways. He was joint founder of the motorway building company Marples Ridgway.

When Marples was minister he often went to sleep in the railway observation coach when he was being shown how the railways could be improved, such was his lack of support for rail.

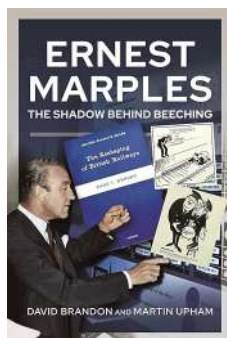
Even as a youth, he had an eye for making money, selling peanuts at the gates of his local football club, according to A J Pearson in his 1964 book *The Railways and the Nation*. Marples later qualified as an accountant and, after setting up Marples Ridgway in 1948 with engineer Reginald Ridgway, he was elected to Parliament and became postmaster general, housing minister and then transport minister.

He proclaimed the first section of Britain's first motorway, the M1, as a magnificent new era, but upset some motorists by introducing breathalysers to combat drunken

driving, and parking meters to tax and tame indiscriminate car parking. Some drivers campaigned to have him sacked, with the slogan "Marples must go". Later the slogan became "Marples goes too far" when he appointed Dr Beeching as chairman of the British Railways Board. Bias was built into the process. The pro-road Railway Conversion

League was consulted on railway policy, while the Transport Users Consultative Committees (which represented rail passengers) were penetrated by members of the automotive industries bent on benefiting from traffic diverted from the closed railways.

The reader of this book is left with the impression that there was no alternative to Dr Beeching's drastic prescriptions, whereas the experience of countries which had different policies at that time such as Switzerland, South Africa and Norway demonstrates that alternatives were available. The Dutch started to re-expand their system from the early 1970s. Network Effects or Wellington's



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Law – the notion that journey opportunities expand exponentially as stations are added to a system – had been recognised since 1887 but were ignored by Beeching. The impression given by contemporary commentators that railways did not matter cleared the way for mass closures and the axe continued to swing. Marples was not the first or last transport minister who made the railways low priority.

Alan Lennox-Boyd, when offered the vital role by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, described it as "a post for a rather unprincipled person". As minister of transport, Lennox-Boyd reprivatised road haulage and abandoned a plan to electrify 2,900 miles of main line. His 1954 rail modernisation plan involved replacing steam with 2,500 diesel locos and was dismissed by economists as the "greatest shopping spree" in history which failed to calculate the return on investment.

By contrast, transport minister Barbara Castle's 1968 act of Parliament was crucial for the railway's prosperity because it introduced the concept of

financially weak railway routes being subsidised if they were socially or economically useful. It even led to some rail reopenings. Her successor, Richard Marsh, committed the unforgivable sin of allowing the Waverley line from Carlisle to Edinburgh to be closed in 1969. He later confessed it had been his biggest mistake.

Environment (and transport) Secretary John Prescott became a high speed rail hero by clearing the way for Eurostar services to London St Pancras, unlocking the potential value of railway land to finance the Channel Tunnel rail link. Mr Prescott brought planning and transport together with the creation of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The DETR was split up after his tenure, and we have not yet come close to a situation where the disciplines are re-united.

■ John Barfield has been a lifelong rail campaigner ever since he joined the *Railway Invigoration Society* and is a former editor of *Railwatch*. He wrote *Fighting for the Railways – a history of the Railway Invigoration Society 1952-1977*. It was written in 1978 but first published on the *Railfuture* website in 2025. It can be found at www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture-history

BOOK REVIEWS BY RICHARD LYSONS

The GWR's Forgotten Main Line to the North

by Robert Hendry

ISBN 978-1-398113954

96pp Amberley Publishing £15.99

With the rail press and, indeed, the national press, full of talk about HS2 and the Northern Powerhouse, it is fascinating to read Robert Hendry's book about a forgotten part of the Great Western Railway's network. This main line to the North through Banbury and Birmingham joined up Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury and Chester to reach the North West. In the introduction, Hendry generously gives credit to the various photographers whose images are used in this book, including his late father, Dr Robert Preston Hendry. Other photographers are both named and described, giving the book an admirably personal flavour.

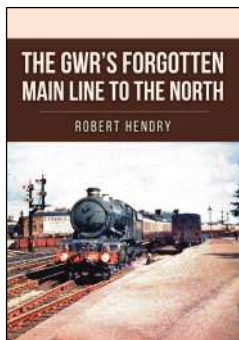
Western Region Rail Scene

by Garry Stroud

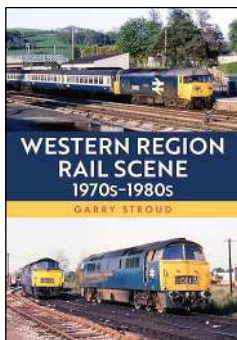
ISBN 978-1-398125216

96pp Amberley Publishing £15.99

Garry Stroud's book is the third in his *Rail Scene* series, following previous books covering Swindon Works and North Wales. The author was based in Swindon, both living and working there, and has been taking photographs for five decades. This book covers the years



from the early 1970s up to the mid-1980s when diesel electric power was taking over from hydraulic traction. The photographs are arranged on a geographical basis starting with the western route to Penzance, north to the Worcester and Hereford area and finishing along the West and South Wales main line. All the images in the book were taken by Stroud and are of a consistently high quality. As the chair of a station friends group, I was struck by how the vast majority of the photographs of stations are free of track-side vegetation, even after the end of the steam era. This also allows the author's images of rolling stock not to be marred by the ever-present buddleia that characterises the present day's railway network!



What Railways Left Behind

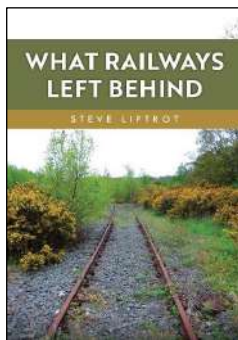
by Steve Liptrot

ISBN 978-1-398125155

96pp Amberley Publishing £15.99

On the other hand, Steve Liptrot's new book, *What Railways Left Behind*, has plenty of vegetation! I have been exploring former railway lines for over half a century, starting with the Wirral Way which was created in 1973 as the first country park in Britain. Hunter Davies' *A Walk Along The Tracks* (1982) was one of the first books about walking disused railway lines.

Inevitably, the name Beeching crops up in the book. *Railwatch* readers know all too well of the doctor's legacy – the closure of over 2,000 railway stations and over 5,000 track miles. Although much of the infrastructure was removed



when railways closed, a sizeable amount was left behind.

In the first part of the book, Liptrot concentrates on Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, where the remnants of coal mining and heavy industry are much in evidence. The book stresses the urgency for us to seek out relics and artefacts "before it is too late and it has all completely disappeared."

I live fairly close to these three counties, but many of the old routes are new to me and tempt me to explore. The author's images are clear and his captions and text are informative and fascinating.

The last third of the book looks at disused lines and stations in parts of France, Spain and the Czech Republic. Liptrot argues that in these three countries, the local communities often celebrate their railway and industrial past in a more overt way. Hopefully, Rail 200 and Rocket All Aboard are raising the profile of Britain's railway past. At the same time we must learn from the past to ensure that the future of rail in Britain serves its communities and not merely the politicians' future memoirs!

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

Rail fare threat

Congratulations to Railfuture's Bruce Williamson for highlighting the prospect of rail fares rising by 5.5% in January, which makes a mockery of the green claims spouted by the government.

The price of railcards was also increased from £30 to £35 in March.

It does not bode well for the Great British Railways future.

Andrew Oldfield, Long Lane,
Worrall, Sheffield S35 0AF

Unfair fare increases

I am pleased that Railfuture is focusing on the unfairness of how rail fares are increasing all the time.

To begin with, not only does the government work on the basis of rail fares going up by 1% more than the inflation rate, it uses a method of calculating the rate of price increases that is not used to work out rises in pensions or benefits, which are based on the consumer price index. Rail fares are linked to the older retail price index, which is normally around 1% higher than the consumer index. So passengers face a double whammy.

What is more, at the same time as rail fares go up, successive chancellors continue to freeze fuel duty for road users, not even restoring the cut that was made during the Covid pandemic.

So public transport users are not getting a level playing field. Bear in mind that the current chancellor, Rachel Reeves, hiked the maximum single bus fare by 50% to £3.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard
Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

High cost of stations

In *Railwatch* 185, I read in horror that the cost of a two-platform station at Cottam near Preston had risen to £55 million. Not unexpectedly, the new station will not be built. Whatever happened to the concept adopted in Greater Manchester in the 1980s of building basic stations to "test the water"? Even allowing for inflation, these stations were built for a mere fraction of the cost of Cottam, probably by a factor of 100, and serve the public to this day.

Cottam, with all its bells and whistles, will serve no one because it will not be built!

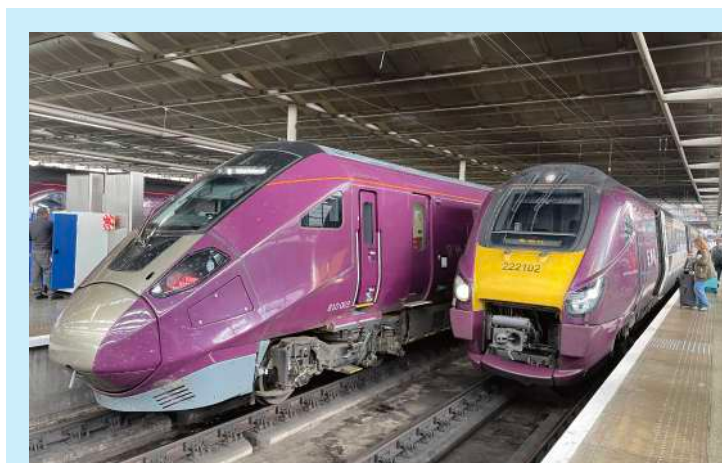
George Boyle, Furness Vale,
Derbyshire SK23 7PU

Simple stations

One idea for a future *Railwatch* issue, might be a breakdown of the cost of a simple railway station, for example:

1 One platform with bus shelter and information display (next train) and help/information point

2 Ticket machine



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE: The new Aurora train, left, and the soon-to-be-displaced Meridian diesel train at St Pancras International station in October
Picture: Railwatch

New dawn on Midland

A new era is dawning on the Midland main line with new trains that can use electric overhead lines, which are now installed almost as far as Leicester.

The new Aurora trains also have diesel engines allowing them to venture beyond the overhead wires to serve Derby, Sheffield and Nottingham.

The Hitachi-built £400 million Aurora fleet is expected to enter passenger service this month and provide 24% more seats than the old trains.

The 33 bimode trains, built in Newton Aycliffe, Co Durham, will take advantage of the £1.5 billion Midland main line upgrade.

The 125 mph Meridians were built by Bombardier in 2004 and replaced the InterCity 125 HSTs. Some of the displaced Meridians are expected to be used on the open-access Stirling-London Euston service, proposed to start next year.

Network Rail says the Midland main line electrification programme was "paused" in July because of the government's spending review.

Transport for the East Midlands, which represents 10 councils, said the decision was very disappointing. It said the Midland main line is now the only mainline route that remains largely non-electrified.

Full electrification is essential to improve inter-city rail services between Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield.

3 Two platforms with no footbridge

4 Two platforms with lifts and a footbridge

It seems a house can be built for a few hundred thousand pounds but a simple station costs over £10 million. Why?

Adrian Carr, Kenilworth,
Warwickshire CV8 1FH

If only...

Two items in the October *Railwatch* highlighted the disadvantages of transport modes being treated separately: a journey from Portrush to Bristol and how best to serve the Morecambe area.

Efforts to make the separate modes work together to benefit passengers are not sufficient. Even today our government has separate ministers for rail, road, shipping and aviation. Investment and safety are treated differently depending on the mode, not to mention taxation. On a recent trip on the continent I

was impressed once again by how often bus stations and tram routes are adjacent to railway stations.

If only road freight paid its full costs for damage caused to the road network. If only road injuries were treated as seriously as those on the rail network. If only airlines paid tax on the vast amount of fuel they used. If only...

David Dixon, Great Corby near
Carlisle

Ludicrous load

I was wondering how many members of Railfuture and readers of *Railwatch* managed to catch recent episodes of *Trucking Heavy* on My5 – Channel 5's catch-up.

My question may seem surprising, but it is relevant to the railway world as it concerns the transfer of rolling stock from Glasgow to Stranraer.

The programmes follow RSS taking a trailer from its base near Sutton Coldfield to Rutherglen depot in

Glasgow to pick up a "rail tamper" unit, presumably for Network Rail, and transporting it to a site in Stranraer.

The journey involves a trip down the A74(M) with a night stop at Gretna Green Services due to expiry of driving time. However, this was extended 24 hours as a result of their police escort along the A75 being involved in a crash which had closed the road to Stranraer.

The truck with the "tamper" unit eventually arrived in a yard in Stranraer but as there was no direct rail connection, as at Rutherglen, a large crane had to be used to hoist the unit off the trailer and over the fence to the adjacent track.

This was delayed because of strong winds. Once this was eventually successfully achieved, the crane had to lift a ScotRail two-car diesel unit (156 495) back over the fence on to the original trailer, plus another one that had arrived from Sutton Coldfield, for both then to subsequently make their way back to Glasgow.

Their troubles began on the slip road off the end of the A75, when they both unsuccessfully attempted to turn left to join the road that would take them to the A74(M) northbound. This blocked all traffic on both the slip road and the B7076. After eventually deciding to turn right instead of left and reversing into the other slip road they eventually managed to get on track for Glasgow.

This obvious farcical situation could easily have been avoided and taken a quarter of the time spent using the road transport, if both the "tamper" and 156 diesel, using their own power or even being towed by a locomotive, had been transferred from and to along the railway direct.

Apart from being probably a lot more economical, it would also have avoided unnecessary large trucks blocking the less than suitable roads along the south of Dumfries and Galloway.

I appreciate that in some cases rolling stock has to be transported by road around the country, especially between heritage railway sites particularly if they have no direct link to the main railway railway network, but this obviously does not apply to the above fiasco.

Terry Sheppard
tel.sheppard11@rocket20.plus.com

Double potential

Eurostar's decision to buy up to 50 double-decker trains is good news, but they will not be the first to operate on the UK rail network. Southern had some.

I lived and went to school in Sidcup. School finished at 1555 but a double decker train from Dartford

to Charing Cross called at Sidcup station (a 10 minute walk from the school) en route to Charing Cross at 1550.

I have happy memories of my friend and I skipping the last lesson of school, avoiding any teachers, to arrive somewhat breathless at Sidcup station, just in time to buy our child returns to Hither Green and sit upstairs on the double decker for a few stops!

Later I put my knowledge of the Dartford lines to good use by persuading Connex to run passenger trains round the Crayford-Slade Green loop. Today that is providing an important link from Sidcup and Bexley to Heathrow Airport via just one change at Abbey Wood, or City Airport with just one change at Woolwich Arsenal. Both were tortuous journeys by rail before.

Let's hope Eurostar's new double deckers will call at Ebbsfleet, thus seeing the return of double deckers to south-east London and Kent once again.

Dennis Fancett
chair@senrug.co.uk

South East Northumberland Rail
User Group – the group that got
the Northumberland Line open

Birmingham must fly

In *Railwatch* 185, it was suggested that if HS2 continued to Manchester Airport there would be no need to expand Heathrow.

I suggest a more logical solution which might well be quicker and cheaper, especially if we accept that for the foreseeable future we are left with no alternative but to make best use of what remains of the much-curtailed high speed project.

We have, at Birmingham, what will become by far the best connected airport in the country, with not one but two major stations serving it.

Expansion at this centrally situated airport has been resisted for years, with local politicians arguing and national politicians showing no interest in any airport outside London.

We are left with a rather small provincial airport which does a great disservice to the nation's second city.

Given that it will be decades before HS2 reaches Manchester – if ever – we must make maximum use of the two major stations which will serve Birmingham Airport. Manchester has shown what huge economic advantage can be gained by having

a major airport. Birmingham should do the same.

Projected travel times from the new Birmingham Interchange station to London are comparable with those from current London airports, and better than from Stansted. We must resist fiercely any temptation to name a new expanded facility London Birmingham Airport! That would be one insult too far!

Tony Millinger, Rugby,
Warwickshire

West Wales link

The two-page article in *Railwatch* 185 about reopening the west Wales rail link from Bangor to Carmarthen represents wishful thinking in the current economic climate. Railfuture Cymru/Wales is,

however, strongly in favour of restoring a conventional rail link between Bangor and Caernarfon, for which there is a strong business case.

Richard Wilcock, chairman,
Railfuture Cymru/Wales
sowerby01@yahoo.co.uk

Rail for Sam's town

While it is good to see Sam Ryder extolling the virtues of travelling by train to the Glastonbury festival (*Railwatch* 185), it is a shame that his home town of Maldon, Essex, is devoid of any train services. This rapidly expanding town once had two railway stations but has not had any for many years. Access by road is via country roads passing through villages and rural areas.

Much more thought should be given by those in government to reinstating rail services to places such as Maldon.

R A Smith, Station Road, Witham,
Essex CM8 2FP

Airport benefits?

Chancellor Rachel Reeves insists airport expansions are essential for the UK's economy. However, when interviewed on the BBC, the first benefit of them she cited was that UK citizens will have more choice of where to go for their holidays. Helping other countries' economies seems bizarre. Maybe we should encourage more staycations.

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Picture: RICHARD GENNIS

£2m facelift for historic Crewe works

Train maker Alstom is carrying out a £2 million investment in its historic repair plant at Crewe Works.

The factory upgrade includes new heating, ventilation and air conditioning, as well as refurbishing offices.

One benefit of the upgrade is a climate-controlled chamber to allow train air conditioning to be checked and refurbished with refrigerant and new parts, at double the rate in the past.

Work is currently under way on air conditioning in class 334, 375, 377, 387 and 390 trains. Next year work will start on classes 222 and 378.

"This expansion not only futureproofs our operations but also enables us to better serve customers across the country with enhanced capacity and capability," said services director Steve Harvey.

"Crewe has played a pivotal role in Britain's rail history and this latest development will ensure it remains at the heart of train maintenance in the UK.

It is a landmark investment in both technology and talent."

Originally opened by the Grand Junction Railway in 1843 to manufacture steam locomotives, Crewe Works was instrumental in the development of the town, with its population growing from 500 in 1841 to more than 40,000 by 1900.

Crewe Works today carries out bogie, wheel and traction motor overhaul. Trains for HS2 will have bogies made at Crewe.

The new air conditioning repair area and offices were opened in October by Rob Whyte, managing director for UK and Ireland, Steve Harvey and project director Steve Hadfield.

Crewe Works featured in a Channel 5 TV programme in November.

Alstom has almost 6,000 employees in the UK and Ireland and has built round 40 % of the UK main line train fleet, as well as entire fleets in service with London Underground and Dublin Luas. Half of all UK rail journeys are made on an Alstom train.

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

tony.smale
@railfuture.org.uk

Cross-boundary services

Rail privatisation in the 1990s brought with it a degree of territorial retrenchment. It became inconvenient to run services that encroached on another operator's network, so we lost a number of useful direct links. However, soon all train operators in the south will be returned to public ownership under the single Great British Railways brand, and we will be arguing for the restoration of some of these direct services.

Southern's Brighton-Southampton trains could once again run on to Bournemouth, and we would like to see a return of South Western's Waterloo-Salisbury-Bristol service. Some trains on Great Western's Reading-Basingstoke shuttle could usefully run on to Salisbury, and this would maintain route knowledge for GWR drivers in the event of disruption on the "Berks and Hants" route to the West Country. There must be many other examples like this around Britain, where direct connections could be restored once the accurate division of fares income is no longer an issue.

Rover prices soar to double the rate of inflation

A railfuture Wessex member has been updating the travel information pages on his village website for several years and was shocked when he looked back at how the price of rail rover tickets had gone up year-on-year. In 2017, the cost of the Freedom of Severn & Solent Rover for any three days in a seven-day period was £46.45 per adult. The cost is now £79.50, a rise of 71%. The Bank of England's figure for price inflation over the same period is just 35%. It would appear that train operators setting rover prices are actively discouraging people from using this kind of ticket.



Tony Smale

julian.langston
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Rail supporter

Senedd Member Sam Rowlands has reassured Railfuture that the Conservatives want to support rail as it enables wealth to be spread across the country.

Sam, a Senedd member for North Wales, regularly travels by train from Chirk to Cardiff, and is the shadow cabinet secretary for finance, transport and infrastructure.

Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury and I met Sam in September as part of our campaign to meet all the main political parties in Wales before the Senedd elections in May. Sam told us Network Rail should not be further devolved in Wales, although much of the Cardiff valleys lines already are. However, although he recognised that Transport for Wales has done some good work, he wants to see more transparency. We discussed electrification of the north and south Wales main lines and agreed that £1 billion, proposed by the Sunak government to wire the north Wales main line, would probably not be enough.

In south Wales, Railfuture's priority is speeding up journeys between Cardiff and Swansea. At the moment, the fastest trains take 51 minutes for the 46-mile journey between the two cities. Railfuture believes selective level crossing upgrading or removal, track improvements to raise very low speed limits around Cardiff Central and Swansea and some judicious realignments would reduce journey times at reasonable cost. Electrification would save further minutes through the enhanced acceleration of electric trains. A 45-minute journey time should be feasible.

Sam said it was important always to estimate the cost of any works, and we argued that for electrification it was important to drive down the costs. This can best be done with a carefully thought-out rolling programme, which allows electrification teams to learn from experience rather than being set up anew for each scheme, as often happens now.

Sam commented that, in assessing which areas and routes had the strongest case for investment, the Treasury traditionally looks at existing passenger volumes. This tends to work against investment in areas with lower populations such as Wales. The formula could be adjusted to include potential passenger numbers in the appraisal.

He asked about Railfuture's stance on freight. We said that improving opportunities for rail freight services often does not cost a lot.

Sam's wish list includes integrated ticketing, and he wondered if a free railcard for under 25s would help to get young people accustomed to travelling by rail. He would also like to explore making travel free for the over-60s on Welsh trains, as it currently is on buses.

Sam does not support major new railways in west Wales, regarding them as unrealistic. We explained the current Railfuture policy that



Senedd Member Sam Rowlands, the shadow minister responsible for transport, holding a copy of Railwatch, between Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury (left) and Julian Langston (right) at the Senedd, Cardiff

rebuilding Bangor-Caernarfon as conventional rail is more important than rebuilding Caernarfon-Afon Wen.

Shortly after the meeting, Sam posted on his Facebook page: "Today I met with Railfuture Wales to discuss new and exciting ideas on how to improve rail services for everyone. It was good to hear their thoughts on restoring our railway, electrification, and attracting passengers back to using trains."

Valleys Community Rail

Railfuture is planning to make contact with a new community rail partnership which has been set up for the Cardiff core valleys lines: Cardiff to Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil. Based in Merthyr, the Three Valleys CRP is hosted by Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil and includes representatives from the voluntary and tourism sectors, healthcare providers, community partners and the rail industry.

USA talk

Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury was invited to give a presentation to the University of the Third Age in Church Village near Pontypridd in September. His Powerpoint presentation covered what Railfuture is and does, as well as the revival of rail in south-east Wales since the 1980s and the challenges of implementing current and future proposals. Around 60 people attended.

Newport supports station proposal

Railfuture is pleased that a meeting of Newport City Council in late September backed the reopening of Caerleon station, just north of Newport on the Marches line to Hereford and points north. This will add momentum to the TRACS (Towards Restoring A Caerleon Station) campaign to reopen the station, which Railfuture supports.

Newport council wants the station included in a revamp of public transport planned for south-east Wales, which already includes five new stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction. The five were authorised in the chancellor Rachel Reeves' June spending review. Caerleon is on a different line, but there is a strong argument that reinstating a rail service would help to reduce the horrendous traffic congestion in the town.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk

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



Swanage Railway's Frank Roberts (left) and Mark Goodall, Network Rail's route director

Heritage Railway signs deal with Network Rail

The heritage Swanage Railway signed an agreement with Network Rail Wessex in October. One benefit of the deal signed at Corfe Castle is that the Swanage Railway will receive donations of redundant railway assets, including materials such as rail and sleepers no longer required on the national network.

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

Alarm bells ring for Peartree passengers

By Ian Clark

I was optimistic for the future of Peartree, a small station in South Derby, when *Railwatch* 177 was published two years ago. How wrong could I be!

East Midlands Railway is reorganising its Regional network from this month to give vastly improved connectivity generally. One highlight is the doubling of frequency between Nottingham and Lincoln with the Crewe-Newark Castle service being extended to Lincoln.

However, EMR has also agreed with the Department for Transport to dispense with afternoon westbound calls at Peartree, thereby amending the service specification.

This was presented fait accompli to me at stakeholder consultations in February 2025. I have made attempts to modify EMR's position, without success. It now feels as if we have gone back to the 1960s.

Withdrawal of both westbound afternoon calls means that anyone travelling from Peartree eastbound towards Derby, Nottingham and Newark in the morning peak has no way of returning by train.

Inbound passengers from the Crewe direction will still be able to alight at Peartree in the morning peak but will have to book a ticket to Derby instead and proceed from there to travel home. The two morning eastbound calls may therefore also now be in jeopardy.

The service specification, dating from 2007, required one call at Peartree in each peak in either direction, later increased to two.

The ability to make a round trip to Peartree for work from, say, Uttoxeter has suddenly been eliminated. This severe reduction in services is ironic given that Peartree station is within a couple of miles of the future headquarters of Great British Railways.

In *Railwatch* 177, I mentioned that Peartree station was to be modernised. We now have two shiny new waiting shelters, and five expensive glass panels have recently been replaced following vandalism. This investment suggests a potential to improve services rather than the reverse, indicating a lack of joined-up thinking by EMR.

Currently, afternoon westbound calls at Peartree are made by the 1537 and 1637 departures from Newark Castle (1646 and 1746 from Derby).

Peartree calls are accommodated by variation to standard timings (flexing) of just ONE minute, as trains would otherwise pass through the station at low speed. It appears that EMR is no longer prepared to flex the service, seeking a standardised timetable that features gold-plated operation in preference to passenger convenience.

I have discovered that from December 2025, westbound services (including afternoon peak ones that will no longer serve Peartree) will have to stand at Barthomley Junction for eight minutes, awaiting entry into the single-track section for Crewe!

This is something that EMR did not disclose in the February 2025 consultation and was only found when working timetables were circulated in August.

Peartree may only be a small station, with relatively low passenger usage on account of its already limited train service. However, this timetable change renders it even more limited, when the general tenor of the



Picture: STEVE JONES

SUNSET AT PEARTREE: The 1645 Derby to Crewe service in January 2024. Commuters using this service will have to make other arrangements from this month

December timetable changes is improvements aimed at traffic and revenue growth.

Although the contractual regime has changed since Covid and will change further as train operators are brought within the Great British Railways orbit, this apparent disregard for the previous minimum service levels is alarming.

It serves as a warning for other stations across the network. Railfuture needs to remain vigilant and be ready to intervene should it happen elsewhere.

■ Ian Clark is Railfuture East Midlands portfolio holder for Derby area services



Picture: STEPHEN CLARK

A deserted Peartree station

Winchburgh green light for station

By Andrew Cottle

andrewcottle@gmail.com

Great news for residents of Winchburgh in West Lothian as the local council has officially approved the plans for a new railway station.

This decision, made in October, is a huge step forward for a project that was first promised over 10 years ago.

In that time, Winchburgh has grown rapidly, transforming from a small village of 2,400 in 2015 into a bustling town with hundreds of new homes.

The community has been waiting a long time for this vital connection, which will allow people to travel to Edinburgh in about 20 minutes and to Glasgow Queen Street in about 30 minutes.

The new station will be conveniently located right next to the town centre, sitting on a major railway line which connects Edinburgh and

Glasgow Queen Street (via Falkirk), and also serves Stirling and Dunblane.

Key features of the approved plans, which were first released in June 2025, include:

■ Park and Ride facilities for commuters

■ Electric vehicle charging points

■ Platforms long enough for up to six-carriage trains

Currently, the closest station for Winchburgh residents is Linlithgow, which is six miles away.

Although planning permission is secured, the crucial next step is finalising the funding. The council can move forward with a funding application in the next month or so.

The project is the result of months of teamwork between West Lothian Council, Network Rail, Transport Scotland, and the town's developers Winchburgh Developments. Local officials

and partners are delighted that the project is at last moving ahead.

Tom Conn, executive councillor for the environment and sustainability, said the station will be warmly welcomed by residents and will bring lasting benefits by increasing sustainable travel and supporting the local economy.

John Hamilton of Winchburgh Developments said securing permission was a huge step forward.

As the community grows from 6,500 to an expected 14,000 residents, the station will be a game changer that connects people more easily and helps the town move towards a cleaner, greener future.

Transport Scotland is currently reviewing the outline business case for the station to confirm its strategic and economic merits but many people will be impatient to see this long-awaited transport link a reality.

Edinburgh urged to use tra

By Liam Eunson
(Midlothian View)
and Lawrence Marshall
(Tram Trains for Edinburgh)

Railfuture campaigners joined members of the public to launch a new campaign to bring back passenger services on Edinburgh's South Suburban Railway.

About 100 people attended the meeting at Edinburgh's City Chambers on 7 October opened by Councillor Tim Pogson, who represents the city's Southside/Newington ward.

"I was delighted by the turnout at the public meeting and also by the strong support shown by the audience during the questions and discussion," said Rob Falcon, chair of the new campaign group.

"The South Sub is a sadly underused public asset which can and should make a significant contribution to better public transport in Edinburgh."

The Tram Trains for Edinburgh group was formed in August to promote tram-train technology and to integrate developments with existing tram and rail networks.

Councillor Pogson said many of his constituents supported reopening the South Sub, which is currently used primarily for freight.

He added: "It was something I committed to coming up for election."

Public interest in the proposal to run tram-trains on the South Sub was stimulated by publication of research by Heriot-Watt University students.

Long-time Railfuture campaigner Lawrence Marshall is treasurer of the tram-train campaign.

He said: "Tram-trains are game-changing because they can run on street in the city centre and on traditional rail lines, and are what makes the difference from previous South Sub reopening proposals.

"Tram-train services would run westwards from Portobello along the South Sub and connect to the current tram at Murrayfield. The tram line could then continue to both Princes Street and Leith, or Edinburgh Park and the airport."

The proposed 12 kilometre line links Murrayfield stadium in the west of the city with Portobello in the east, passing through the key neighbourhoods of Gorgie, Morningside, Cameron Toll, Craigmillar, Fort Kinnaid and Brunstane.

The Heriot-Watt team calculated two estimated costs. The "realistic" higher (including £64 million optimism bias) was £200 million.

At £16 million per km, this is three times cheaper than the latest tram line from Edinburgh York Place to

Newhaven. The project would link with the Borders Railway at Brunstane and has potential for an interchange with the proposed north-south tram line at Cameron Toll, offering connections to the main hospital and medical research campus, and beyond to Dalkeith and further into Midlothian.

The old South Sub closed for public service in 1962, resulting in a loss of city connectivity. Edinburgh is growing fast, with many new homes, retail parks and university and college facilities built within walking distance of the proposed tram-train stops.

The TTfE campaign to bring the South Sub back into use for local passengers is not the first time a campaign has sparked public attention – but it is the first to propose using tram-trains to overcome the rail capacity issues in the city centre which, despite some promising usage projections, have thwarted previous attempts.

TTfE believes that the South Sub will complement and augment current and future tram lines in the city, creating a more robust public transport network in one of the most congested cities in Britain.

Sheffield has led the way in the introduction of tram-trains to Britain – and the technology is well established and in widespread use on the continent.

TTfE's Rob Falcon, said: "The railway is a very under-used resource that the campaign really wants to use for Edinburgh, that also has potential use into Midlothian and East Lothian". A key speaker at the

meeting was Corey Boyle, one of the Heriot-Watt team of masters students who carried out the influential study.

The study concluded that using tram-trains on the South Sub would bring many benefits for Edinburgh, including reducing congestion by cutting car journeys, encouraging urban regeneration, and improving access to jobs, education and health services for communities across the south side of Edinburgh.

Although not officially part of the campaign, Corey and his colleagues' study played a pivotal role in the campaign, both raising awareness and providing a clear plan of how the network could be constructed and operated.

Corey told the *Midlothian View*: "After researching previous proposals and why they had not succeeded, we felt our team could offer a fresh perspective. From there, the project grew, gathering nearly 4,500 petition signatures, securing TV and radio interviews, and leading to presentations at two conferences, including at the Scottish Parliament.

"Our study found it is unlikely that heavy rail passenger trains will ever return to the South Sub because of capacity issues at Haymarket and Waverley and the prohibitively high costs which have blocked previous plans. Light rail tram-trains are cheaper to run and operate than heavy rail, making them a practical and commercially viable option.

"I believe tram-trains are the best, and really the only, way to reopen the South Sub to passengers."



The Tram Trains for Edinburgh public m



The reopened and new stations which would make the South Sub a modern part of Edinburgh's network. The map was a key asset when Tram Trains for Edinburgh campaigners met with the City of Edinburgh Council's strategic transport planning and delivery manager Jamie Robertson in October. In November, TTfE was planning to meet Brian Butler, the partnership director of SEStran (the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership) and Keith Fisk, SEStran's senior partnership manager. To keep the momentum going, TTfE is in the process of arranging meetings with local members of the Scottish Parliament, as well as United Kingdom MPs. Links with local community councils, some of which helped launch TTfE, are being carefully maintained

Map: COREY BOYLE

Tram-trains for the South Sub



Picture: COREY BOYLE

Meeting on 7 October at Edinburgh's City Chambers attracted more than 100 people

Corey's prize-winning initiative

The proposal by Edinburgh students to reopen the city's South Suburban Railway using tram-train technology has won The Princess Royal Award for Emerging Engineers, organised by the Institution of Civil Engineers.

The award to the six-strong Heriot-Watt University team, led by Corey Boyle, celebrates the communication of outstanding engineering ideas, research and best practice in project and design.

At the ICE award presentation, Corey dedicated the award to Natalia Salajka, a member of the project team who was killed in a road crash.

Tram Trains for Edinburgh congratulated Corey for conducting the feasibility study, which generated significant public interest in the proposal. The award was recently renamed in honour of the ICE's royal patron. Princess Anne is an Honorary Fellow of the institution and is also a patron of the WISE (Women into Science and Engineering) campaign, which encourages young women to pursue science and engineering.

Corey was awarded a £1,500 prize and the ICE medal after a live final when he presented the team's research on Edinburgh's South Sub. He



Corey Boyle makes his presentation at the public meeting in Edinburgh

was joined by runner-ups Timothy McCaughey, who presented a paper on the crumbling concrete crisis, and Josephine Joseph, who presented a paper on parametric façade design to suit daylighting needs and its impact on the energy demand of an office building. Corey

said: "Edinburgh is thriving, with major projects like the £80 million Edinburgh Arena, the £250 million Ocean Terminal redevelopment, and the £1 billion St James Quarter all planned and designed to be within walking distance of tram stops.

"However, this success is not evenly spread across the city. Reopening the South Sub could bring similar opportunities for regeneration to these areas while improving access to jobs, education, and services."

Rather than putting another 300 buses an hour on the road to accommodate future population growth, Corey's study showed that the South Sub's more cost-effective approach ought to persuade the city council and the Scottish Government to get on board.

Tram Trains for Edinburgh has already met the City of Edinburgh Council's strategic transport planning & delivery manager, Jamie Robertson. Further meetings are planned with Brian Butler, the Partnership Director of South East of Scotland Transport Partnership, and Keith Fiskien, SEStran's senior partnership manager, local MSPs and MPs and then moving on to local community councils, some of which helped launch TTfE.

Fight to correct 50-year-old Beeching injustice

By David Pennie
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David Pennie

It is 50 years since the 34-mile Beverley to York line was closed, one of the most short-sighted and unjustified of the Beeching closures. The last train ran on 27 November 1965 on the line, which served as a 42-mile direct route from Hull to York.

At the time the line was being modernised. The work had started in 1960 and would have included single tracking with passing loops, colour light signalling, centralised control and upgraded level crossings. The modernisation would have greatly reduced operating costs.

This positive scheme was brought to a halt with the publication of the Beeching Report in 1963, which recommended closure.

Despite an initial pledge by the new Labour prime minister Harold Wilson to halt the closures, the line was not saved, possibly because such a decision would have encouraged people in other areas to push for their threatened lines to be relieved.

The reminiscences of Richard Marsh, a Labour minister of transport a few years later, show how politics entered into such decisions, with lines in some marginal Labour constituencies being taken off the closure list.

The Beverley-York line runs through a predominantly Conservative area.

The Minsters Rail Campaign (the name referencing York and Beverley Minsters) was established in 2001 to promote the reinstatement of the line. In 2004, the East Riding of

Yorkshire Council commissioned a report from the Carl Bro Group to investigate the feasibility of reopening.

Because of housing development, particularly around Pocklington, Stamford Bridge and Market Weighton, alterations to the former route were proposed, with alternative alignments going around these towns. A new connection into York, near Haxby on the Scarborough to York line would be needed.

The study found benefits to reopening the line for passenger traffic and recommended a Hull-York service calling at Beverley, Market Weighton, Stamford Bridge and Pocklington, with an estimated journey time of under one hour.

The environmental benefits, particularly to road traffic on the A1079 and A166, the time savings for rail passengers and other non-user benefits would make the scheme economic.

The 2011 council transport plan identified the reinstatement of the line as a long-term goal.

Although the 2013 local plan was not able for legal reasons to protect the original route from development, the reinstatement remained an aspiration in this and later local plans.

As time went by, rail reopenings and reinstatements were becoming a political reality.

In 2020, the government launched its *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund, and in March 2021 a joint application from the Minsters Rail Campaign and the council was successful in being awarded funding for a strategic outline case for the reinstatement. With additional funding from the council,



Picture: OFFICE OF GRAHAM STUART MP

CAMPAIGN ALLIES: (left to right) Transport consultant Julian Sindall and Minsters Rail Campaign technical officer Roy Beggs, with East Riding MPs Charlie Dewhurst and Graham Stuart at a campaign event for MPs in the House of Commons

consultants AECOM (who were instrumental in the Borders line reinstatement) were commissioned to compile this, and it was submitted to the Department for Transport in September 2022.

AECOM's work found that the reinstatement would bring substantial social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable economic growth and new development.

All transport options were assessed, and heavy rail was found to offer the strongest alignment with strategic objectives, including competitive journey times and enhanced connectivity between communities, with the major centres of Hull and York and also regionally.

The heavy rail option would also

deliver operational resilience benefits for the national network, providing an alternative to the existing main line to Hull along the Humber, which suffers from a high risk of flooding.

Like the East-West (Oxford-Cambridge) reinstatement, parts of the line would be new build, but feasible alternative alignments were identified.

The positive strategic outline case opened the way towards the next objective of achieving the funding for an outline business case.

Getting the funding is a challenge, but the campaign is optimistic that it can be found and further progress made.

■ David Pennie is secretary of the Minsters Rail Campaign

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Don't build new line

Scrap the proposal to build an expensive new non-stop high speed railway line between Bradford and Huddersfield, and upgrade the Calder Valley Line instead. This is the headline recommendation in the Railfuture Yorkshire response to the consultation on the West Yorkshire Mayor's local transport plan, a plan which Railfuture broadly supports.

www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/hub-page/local-transport-plan

Instead of building a new line costing billions of pounds and causing environmental and community disruption, Railfuture says the objective of faster services between Bradford and Manchester can be achieved more quickly and

at much lower cost by upgrading the Calder Valley Line.

Nina Smith, chair of Railfuture Yorkshire, has said in a press release: "There is capacity for more train services on the Calder Valley route. We consider upgrade measures could enable direct express Bradford-Halifax-Manchester services in 40 minutes, compared to the 55 minutes at present, with Liverpool in 70 minutes or less.

"This would be achieved by the overdue electrification of the route, signalling improvements, and two or three passing loops including reinstating a third platform at Halifax. Our proposal offers better value for money and benefits Halifax as well as Bradford."

Railfuture also calls for the reopening of the Cragglestone Curve near Horbury to enable direct train services between Bradford and Halifax via Barnsley and Sheffield.

Other recommendations include extending the proposed Leeds tram network to Wetherby; reopening the closed railway between Skipton and Colne; hourly services between Goole and Leeds, Pontefract and Doncaster, and on the grossly underused Sheffield-Pontefract-York route.

Looking beyond West Yorkshire to developments that will benefit the mayoral county, Railfuture recommends a new underground link between Victoria and Piccadilly stations in Manchester to improve connectivity between services, and to enable direct services from Bradford and Calderdale to Manchester Airport; and a new inter-city interchange station on the East Coast main line at Tempsford where it crosses the new East West rail route from Cambridge to Oxford. Railfuture's response to the West Yorkshire local transport plan

consultation also emphasises the need for more freight to be moved from road and air to rail, and recommends that the mayor lobbies the government for planning changes which stipulate that large new warehouses and distribution centres must be rail served.

Bradford-Sheffield plea

Railfuture-affiliated Halifax and District Rail Action Group has called on West Yorkshire Combined Authority to support new through trains from Bradford to Sheffield serving Halifax, Elland and Brighouse, via Mirfield and then via Barnsley or Wakefield. HDRAG wants the service to be included in the council's local transport plan

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch

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

GBR must boost rail freight



By Ray King

There are fears that rail freight is not being properly considered in the process of giving Great British Railways control of the network.

A system to encourage more freight to switch from road to rail must be created alongside concern for passenger needs.

"It is essential that GBR offers capacity for freight through a fair, transparent and consistent process which offers long term certainty for customers and operators, with an effective and strong right of appeal," said Maggie Simpson, director general of the Rail Freight Group.

Alexandra Herdman of Logistics UK said: "We need to ensure there are safeguards to prevent freight being deprioritised with GBR in control of both infrastructure and passenger operations."

"Rail freight is critical for helping the UK meet its sustainable transport goals and rail reform presents an opportunity to grow freight as part of an integrated logistics system."

"The establishment of Great British Railways has the potential to achieve this, but success will hinge on how effectively it enables freight to grow and fulfils its statutory duty to promote rail freight."

Big Box freight depot

A rail freight interchange proposed for land near Newton-le-Willows on the Liverpool-Manchester line should be considered a project of national significance, say the developers of the Intermodal Logistics Park North.

The terminal, owned by Tritax Big Box, is designed to accommodate up to 16 trains per day with a turnback facility able to cope with 775 metre-long trains.

The position would allow operators to take advantage of the West Coast main line and the TransPennine line upgrade currently in progress.

Consultation is currently under way into the proposed depot, which involves three local authorities: St Helens Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council and Wigan Borough Council.

Inverness timber freight

Work started in October on a new £11 million freight terminal at Dalcross near Inverness, where global timber firm West Fraser Ltd has been granted Scottish government funding of up to £3 million towards the facility. Rail operations are expected to start next summer.

Scottish transport minister Fiona Hyslop said that over a 10-year period the project was expected to result in the removal of more than 8.5 million lorry miles from Scotland's roads and more than 17 million from UK roads. She said: "This particular project could



150-year rail freight landmark for the Settle-Carlisle line

It is 150 years since freight trains first ran on the Settle-Carlisle line so the event was marked in August by a class 66 diesel freight locomotive being named "Settle & Carlisle 150". The naming ceremony was carried out by (right) Becky Murphy, regional director of Heidelberg Materials, joined by (left) John Smith, chief executive of GB Railfreight, and (centre) Bryan Gray, chairman of the Settle and Carlisle Railway Trust. The ceremony took place at Horton-in-Ribblesdale quarry, where a rail connection was restored in June 2025 after a 60-year gap. The quarry

predates the opening of the Settle-Carlisle line and is now operated by Heidelberg Materials for the extraction of limestone. The new rail link will enable about 1,600 tonnes of limestone to be moved every weekday by environmentally friendly rail instead of road. Apart from new trackwork, the Network Rail project involved upgraded signalling and a new bridge for passengers over the line at nearby Horton station. Two other quarries in the Yorkshire Dales – Arcow and Dryrigg – were reconnected to the Settle-Carlisle line in 2016.

equate to removing the equivalent of up to 100 HGVs permanently from our roads per week, with the potential for even more should other companies use the facility."

West Fraser's George Webb added: "This facility will help accelerate the switch from road transport to rail, improving efficiency, removing some 20,000 HGV journeys off the A96 and A9 and eliminating approximately 9,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year, in the first phase."

Chiltern line freight

Plans for a new intermodal rail terminal and warehousing site at Ardley, Oxfordshire, next to the Chiltern main line north of Bicester, are out for consultation. The project is classed as nationally significant, meaning the decision will be made by central government, not local councils.

East West Rail freight

Delays to introducing passenger trains on the East West Rail line from Oxford to Bletchley have not stopped freight and steam specials taking advantage of the reinstated rail route.

DRS is operating freight trains between Daventry (Northants) and Wentloog (between Cardiff and Newport) and a Maritime Transport container train service from DP World at Southampton to SEGRO Logistics Park at Northampton.



Rail fan Lisa backs road to rail freight switch

MP Lisa Smart (centre) visited Tarmac's depot in Bredbury, near Stockport, to demonstrate her support for shifting freight traffic from road to rail. The Hazel Grove MP was shown a freight train unloading materials carried by rail from Tarmac's Tunstead quarry, near Buxton, in the Peak District.

The MP heard how a delivery by just one freight train can provide the building materials for 30 new local homes. One train can also remove around 60 lorry movements from the A6 and local residential streets.

The MP's visit came on the day when Tarmac received its first rail delivery from its quarry in South Wales. A daily freight train from North Yorkshire also delivers

construction materials. From the railway, the train's cargo is used to manufacture materials such as asphalt or ready mix concrete which is then moved by road for the last few remaining miles to local construction and road building projects.

Lisa said: "I am a huge supporter of rail. We need to make more use of rail for freight. It is good for the environment and we have real issues with local road congestion. The more we can move freight on to rail, the better it is for everyone."

Tarmac's Chris Swan said: "We believe that Bredbury and sites like it will enable us to support the government's house building targets over the coming years."

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Reduced Sunday services

Most of Northern's routes in the North West have a much-reduced Sunday service because there is a shortage of guards willing to work. Railfuture is worried that the problem is severely affecting the number of people who travel on Sundays, thus cutting the revenue from ticket sales. Northern's aim is to make Sunday a normal part of the working week for guards, so Railfuture North West asked the operator what is the current state of discussions regarding the issue.

Northern told us that further discussions with the RMT union are under way and it is hoping to agree a draft deal which can be passed to members in a ballot. Northern was not able to give an idea of how long this process might take.

Settle-Carlisle bimode diversions

The introduction of train operator Avanti's new class 805 bimotores will mean that long-distance trains can be diverted over the non-electrified Settle-Carlisle line when engineering work is under way on the West Coast main line in January. The diversions will reduce the number of unpopular bus replacement services Avanti has to arrange to cover the 88 miles between Preston and Carlisle. The works in the first two weeks of January include replacement of Clifton bridge over the M6 near Penrith, where the motorway would also need to be closed.

Earlier in the year, Railfuture contacted Avanti and asked it to consider the possibility of diverting trains over the Settle-Carlisle route during the engineering works so Railfuture is pleased Avanti has been open to making use of the flexible bimode trains. Northern is also trying to keep trains running by providing a Windermere to Barrow (via Lancaster) service by linking Windermere and Barrow to Lancaster services as one through train.

Piccadilly station closure

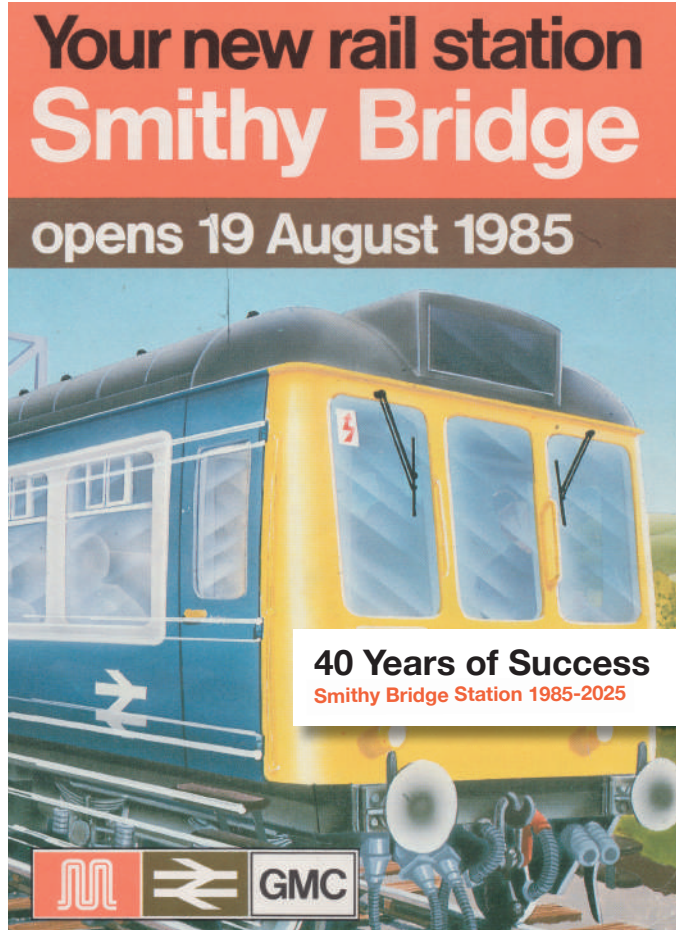
Network Rail is planning an almost complete closure of Manchester Piccadilly station for a week starting on 14 February 2026 for engineering works, including relaying crossovers at Ardwick Junction. Only platforms 13 and 14 will be in use during that period. No trains will arrive from the east or south, so Avanti, CrossCountry, East Midlands, Transport for Wales, TransPennine and local Northern services will be affected.

Rail freight loses waste battle

Hopes that an "energy from waste" plant being built near Elton, near Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, would be served by freight trains have been dashed. The Protos "energy recovery facility", run by Encyclis, will process 500,000 tonnes of non-recyclable

waste when it becomes operational. The Protos plant will generate up to 50 megawatts of electricity – enough to power 75,000 homes. About 370,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide will be prevented from entering the atmosphere by sending it via the HyNet North West

pipeline for storage in depleted gas fields in Liverpool Bay, as part of a programme led by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. North Cheshire Rail User Group reports that a recent Cheshire West and Chester council planning committee



WWW.GEOFFREAD.COM

Birthday party for Smithy Bridge

Smithy Bridge railway station in Greater Manchester celebrated its 40th birthday in August with an event at the Methodist Church. Mayor of Rochdale, Councillor Janet Emsley, and her Consort, Mr Ken Emsley, were guests of honour, with rail staff and members of the local community and Rochdale Council.

The station on the Calder Valley line closed in 1960 before the Beeching Report and nearly 100 years after the station opened.

Thanks to an imaginative partnership between Greater Manchester Council, British Rail and Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, the station reopened in 1985 as a "temporary experimental" station. The experiment worked.

Richard Lysons, chair of the Friends of Littleborough Stations (the group has adopted both Smithy Bridge station and its nearby big sister, Littleborough) said: "Smithy Bridge station has been an unqualified success over the past four decades, taking thousands of car journeys off our borough's crowded roads.

"More importantly, for residents without access to private transport, the station is a lifeline to access Rochdale, the cities of Bradford, Leeds, Manchester and Salford and other towns and communities along the line, whether for work, education, medical appointments, shopping, meeting relatives and friends or days out and holidays.

"Having two trains per hour from the station for six days a week is a wonderful facility. I know a lot of car owners who now prefer to take the train into Manchester. This 20-minute rail journey into the city centre cannot be matched for speed and convenience by any other form of transport."

The group has published a commemorative leaflet to celebrate the station's 40th birthday, along with "Smithy Bridge 40" fridge magnets made in Rochdale by DPS Sign and Screenprint.

voted in favour of removing part of a section 106 agreement with developer Peel L&P to provide a rail head for the plant. Councillor Sarah Temple of Helsby Parish Council appealed in vain for the council to retain the legal requirement for a rail head and Councillor Ben Walker said he was cynical about promises to deliver rail infrastructure in the future if the legal requirement was removed. Councillor Chris Copeman appealed to the council to follow the lead of Austria, Germany and France which increasingly require waste to be transported by rail. The 6 to 3 decision by the planning committee is a big disappointment for NCRUG because it flies in the face of the government's 2050 targets for rail freight. The group believes the plant will see extra heavy lorries on locally congested roads, potentially over 700 a day.

NCRUG warns that removing the legal requirement leaves no guarantee that the developer would provide a rail link ever, even when the economic climate is more favourable.

Another waste plant run by Encyclis (and Veolia) at Rookery South, Bedfordshire, has also rejected calls for the plant to be served by rail freight, despite the existence of rail lines on both sides of the plant.

Merseyrail expansion plans

Merseyrail has plans to expand its rail services beyond Ellesmere Port, said Steve Dodd, its chief operating officer, when he spoke at the AGM of the North Cheshire Rail User Group. Elton Parish Council invited Reform MP Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) to visit the village to impress upon her the need for improved rail services.

This resulted in a formal letter from the MP to transport secretary Heidi Alexander calling for bus and rail services to be improved "in the towns and villages surrounding Elton, Helsby and Frodsham".

Track and signalling will support more frequent services from Ellesmere Port as far as Helsby, but complications could be caused by the present different train operator management arrangements. Battery-electric trains likely to be used here may not be compliant in operating through the Sutton Weaver tunnel.

Tap and go success

Liverpool city region mayor Steve Rotherham has hailed the introduction of contactless "tap and go" smart ticketing on Merseyrail in August as a success story.

Northern Powerhouse Rail

Rail campaigners are hopeful that Chancellor Rachel Reeves will give further backing in her November budget to Northern Powerhouse Rail.

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

Students with a plea to government

By Roger Blake

More than 50,000 people would benefit if a new station was built to serve the Somerton and Langport area on the Great Western main line between Castle Cary and Taunton.

As 150 new houses are planned near a potential station site, campaigners are planning to build on the advantage of having won a successful strategic outline business case report under the previous government's *Restoring Your Railway* fund, which was ditched by the new Labour government.

The Railfuture-affiliated Langport Transport Group is determined to build on a successful conference in Taunton it organised in September and a meeting with students at Langport's Huish Episcopi 6th Form College in October.

Access to education depends on public transport, said David Northey of Langport Transport Group.

He added: "Given the lack of a station and the poverty of bus services, young students are already having their opportunities and life choices curtailed."

A series of campaign engagements is planned across Somerset, with an environmental meeting in Somerton, followed by two parish council meetings.

"Some of you may have had the impression (we certainly did) that the idea of a station for the Langport/Somerton area was effectively killed off when the Labour government killed off the *Restoring Your Railway* fund in July last year," said David Northey, a former Network Rail executive.

"We have been campaigning for a decade and our campaign to reopen a local station remains very much alive." The conference



Students from Huish 6th Form Academy showing their support for a new station for Somerton and Langport with officers from the Langport Transport Group, left to right, Simon Taylor, David Northey and Phil Edge

reinforced the strength of local support, and a message of support came from Glastonbury and Somerton MP Sarah Dyke, who has been calling for a station since she was first elected in 2023.

"The government had made growth and opportunity the central plank of its policy," she said. "Without public transport, both growth and opportunity would wither on the vine."

"I am regularly in touch with Great Western Railway, Somerset Council and the Langport Transport Group to explore ways in which the proposal for a new station at Langport can be driven forward, along with alternative ways in which local public transport can be

improved generally, such as integrated bus-rail travel options. Residents in Somerton and Langport are isolated from the railway line that runs right through the area."

Ms Dyke used a parliamentary debate in July to urge the government to support a new station in the area.

Representatives from Curry Rivel, Somerton and Langport councils as well as local Somerset councillors attended the conference.

Somerset Council's executive member responsible for transport, Richard Wilkins, who also represents Langport, gave a presentation.

The 28 miles of railway between Castle Cary and Taunton is the

longest stretch of rail without a station on it in the south west of England. At one time, it had 10 stations along it.

Working with Department of Transport officials, it was calculated that the likely number of tickets bought per annum would be around 233,000, more than at Frome station. A station in the Langport/Somerton area would be well used and financially viable.

Travelling by train to Taunton would take 11 minutes, compared to 45 minutes by bus.

The Langport Transport Group believes an updated feasibility study for a station is needed, that is ready to go at a moment's notice as and when funds become available.

Election of directors

Railfuture is run by a board of directors who receive no pay and come up for regular re-election. While members campaign for a bigger and better railway, directors are responsible for running the company properly and ensuring the finances are not exposed to unnecessary risk.

The existing directors contribute experience of management, finance, accountancy, human resources, information technology, marketing and railway operations.

The current board would welcome nominations from Railfuture members to stand as directors. The closing date for nominations is 1 February 2026. The current list of directors is: Chris Page chair; Neil Middleton vice-chair and communications; Jerry Alderson finance and information technology; Roger Blake infrastructure and networks; Ian Brown CBE policy; Allison Cosgrove passenger; Pete Myers assistant passenger; Owen O'Neill freight and logistics; Mike Southgate (co-opted)

For more information, see:

www.railfuture.org.uk/Board

Former Railfuture vice-president Patricia Routledge CBE died in October aged 96

West Midlands

Metro extensions

Another phase in the West Midlands Metro extension is expected to be completed before Christmas. Work between Birmingham Corporation Street and a temporary terminus at the Clayton Hotel at Millennium Point, as part of the Eastside extension, was almost complete in November.

The extension will eventually reach Birmingham City football club's planned 60,000 seat stadium and also serve the HS2 station at Curzon Street.

Construction work is also under way on the extension from Wednesbury to Merry Hill Shopping Centre, via Dudley town centre.

West Midlands mayor Richard Parker said the extension to east Birmingham and Solihull is "crucial to unlocking the £3 billion private sector investment in our new Sports Quarter, which in turn will create huge opportunities for communities that have been held back for too long."

Stratford-Honeybourne rail 'solution'

Stratford District Council's cabinet has decided to back proposals to reopen the Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne line. The decision is seen as a solution after the council was told the government wants to see large-scale house building in the area.

In December last year, councillors agreed to look at reopening the line using tram-trains as a cheaper option, but they have now decided that heavy rail should again be considered.

Significant housing is proposed between Worcester and Leamington, accelerated by the government's housing completion targets. Both Stratford and Wychavon are required to double their home building targets.

Proposals to reopen the line were mooted back in 2016. A strategic outline business case was produced in 2021 by consultants Stantec on behalf of Wychavon District Council.

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

East Anglia

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Growth plan for rail

Railfuture is pleased to see that rail features strongly in a new growth plan. Investment in key infrastructure such as transport, housing, water and energy can unlock growth in six priority sectors to drive the local economy sustainably, according to the local growth plan prepared by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. The conclusion followed consultation with government, local councils, businesses, and the education and training sector. Railfuture East Anglia recently met with the mayor and his team and is pleased that it reflects many of the aspirations Railfuture has been campaigning for over many years.

The growth plan will act as a strategic framework feeding into other local plans across the region. Proposals include new stations at Peterborough North, Peterborough South, Alconbury Weald, Tempsford, Cambourne, Cambridge East, and Waterbeach New Town, as well as the reopening of the railway between March and Wisbech.

In the Newmarket area, the plan supports restoration of the Snailwell Curve to provide a direct link between Newmarket and Soham. The Ely Area Capacity Enhancement is also fully endorsed.

Mass Transit is mentioned for both Cambridge and Peterborough and although the precise mode is left open, the report notes it could be light rail.

East West Rail is identified as a key part of the plan, which also proposes a link at Tempsford to enable through running from Cambridge to Peterborough. This would relieve the heavily constrained route via Ely, though the mayor's team recognises the need to enhance capacity



Paul Hollinghurst

on the East Coast main line to support such a connection. The plan suggests complementary investment in the dualling of the Cambridge-Newmarket line, something which we have long seen as a priority.

The transport strategy is underpinned by a strong emphasis on intermodal integration with buses, cycling and walking.

Railfuture welcomes the report, although we would like the authority explicitly to link the reopening of Wisbech-March with direct passenger services to both Cambridge and Peterborough. The plan should also make clear how important is the Ely area capacity enhancement scheme because it includes improving passenger train frequencies between Peterborough, Whittlesey, March, Manea and Cambridge. The plan should also include doubling of the Ely-Soham line. In addition, the plan omits any reference to the proposed transport interchange at Foxton railway station.
www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Cambridgeshire

Passenger boom prior to 'nationalisation'

There was positive news at a recent meeting of the Norfolk Rail Group, an informal stakeholder group convened by Norfolk County Council and attended by Railfuture East Anglia.

Greater Anglia, on the eve of being taken back into public ownership, confirmed that passenger numbers are higher than pre-pandemic levels. GA was the best performing train operator in the UK with excellent levels of reliability.

Lifts and a new-style footbridge were planned to be installed at Stowmarket, Suffolk, in November. The improvements in accessibility will benefit passengers who change trains from the main line to the Mid Anglia line. Stakeholders are now waiting for government confirmation on funding for a step-free access bid at Wymondham station. Integrated transport progress was also reported with new improved train indicators at Norwich and Great Yarmouth



Prefabricated parts of the modular AVA footbridge before installation at Stowmarket station at the end of November

showing onward bus connections. An improved bus interchange was also being implemented at Diss with better walking and cycling access to the station.

Fitting of tables in the Stansted Express trains was now almost complete, important because some of these units double up as expresses on the Great Eastern main line. The 12-car trains are proving their worth in providing extra capacity.

Norfolk County Council is following up on work done by consultants on two potential new stations. One of these was at Broadland Business Park (East Norwich) on the Bittern line, and the other was to the south of Kings Lynn, near where new housing is planned.

The lack of government funding for Ely junction improvements did cast something of a shadow over an otherwise upbeat meeting. Without this work, new rail services and the otherwise excellent prospects for further growth will be seriously held back.

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

Picture: GREATER ANGLIA

Sevenside

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Branch meeting

Railfuture Sevenside met at the Railway Inn, Yatton, on Saturday 18 October. About 15 people made it in person with some also online via Zoom, a good turnout considering that the line through Yatton was closed for engineering work. This meeting was arranged as an informal get-together, as part of our efforts to rejuvenate the Railfuture branch. No formal business was conducted at this meeting but it was a useful exercise. The guest speaker was Luke Knight from BBC Radio Somerset who talked about his recent radio documentary on the Somerset & Dorset railway, which was inspired by the 60th anniversary of the line's closure and the 200th anniversary of the railway. The programme can



Bruce Williamson

be found at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0m11fc5> or by typing the keywords "bbc sounds dorset railway" without quotes into Google. Bruce offered his apologies to David Redgewell and anyone else with mobility issues for the fact that the meeting was arranged at a non-accessible venue. This was an unacceptable oversight on our part and will not happen again. Unfortunately, *Railwatch*, with



Luke Knight from BBC Somerset

meeting details, had already gone to press by the time this was brought to our attention and it was not possible to change it. David nonetheless managed to attend by getting some assistance up the entrance steps. We agreed that we would meet again in early spring, probably in Bridgwater, with a more formal agenda, in an accessible venue and on a date when the trains are running. The meeting continued as an informal mingling event until approximately 1600.

GWR stakeholder liaison

Railfuture's John Henderson has approached Great Western to re-establish Railfuture Sevenside as a stakeholder. We plan to attend the next stakeholder meeting in February or March to discuss the May 2026 timetable changes as well as other business updates.

Hopes for Saltford station

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority is consulting again on proposals to improve the

A4 corridor between Bristol and Bath. This includes Saltford station on the parallel GWR main line. Previous proposals included converting part of the disused Bristol & North Somerset railway trackbed into a road, which received a lot of opposition, including from Railfuture. This is not mentioned in the latest consultation, and has been left out for a possible future consultation. Railfuture will have to be vigilant to ensure that the route can be reserved for future rapid transit use. Railfuture Sevenside will be replying to this consultation, and you can too at: <https://haveyoursaywest.co.uk>

Portishead work starts

Now that the Portishead line has been given the green light for reopening, we have "shovels in the ground". Work has started on tree clearance and we can expect trains to be running in late 2027 or early 2028.

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Funding five get-together

Five of the organisations which have provided funding for an economic study into bringing rail services from Exeter to Bideford met in September for a workshop organised by the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance. The venue was The Burton at Bideford Museum and Art Gallery. The financial support enabled Railfuture to commission an independent specialist assessment, on behalf of the alliance, for a preliminary strategic business case. Railfuture used its Fighting Fund to match Torridge District Council's one-third share. Other contributions came from Bideford and Barnstaple town councils and Devon County Council's locality budget.

The alliance's independent adviser, Railfuture member Peter West OBE, gave presentations on business cases in general and his draft preliminary strategic business case.

SLC Rail's strategy director Ian Baxter gave an energetic and optimistic report on his consultancy's findings. Full details can be viewed in the Bideford and Barnstaple to Exeter page of the Railfuture Devon and Cornwall website. The SLC Rail appraisal predicted that, with ideal conditions, Bideford station could match Weston-super-Mare's current passenger use by 2040.

Following the Railfuture press release, reports appeared in three local newspapers.

BBC South West Spotlight also interviewed the alliance's convener Roger Blake at Bideford station.

Bude by bus

Railfuture's Fighting Fund supported a study in Cornwall undertaken by Railfuture-affiliated Connect Bude.

Richard Wolfenden-Brown chaired a public meeting following Connect Bude's AGM at the Falcon hotel in Bude in October. Speakers included Dave Gordon from Connect Launceston, Tim Steer from Railfuture Devon and Cornwall, Bruce Thompson and Katie Goode. Bruce is advising Connect Bude on encouraging Devon County Council and Cornwall Council to work together to improve the cross-border bus service from Bude to Okehampton town station and the planned Okehampton Interchange. Committee member Katie Goode updated the audience on the collection of bus use data.

Katie said "Railfuture's support has been invaluable in helping Connect Bude gather the evidence base we need to demonstrate the real demand and value of improved public transport connectivity to Bude. Their backing meant we could focus on delivering a

Picture: LEWIS CLARKE



Bideford funders get together: Among those pictured are (front row left to right) Torridge District Council deputy leader Claire Hodson, Barnstaple Town Council mayor Councillor Janet Coates and Torridge District Councillor Teresa Tinsley

Picture: NIGEL LEWENS



Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch chair Tim Steer holding the British Rail Bude sign, left, with Connect Bude chair Richard Wolfenden-Brown. Katie Goode is on the left

Pictures: TIM STEER



Peter West OBE gave a presentation to the Bideford funders get-together on preparing strategic business cases

high-quality survey and robust results, rather than struggling to organise it on limited resources. Thanks to Railfuture, we have been able to take a big step forward in building the case for better connections for our community." Copies of *Railwatch* were given to members of the audience.

Biosphere consultation

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has responded to the consultation on the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere reserve's draft strategy for the next 10 years. The Railfuture press release was accompanied by a



SLC Rail's Strategy Director Ian Baxter gave an optimistic report based on his consultancy's findings

picture of part of the former 19th-century rail alignment co-existing with the 20th-century active travel route. The consultation response and press release can be viewed in the online diary for the Bideford and Barnstaple to Exeter campaign section of the branch website.

New website for Heathfield

Heathfield Rail Link Association launched its new website in September, promoting reopening of the five-mile rail route from Newton Abbot to Heathfield. The association, chaired by Railfuture member Michael Cooke, has



Blake at Bideford. Roger Blake is Railfuture's infrastructure director and is also acting convener for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

highlighted the growth in population and the 160 companies operating from the local industrial estate. Although not shown as part of Devon Metro, the new Devon & Torbay local transport plan recognises the Heathfield branch line as a "movement corridor" and the need to engage with the rail industry and third-party promoters to explore opportunities for passenger and freight use to return.

Coradias are coming

At GWR's stakeholder forum in October, Railfuture was told that deploying class 175 Coradia trains from Wales to enhance Great Western Railway services in Devon and Cornwall is proving difficult. Storing the trains in the open has caused problems and driver training has been delayed. The trains are being refurbished as part of a £75 million deal with Alstom, but the full fleet is not expected to be in operation until the end of next year.

It is hoped the 26 trains will bolster GWR's punctuality and reliability. In the first stage, the Coradias should replace the few remaining InterCity 125 trains this month. The Coradias are also earmarked for the overcrowded Exeter-Barnstaple line, as well as Mid-Cornwall Metro services for Newquay and the new Okehampton Interchange station.

Monorail response

Railfuture has responded with a dose of common sense to a local newspaper "letter to the editor" which called for a monorail from Bideford to Barnstaple and Exeter.

Dodgy dates detailed

Stakeholders recognised the 171-year history (not 151 as reported in October's *Railwatch*) of what is now King's Nympton station, having opened as South Molton Road in 1854 (not 1874) when rail services first reached Barnstaple from Exeter.

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



More than 5,000 people had tickets to watch the replica Locomotion No 1 cross Skerne Bridge, Darlington, in September as part of the 200th anniversary celebrations of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. Skerne Bridge is the oldest railway bridge in the world still in use. It was used by No 1 in 1825, and is still used by local services

peter.walker@
railfuture.org.uk



Peter Walker

Locomotion 1

Plans to run a replica Locomotion-hauled train on parts of the original Stockton and Darlington route were hit by problems but eventually went ahead in late September. There are many more bicentenaries in the next five years.

International rail-sea freight link

The end of October saw the start of a carefully timetabled daily freight service, taking perishable cargo from central Scotland to Teesport, and to suitable container ships for a prompt onward export. This in effect replaces previous links between Teesport and Scotland's industrial heartlands, catering for distilleries, retailers and chemical producers. Instead of alternating between Mossend and Grangemouth as their Scottish destinations, the revised workings have been combined into one 16-wagon "jumbo" train (up to 1,475 tons).

Another Happy New Year?

Long-standing traditions in industrial north-east England have included a bank holiday on New Year's day, as well as on Christmas and Boxing days. Recently, however, some exceptions to this custom have occurred, notably between Darlington, Middlesbrough and the Whitby line: two out-and-back services linked them this year, and they will be repeated to start 2026. Elsewhere in Tees Valley, TransPennine trains have for some years served Middlesbrough and Redcar as on a usual weekday, but this year will run from no further away than York. Worthy as these gestures are, they do not present a coherent pattern to a would-be rail user, not least because no local services will be running between

Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Middlesbrough and Saltburn.

New East Coast timetable

The new East Coast timetable will lead to one very important change just after the Christmas holidays, thanks to the diversion of trains between York and Leeds for some three weeks. Extended journey times between these cities affect TransPennine services, obviously, but they also seriously alter the CrossCountry train patterns between Newcastle and Sheffield. Until mid-January, this section will host an hourly service of trains from Edinburgh to Bristol and the west country, all routed through Doncaster instead of via their usual Leeds and Wakefield calls.

There will be hardly any trains from Newcastle to Reading, since these will mainly start and finish at Leeds. They will serve Wakefield and Sheffield, and then observe the usual stops en route to and from Reading. The York to Leeds diversion is part of the welcome process of upgrading the TransPennine route as part of its electrification, but there are plans for a continuing programme of track renewals and ancillary disturbances throughout large areas of west and south Yorkshire in the next few years, so CrossCountry may well have to run similarly modified train services in those areas from time to time.

Northumberland Line news

Blyth Bebside station opened as planned (see page 2) and the long-awaited interchange with the metro at Northumberland Park will be open soon.

We hope, however, that Northern will soon wake up to the fact that Manors is the station for the student population of Northumbria University (among others), who would undoubtedly make much use of a local Sunday train service.

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

X @RailfutureNEast



Attendees at the Oxfordshire County Council/Railfuture meeting in September. Oxfordshire County Council's Pete Brunskill, front right

andrew.mccallum@
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Cowley funds

Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the news that the Cowley rail link is to go ahead and the government has agreed the funding. We have been campaigning for this for years yet the announcement, on 23 October, was unexpected. (see page 5). Ellison Institute of Technology commitment to the scheme serves as an exemplar for other institutions.



Andrew McCallum

Ambitious Oxrail 2040 welcomed

As mentioned in *Railwatch* 185, Oxfordshire County Council hosted a joint meeting in September for Railfuture members and others to provide feedback for its Oxrail 2040 strategy. Councillor Judy Roberts, the cabinet member for environment and climate action, introduced the session and the council's rail development lead Pete Brunskill and Railfuture director Roger Blake also spoke. The importance of good seamless interchange at a rebuilt Oxford station was recognised. Railfuture Thames Valley's Dave Richardson secured good media coverage around the Oxrail 2040 strategy including an interview on BBC South Today News. Follow Railfuture in the news here:

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture-in-the-news>

The next day the council held a session of its Citizens' Assembly to debate the Oxrail 2040 strategy at which Railfuture Thames Valley chairman Richard Stow was one of a select number of speakers invited to explain their organisation's views on the strategy. Richard's main point was to emphasise that greater capacity on the core section between Didcot and Wolvercot junction (north of Oxford) and at Oxford station itself is fundamental to almost everything else in the strategy. Achieving all the other objectives is reliant on increased capacity on this section of route.

GWR stakeholders

Railfuture Thames Valley vice-chairman Nigel Rose represented us at Great Western online stakeholder sessions for the Thames Valley/North Downs and North Cotswold lines. Raising the matter of crowding between Oxford and Didcot he was assured there would be more nine-car trains on the Cotswold line at weekends from December. He also raised the perennial issue of provision of lifts at Kingham station. There was much discussion about improving rail replacement road services through more staff training and Reading-Gatwick service enhancements.



Dave Richardson on BBC South Today on 24 September. The Cowley line bridge over the Thames is in the background

Chiltern train launch

Railfuture Thames Valley's Nigel Phillips attended the launch of Chiltern's "new" mark 5A trains in October at Marylebone, followed by a trip to Birmingham. The extra capacity these trains will provide should enable some of Chiltern's class 168 or 165 trains to be deployed to the Oxford-Milton Keynes route where they will be able to provide more capacity than the class 196 trains currently lined up for the long-delayed commencement of this East West Rail service.

Green Fair welcome

Railwatch readers are welcome to visit us when Railfuture Thames Valley presents its "wares" at Oxford Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall on Saturday 29 November.

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

X @RailfutureTV

'Everyone should have access to rail'

By Ray King

As work started on making Bryn station near Wigan accessible, Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham promised to improve access to the railways for everyone.

He said: "I passionately believe that everyone should have access to our rail network and the opportunities it opens up right across our growing city region.

"There should be no barriers for those with disabilities or people travelling with pushchairs or luggage and I am proud Greater Manchester is leading the way with this accelerated programme of improvements, which will ensure two-thirds of our stations are step-free by spring 2028.

"It is all part of our vision to ramp up standards and make our stations more attractive, safe and accessible places, with 64 Greater Manchester stations joining the Bee Network by 2028, and the remaining 32 following by 2030."

The £6.1 million upgrade for Bryn will include two passenger lifts and replacing steps with a ramp to provide step-free access.

TfGM, Network Rail and Northern Trains will also upgrade the station's lighting and CCTV at the lifts and assistance areas, providing a better and safer experience for train

passengers. The work at Bryn comes after step-free access schemes at Daisy Hill, near Bolton, and Irlam.

In three year's time, 63% of the city-region's stations will be step-free, up from 43% currently.

Makerfield MP Josh Simons said: "Transport around the area is brought up again and again by residents.

"I am very pleased that the money has been provided to get this going. Local people deserve a public transport system that gets them from A to B as easily as possible."

Craig Harrop, regional director for Northern, said: "Providing step-free access at stations is incredibly important."

Accessibility works at Hindley, Reddish North and Swinton are expected to get under way next year, with step-free access at Flowery Field, Newton for Hyde, Bredbury and Levenshulme to follow.

It is part of Greater Manchester's plans to bring eight commuter rail lines into the Bee Network by 2028, providing a more inclusive and accessible public transport network. At a national level, the UK government published its unfortunately named "roadmap" for



Picture: SIGHT LOSS COUNCILS

Blind and partially sighted volunteers are part of a Try the Train initiative to encourage authorities to improve facilities and to persuade more people to take advantage of rail travel. This group of Sight Loss Council members visited South Fylde Station at an event, run jointly with Community Rail Lancashire, to celebrate Railway 200

accessible railways, which promises a "broader reform" of the Access for All programme.

A "sustained" budget would be provided to deliver small but important accessibility improvements. Level boarding will be an important aspect of the long-

term strategy for rolling stock which will be published next year. House of Commons transport committee chair Ruth Cadbury welcomed the plan but said that access was often denied by inadequate infrastructure. She added: "Funding needs to equal the scale of the challenge."

Level crossings add to cost of running the railway

By Richard Wilcock

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In the recent Railfuture Wales Cymru committee meeting, I raised the issue of Network Rail putting a new pedestrian bridge next to a road bridge with a pavement in Prestatyn.

Is the railway expected to provide a higher level of safety than for roads? I am not sure if I have the relevant expertise to fully answer

this question, so in this article I am raising issues to facilitate discussion.

First a few facts, according to Google:

- There are about 5,000 pedestrian crossings of railways in the UK
- Twelve people died on UK railways in 2023-2024 on crossings
- 405 pedestrians died on UK roads in the same period

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Travellers on railways abroad may notice that railways are not usually fenced off in the same way as they are in the UK.

The UK situation results in part from the Railways Clauses Consolidation Act 1845, which was intended to prevent cattle from straying on to the line. The legislation covering pedestrian rail crossings is complex, as are the number of organisations involved. For more information, see:

The legal framework for level crossings | Office of Rail and Road

The other issue is risk versus consequences. If you are hit by a car you may well survive while if you are hit by a much heavier train, you are more likely to die.

Fencing off the railway is expensive. Regardless of what is said, we do put a price on human life.

Road engineers have used this to justify road schemes for decades.

This raises another issue. Should people take responsibility for their own and their children's actions?

If you choose to trespass on the railway or ignore the crossing instructions and suffer as a result, is that your fault or Network Rail's?

Or is it not so much about health and safety but part of a litigation culture? Network Rail may be

pursued for compensation. While researching this article, I found that in south-east England, one MP raised the fact that trains sounding their horns before pedestrian crossings annoyed residents.

In my opinion, many of the massive structures Network Rail erects to divert paths are eyesores.

Taking a reality check, pedestrian crossings will never be eliminated. So what factors should be used to determine whether to remove a crossing? I suggest:

- 1 Frequency of rail service
- 2 Speed of trains
- 3 Number of people using the crossings

4 Ease of remedial measures – closure, diversion, upgrade, better signage, barriers to force people to look, warning lights/sirens

The Rail Safety and Standards Board has written a paper on the design of crossings. See:

Research into the causes of pedestrian accidents at level crossings and potential solutions (T984)

You may have to register to read it.

Also, better education of the risk, starting with parents, would help. I would welcome your opinion on this issue as it is a complex topic.

Setback for St Andrews but the battle goes on

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More than 18 months after receiving the St Andrews detailed options appraisal, Transport Scotland finally revealed its response. Far from detailing any next steps for the StARLink campaign, Transport Scotland claimed that there was no socio-economic case for a railway of any kind, and that all St Andrews needed was better buses! The review effectively poured scorn on the whole appraisal, carried out by respected consultancy Stantec and funded by the public purse in the shape of Transport Scotland's local rail development fund. Among other things Transport Scotland claimed there was no evidence that St Andrews had problems with too much traffic, or that journey times to other key settlements were too long, or that cyclists had difficulties accessing Leuchars railway station. Transport Scotland also claimed that there were (unspecified) engineering issues which indicated that five miles of track to St Andrews would take longer to construct, and cost more, than the 30 miles of the Borders line between Edinburgh and Tweedbank. In fact, while the Borders line required new and refurbished bridges, clearance of spoil heaps, filling in old mine workings, moving the Edinburgh by-pass and putting it back, St Andrews requires very little of such



Jane Ann Liston

work. There was also some rewriting of history, implying that the first part of the appraisal, *The Case for Change*, had not been accepted when it had. Dealing with the excessive length of time taken in responding to *The Case for Change* and the preliminary options appraisal, Transport Scotland said its thinking on transport planning objectives, against which all the options must be tested during the sifting process, had changed, requiring the objectives to be amended.

Although these were agreed with Transport Scotland, its review claimed that these amended objectives were weak because they had not been used in the preliminary options appraisal, knowing full well that there was no more local rail development fund money to pay for the extra work and that a community group like StARLink would not have the cash to redo that part of the appraisal.

St Andrews has been described as the cradle of Scottish tourism as well as a combination of Scotland's Oxbridge and Cambridge. In addition, its role as the Home of Golf contributes £317 million to the economy every year. As such, it is a key destination, last year attracting seven million visitors according to the St Andrews BID (business improvement district). StARLink is disappointed and perplexed that Transport Scotland has decided that St Andrews can make do with a better bus link to Leuchars railway station nearly six miles away, rather than being connected to the rail network, enabling direct travel to



Picture: LAWRENCE MARSHALL

Copies of Railwatch were handed out to people who attended the Aberdeen Model Rail Show in October, as a Railfuture Scotland team including Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove promoted rail – and sought new members, writes Roderick Cromar. Many of the people who approached Railfuture were keen to see more rail investment, especially in extending the successful Borders Railway to Hawick and to Carlisle.

They also wanted to see more passing loops, especially on the Perth-Inverness and Aberdeen-Inverness routes. There was optimism about the use of rail for timber products. Railfuture was told new stations are needed just outside towns in order to support housing developments, such as at Culloden, near Inverness, and several sites just south of Aberdeen. An interesting proposal to reopen the line between Grantown and Dufftown was presented as potentially useful for distillery freight as well as being attractive to tourists. There was strong support for passenger services between Dunfermline and Alloa (and beyond) which people with local knowledge referred to as a “no-brainer”.

Edinburgh, Dundee and all points north.

We have been here before. Back in 2008, the Scottish Government decided to rename the bus service a “virtual branch line”, which, rather than getting people out of cars, resulted in Leuchars car park having to be doubled in size. Even the higher frequency of buses nowadays tempts only a minority of railway passengers away from cars and taxis, all trundling along the busiest road in North East Fife and then driving round and round in the town trying to find somewhere to park! In most other countries, St Andrews would have had a railway connection restored years ago, or more likely would never

have lost it in the first place. It is a sad day for St Andrews and a slap in the face considering the revenue it generates. Tourism, the university and golf require people to travel to the town but we need them to leave their cars behind.

Although this short-sighted decision by Transport Scotland is a set-back, the StARLink campaign will continue. St Andrews is one of Scotland's more successful settlements, yet its potential for economic growth is being hampered by poor transport links, limiting its ability to contribute to the economy. That must be addressed, and a few extra buses will not do that.

London & South East

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Brighton line

The main campaign of Railfuture London and South East at present relates to the Gatwick Express and capacity issues on the London-Brighton main line, one of the busiest in the country. Those in the know avoid the Gatwick Express because of its premium pricing, and in consequence many of its trains are partially empty. Indeed our own research suggests that only around 12% of passengers travelling from Gatwick to London by rail choose the Gatwick Express. This results in passengers standing, due to



Richard Bowry

over-crowding, on the cheaper Southern and Thameslink trains. To compound matters, Gatwick Airport is now seeking to add a second runway, with the hope of increasing air passenger numbers from around 41 million today to about 75 million by the late 2030s and 81 million by 2047. Governmental permission for such expansion has recently been granted, dependent on a number of matters, including a requirement that at least 54% of airport passengers must arrive/leave the airport by public transport. We believe that figure at the moment is less than 50%, and based on the current 41 million passengers.

Ticket prices between London and Gatwick Airport are among the most complex and convoluted in the country for a journey of less

than 30 miles. There are currently 16 trains an hour each way between Gatwick Airport and London, run by three different train operators (all owned by the same parent company), each charging significantly different prices. In total there are 14 different fares between London and Gatwick (more if zone and other type tickets are considered), depending on departure date and time and routing. At times the fare varies between £10.70 and £35. The issue is compounded by a lack of information, in particular at Gatwick Airport station.

As part of our campaign, a report has been prepared by committee member Charlie King, a full version of which has been submitted to transport minister Lord Hendy and copied to the MPs for Crawley,

Dorking, Reigate and Croydon East, Thameslink Govia Railway and Network Rail, among others. This was followed up by a Railfuture public campaign meeting held near Gatwick Airport on 20 November.

Battery trains in London

Great Western Railway has applied to the Department for Transport for dispensation to enable it to run passenger trains on the Greenford branch using innovative ultra-fast-charging equipment installed at West Ealing station. Railfuture is strongly supporting the request, following an 18 month trial on the West Ealing-Greenford line, and Railfuture also supports its use on other diesel-operated branch lines throughout the country.

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

Chair's column by Chris Page

The Railways Bill

Ten months ago, the government consultation *A railway fit for Britain's future* gave little clarity about how Great British Railways will work in practice. For example, it was not clear how much control is to be exercised by the Department for Transport and how much independence railway managers will have. To get some clarity, I wrote to the transport secretary asking the three key questions below, and received a response from the DfT basically saying "wait and see". Now, the government has published the Railways Bill, and as actions speak louder than words we can compare the intentions laid out with what has been done.

1 What strategic objectives will you set for Great British Railways to ensure that policies, decisions and actions support national objectives of raising living standards, providing safe housing with access to jobs, environmental sustainability and social inclusion?

The Bill will require the government to create and maintain a *long-term rail strategy* which will include five strategic objectives: meeting customers' needs, financial sustainability, long-term economic growth, reducing regional and national inequality, and environmental sustainability. These reflect the objectives Railfuture called for a year ago, but they have yet to be defined. The location of the first 12 new towns was announced at the Labour party conference. It is significant that all but one are either around existing stations or in locations that could be rail served, showing that the government is serious about integrating land use and transport planning, and will fund rail development needed to support significant housing development. None of the 12 are in areas which the property website Zoopla identified as financially unviable for property development (mostly in the north of England).

Lord Hendy announced in October the decision to fund reopening the Cowley branch line to passengers, supporting the creation of up to 10,000 new jobs. This confirms that the strategic objective for GBR of long-term economic growth will include supporting national objectives for housing with access to jobs.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has also been reassuring that the government will not cut investment in transport infrastructure. This is not, however, an opportunity to dust off *Restoring Your Railway* proposals. Investment will be focused only where passenger numbers are likely to be substantial.

www.railfuture.org.uk/A-bigger-railway

2 What fiscal measures will you take to promote modal shift to rail, to realise the increased efficiency, productivity and economic growth that greater rail utilisation brings, and to reduce the overall transport contribution to carbon emissions?

The Bill will place a duty on GBR and ministers to promote rail freight, but the target increase of 75% by 2050 remains. This matches expected economic growth, so zero modal shift is planned. Not good enough!

The Bill also expects a gradual move away from the current approach of an annual blanket fares increase towards giving GBR more commercial freedom to manage fares strategically. There is no indication of whether the aim is to improve profitability or encourage passengers to shift from private to public transport. The government will cut electricity prices for energy-intensive industrial users but despite rail using between 1% and 2% of all electricity generated in the UK, rail does not appear to be included. Reduced electricity prices should be extended to rail to encourage a shift from diesel to electric traction, especially for freight. In the autumn budget, Railfuture looks for government commitment to modal shift, by reversing the "temporary" five pence per litre cut to fuel duty and restoring the annual inflation-linked increase. This would also fit the Treasury's search for more tax revenue.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Modal-shift

3 When will you give visibility of how Great British Railways will be managed to create a customer-focused culture, giving freedom to professional railway managers to make decisions which deliver a 24/7 service, offer value-for-money tickets which are easy for everyone to buy, and so grow the railway?

The Bill will give GBR, with a business mindset, responsibility for day-to-day railway operations. Professional managers should therefore have the freedom to make decisions to increase revenue, value for money and customer satisfaction.

As train operators are brought into public ownership, the opportunity is being taken to combine the operator with the relevant Network Rail route organisation. For example, managing director Lawrence Bowman, who has previous experience as both a train operator and with Network Rail, is responsible for South Western Railway and the Wessex route.

About 300 DfT staff are being moved to DfT Operations Ltd, the government body which has taken control of the train operators in public ownership, and which will become part of GBR. This is a step in the right direction – but some would speculate whether these staff, who until now have been shadowing train operator managers, will form an unnecessary extra layer of bureaucracy in GBR. How, I wonder, will GBR create a customer-first culture while reconciling the needs of devolved authorities, including Scotland and Wales, with those of a national rail system? For Railfuture's in-depth analysis of the Railways Bill, see the website at

www.railfuture.org.uk/Rail-reform



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Esk Valley rail 'sacrificed for open access'

By Lisa Williams

The government is sacrificing popular publicly run local train services in favour of new open access private-sector train operators on the East Coast main line, claims Esk Valley community rail partnership chairman Alan Williams.

"Open access was meant to encourage use of spare capacity on the rail network, not to push local services aside in favour of private sector long distance operators," he said.

Commenting on the details of the new East Coast timetable, he said that while no local services from Whitby are being entirely withdrawn, their usefulness across the North East will be largely destroyed by cuts wherever they encounter the East Coast main line.

From December, many more passengers will need to change trains at Middlesbrough every day and in some cases platforms too, thus inevitably extending current journey times.

New morning through service – but no others

On the Esk Valley line, a new early morning through commuter service from Whitby to Middlesbrough and then along the Durham Coast via Hartlepool and Sunderland to Newcastle was intended to bring the number of weekday through services to five each way.

Instead, it has been revealed that on the same day this new service starts, three of the four existing daily through services are to be withdrawn, leaving just two (one in each direction).

Worse, on Sundays, all six existing through services to and from Newcastle to Whitby, introduced following lobbying by Esk Valley Railway Development Company, will now be withdrawn.

The replacement "connections" at Middlesbrough are awful, said Mr Williams, requiring waits of between 44 and 57 minutes.

"People travelling to James Cook Hospital station, now the second busiest on the line after Whitby, will probably be the worst affected by the changes. On both weekdays



Picture: GREATER ANGLIA

A warm welcome for Beaulieu Park station

The sun came out, Chelmsford Silver Band played rousing music and Tornado, the famous steam engine, stopped by to celebrate a "hugely significant" occasion – the opening of Beaulieu Park Station in October. It is the first new station on the Great Eastern main line for more than 100 years.

After the first commuters boarded their trains to London, Louise McKinlay praised the public-private partnership which delivered early and on budget the new three-platform station with 500 covered cycle parking spaces and two car parks for over 700 cars.

Ms McKinlay is deputy leader of Essex County Council, which had the courage to commission the project several years ago and the determination to secure £140 million funding from the previous Conservative government. Other funding came from Essex County

and Chelmsford City councils, Homes England, and developers Countryside (now part of the Vistry group) and L&Q. "This station is a beacon to say that Chelmsford is open for business," she said. "And Essex is a fantastic place to live, work and do business. We are being bold and ambitious to future-proof the county and put investment where it is most needed."

Transport minister Lord Hendy added: "The railway has the potential to transform lives and this new station is expected to boost the local economy by £250 million."

Network Rail's route director Katie Frost praised the hard work and dedication of the team which built the station over two years with tenacity and determination while the live, operational 100mph railway continued to run through the station.

and Sundays, no trains will continue beyond Newcastle to Metro Centre as they do now. Will passengers tolerate that? With such abysmal connections, we are concerned that the recent record 9% annual growth in ridership on the line will be reversed, providing an excuse for further cuts in future."

Mayor's hopes dashed

Mr Williams added: "York and North Yorkshire mayor David Skaith has repeatedly called for more services from the East Coast route to the Yorkshire Coast, but sacrificing the

effectiveness of these vital local services and disadvantaging passengers on this scale for the financial benefit of a small number of private sector operators rather than for the public purse would seem to be the exact opposite."

The revised East Coast main line timetable being introduced on 14 December 2025 affects rail services across eastern and north-eastern England and Scotland, from London King's Cross to Inverness. Esk Valley services are therefore but a small part of one of the largest and most complicated single timetable changes on record.

Work began more than six years ago and was increasingly influenced by the desire of the government of the day to introduce more privately operated open access services to the core East Coast main line.

In the 2022 public consultation, almost everyone found the proposals unacceptable to some degree. Hopes for a more positive approach to the Esk Valley rose following the election of a new government publicly committed to

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the concept of "one railway" under the proposals for Great British Railways.

Great secrecy had surrounded the changes to be implemented in December until the last few weeks and unhappily it is now clear that many of the responses to the consultation have been ignored, including those for the Esk Valley line, with the Government choosing instead to implement the original proposals.

■ Lisa Williams is general manager of Esk Valley Community Railway

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Railfuture in the News

Hats off to Tim Steer and Roger Blake for getting Railfuture in the South West media about twice a week, talking about Bideford, Barnstaple, GWR, overcrowding, Okehampton and more. This coverage demonstrates the value of nurturing relationships with local journalists. Elsewhere we made it into the i paper, LBC News, BBC One, BBC Radio Wales and The Telegraph on a variety of subjects, the latter contacting us again for our comment just before Railwatch went to print. It looks as if the government is finally going to abandon the use of RPI for calculating rail fare increases and use CPI instead. This is something we have been campaigning on for years. Our efforts may have paid off! As ever, all this and more can be found on the web page Railfuture in the News.

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