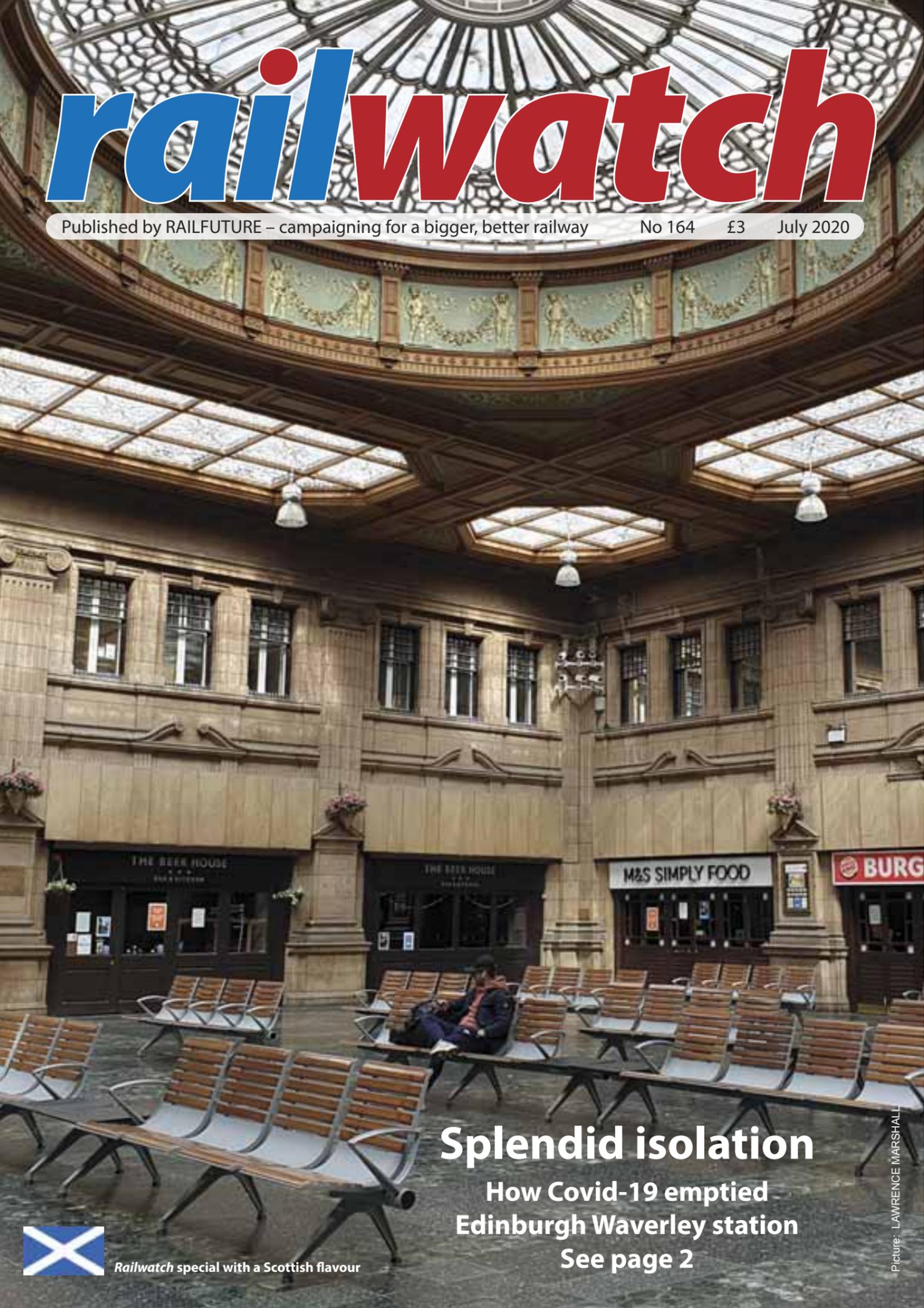


railwatch

Published by RAILFUTURE – campaigning for a bigger, better railway No 164 £3 July 2020



Splendid isolation

How Covid-19 emptied
Edinburgh Waverley station
See page 2

Picture: LAWRENCE MARSHALL



Railwatch special with a Scottish flavour

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Electric railways should be the post-Covid norm

In this personal view, Stephen Waring, chair of Halifax & District Rail Action Group and secretary of Railfuture Yorkshire, and joint coordinator of the Electric Railway Charter looks to a scary future but insists that electric railways should serve communities post-Covid

Modern electric railways should serve communities in the post-Covid-19 world.

It is early May. The lockdown is in full force. Near-empty trains carry essential workers only. Polling suggests people fear early easing of restrictions, and committed rail users vow not to go on a train until they can get vaccinated. Immunity hopes rise, but as yet there is no guarantee.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies advocates peak fare increases to discourage passengers. Staggered work times will help to ease the lockdown, with social distancing on board commuter trains.

Many of our trains used to be disgracefully overcrowded.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, rail commuting was not a choice but a punishment for city working. Already, people were learning to work from home. Going into the office maybe just once a week could turn the rush-hour into history.

The future may be a dystopian nightmare. People travel – when they have to –

singly or in permitted groups, in driverless pods centrally controlled to maximise road capacity. People meet online, but must show immunity passports to meet physically. There are no passenger trains, buses or trams. But rail freight has replaced thousands of heavy lorries and distributes food and hardware via thousands of robotic vans. Good news is both the freight trains and the driverless road vehicles are powered by zero-carbon electricity.

Science fiction maybe.

The real worry for the future is that public transport may really not recover. The “right” to car travel – still largely powered directly or indirectly by fossil fuels – will be reasserted. The quieter roads and cleaner air we enjoyed in recent weeks may be but a footnote in the narrative of environmental catastrophe.

But let there be hope. As the climate emergency becomes more and more pressing, post-Covid-19 reconstruction must be about green, good growth, not about re-seeding the old disasters.

We must recognise changes in the nature of travel. If metropolis-bound work is decimated, where does this leave high speed rail that links only the biggest cities and a few regional hubs? Is there an opportunity to serve our communities better?

People need to travel, to explore, to get together, to be creative, to enjoy active leisure.

Social interaction must again become possible. Trains,

trams and buses enable this – along with environmental excellence. Low-pollution, energy-efficient, ideal for routes with lots of stations, they can run on zero-carbon energy.

Four rail user groups across the Pennines, supported by two Railfuture branches, launched the Electric Railway Charter two years ago.

We know that a rolling programme will reduce the costs of electrification substantially and that decarbonisation means electrification as the only solution on strategic routes.

The 2015 Northern Electrification Task Force report could be the basis of a rolling programme across our region. 12 routes were recommended for an initial five-year plan. Top-ranked on business and environmental criteria was our Calder Valley route from Leeds via Hebden Bridge to both Manchester and Preston.

The charter says the Calder Valley would naturally follow the TransPennine route upgrade (Huddersfield line). And it would link with other electrified routes, perhaps including a reopened Skipton-Colne line. New lines must surely be electric.

A strategic route that also serves lots of communities, our TransPennine line is an ideal case for a modern railway providing a sustainable alternative, that encourages locals to make trains their own, for all sorts of different purposes, not just for the big cities.

So can we just get on with it?



CLEAN ELECTRIC: A diesel train on the Cumbrian Coast line passes windmills generating green electricity. The £4 million Network Rail project under way involved moving 50,000 tonnes of earth to stabilise the area after a landslide at Lowca which disrupted passenger and freight trains running between Carlisle and Whitehaven

Railfuture vice-president **Paul Abell** offers his thoughts on the post-Covid future for the railways

Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble

As I write, we seem to be over the worst of Covid-19 but we are all hoping that something worse is not round the corner. So what is the future for railways?

Passenger count down?

There were some interesting trends becoming apparent even before Covid-19. The latest set of passenger figures, published by the Office of Rail and Road in March, referred to the three months of October-December 2019 (Quarter 3).

Passengers made 462 million journeys, up 2.6% on the previous year, with all three sectors, London and South East, long distance and regional, enjoying increases.

However season ticket journeys fell by 3.3%, and I understand South Western Railway in particular was already being affected by a move to home working. SWR recorded 52.7 million journeys, a decline of 3.2% on the previous year, with a decline of 13% from the Q3 peak in 2015. Many more people now have first-hand experience of home working and video conferencing. With an annual season ticket from Woking to Waterloo costing £3,440, and the

high cost of office space in central London, change looks likely at Waterloo.

Passenger numbers up?

In contrast the same ORR figures for Q3 show Northern with 29.5 million passenger journeys, an increase of 12.5% on the previous year despite the much-publicised problems which culminated in Arriva losing the franchise in the new year. This increase partly reflected the 2018 figures being affected by strikes, but journeys on Northern increased by 19.5% since Q3 in 2015.

The replacement of Pacers should make Northern more attractive to prospective passengers, and it may well be that the different pattern of employment in Northern England makes passenger numbers less vulnerable to home working and video conferencing than on SWR. I suspect that the 20% decline in post-Covid-19 traffic being suggested in some quarters will prove to be pessimistic for significant parts of the railway network.

More electrification

What is definite is that we still have a problem with climate change, regardless of Covid-19, and that railway electrification has a key part to play in

decarbonising our transport. In England, cost problems have beset rail electrification schemes, but passengers in Scotland – especially between Glasgow and Edinburgh – are reaping the benefits of a cautious rolling programme of electrification. The Scottish approach has the advantage of reducing costs of electrification considerably. Maybe this approach would have rescued the London to Sheffield and Manchester-Leeds schemes.

Goodbye franchises?

Already increasingly controversial, and with a shortage of bidders, franchising looks insufficiently robust to meet the challenges posed by the present crisis. The Government may well prefer to set up some form of outsourcing of train operations to follow the present emergency agreements with the train operators. The Williams Review may herald concession agreements, and I suspect that this will be implemented in some form, while retaining the multiplicity of different operating companies.

Prioritise customers

It seems that the immediate objective of operators has been to

comply with contractual obligations of franchises and meet regulatory requirements. Perhaps it will be required in future to develop business by improving the customer experience for both passengers and freight and to target climate change by relieving road congestion.

At the most basic level, if there is only one person staffing a station, should they perhaps be out on the platform helping passengers rather than out of sight in the booking office?

And if the fares system is too complicated to be dealt with by vending machines, surely it is time to simplify it.

The railway industry can be very good in emergencies. Take the speed with which a new station appeared at Workington North after the floods a few years ago. But chaotic timetable changes, for example, suggest it is less good at medium-term planning. Perhaps it is time to accept that the fragmentation of the railway into so many organisations linked legally as an experiment has failed.

However, it may take an even bigger crisis than Covid-19 for that to be admitted.



TOP TEAM: This Railwatch is edited by Jane Ann Liston, left, and Allison Cosgrove. Jane Ann is convenor of the StARLink campaign to bring the trains back to St Andrews and Allison is a director of Railfuture and Rail Action Group, East of Scotland, which wants to see a good local train service between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed, as well as reopened stations at East Linton, Reston and Haddington

Railwatch with a Scottish flavour

Edinburgh Waverley station was like many others in Britain during the Covid-19 lockdown – almost deserted. It was so quiet that a fox (pictured right by ScotRail) thought it was safe to have a look round. But the station was not forgotten. Network Rail arranged for the station to be illuminated in blue as a thank you to the National Health Service and key workers.

Other railway infrastructure in Scotland which went blue as a tribute included Glenfinnan Viaduct and Glasgow Queen Street station, where ScotRail

PAGE ONE PICTURE

volunteers helped load a train delivering hospital “scrubs” to National Health Service staff in Inverness, Caithness and Elgin. The “scrubs” were made by 300 volunteer sewing machinists who donated the products of their labour.

ScotRail managing director Alex Hynes is proud of what is being achieved in Scotland. You can read his contribution to Railwatch on page 12. Many rail campaigners believe Scotland has shown the rest of the United Kingdom the way on rail. You can also read a series of articles from Scotland in this issue.



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Improvements for Fenland stations

Railfuture East Anglia has supported and provided feedback on plans to improve facilities at March station on the Peterborough-Ely line. At present much of the main station building is unused. The plans, as part of a £9.5 million funding package from the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, will provide a larger waiting area, better toilets, a shop and improved facilities for staff. The shop is especially welcome as there are few retail facilities in the area around the station. We have suggested that a *Changing Places* toilet with better facilities than the normal toilet for people with disabilities should be provided. New waiting shelters have been provided at Manea and Whittlesea stations. The three shelters are made of long-life accoya wood and were chosen following a public consultation on which type of design to use. Longer platforms will be provided at Manea and Whittlesea, plus a footbridge and improved car park at Whittlesea station.

Changing Places

Rail users in East Anglia will benefit from improved passenger facilities at three stations. At Colchester, *Access for All* Government funding will pay for a new passenger lift linking platforms and subway to the main booking hall and car park. The Government estimates that every year 52,000 passengers with mobility problems will benefit. Many of the remaining 4.5 million annual users of the station will also benefit. At Bury St Edmunds a fully accessible entrance will be created on the north side of the station, linking the newly built car park with the station lobby. At Needham Market the Government funding will enable the station to be linked to both the town and the Needham Lake visitor centre. The money spent in East Anglia represents 10% of the Department for Transport's £20 million mid tier programme.

Access for All cash for three stations

Greater Anglia stepped up its train cleaning programme because of worries about Covid-19. It used fogging guns to spray and sanitise large areas. GA's Martin Moran said: "If a person with suspected coronavirus travels on one of our trains, the train will be quarantined. Once it has been released, it will undergo a thorough deep-clean and part of this process involves using the fogging guns."

Fogging guns to combat Covid-19



Picture: GREATER ANGLIA

Budget go-ahead for Addenbrooke's station

The Government's budget in March agreed funding for a new Cambridge South station serving Addenbrooke's Hospital to be built by 2025, five years earlier than planned.

'Permitted rights' bid for Soham station

Network Rail has applied to East Cambridgeshire District Council for "permitted development rights" to build a new £18.6 million station at Soham by 2022. The plan is funded by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and includes a footbridge, plus the potential to provide lifts in the future.

Rail is the best option for Wisbech

Restoring the seven-mile Wisbech-March rail line was backed as the best of 10 options in a Mott MacDonald report in March for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. The cost is likely to be £200 million because level crossings may have to be replaced by bridges, plus a passing loop is required at Coldham. Covid-19 Further investment would be needed at Ely to provide capacity to allow two trains an hour to run from Wisbech to Cambridge, as well as a service to Peterborough.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia
Twitter: @RailfutureEA



Picture: BRIAN SULLIVAN

COVID-19 SPECIAL: The railway organised many unusual freight workings to help deal with problems resulting from the lockdown. This was a Crewe-Northampton test train at Kingsthorpe Mill, Northants, on 22 April

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Meeting with Leicestershire

Railfuture East Midlands members Peter Small, Geoff Bushell and Steve Jones met senior officers from Leicestershire County Council environment and transport department at County Hall in February. We aimed to establish closer links between the council and Railfuture as well as exploring the roles of the council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, Transport for the East Midlands and Midlands Connect. Numerous rail issues were discussed, including bringing passenger trains to the Leicester-Burton Ivanhoe line (Geoff Bushell is the chair of the campaign).

It seems that rail developments must fit in with the "jobs, money, homes" mantra to win support. Rail schemes have to show how they support house building and economic growth. The county council is consulting on its draft *Strategic Transport Priorities 2020-2050*, to which Railfuture will be submitting a response.

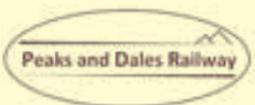
Restoring Your Railway

Progress is being made in commissioning a feasibility study into how passenger trains can be returned to the Leicester-Burton line. The Campaign for the Reopening of the Ivanhoe Line has held two meetings and is close to producing a tender document, and the pledged funds are coming in. CRIL, a group member of Railfuture, has applied to the *New Ideas* fund, part of the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* initiative. CRIL has successfully entered the assessment process.

CRIL's sponsor is north-west Leicestershire MP Andrew Bridgen, an active supporter of restoring passenger services. The process and campaigning generally has been delayed because of the Covid-19 lockdown.

Peaks and Dales Railway

A business case for reopening the railway from Matlock northwards to Buxton and Chinley was submitted to the DfT's *New Ideas* fund on 16 March. The



application was made by Peaks and Dales Railway, a company incorporated by the Goodshelter Group, a corporate sponsor of the Manchester & East Midlands Rail Action Partnership. Peaks and Dales Railway Ltd will undertake development work while MEMRAP continues to lead the part-time campaigning, stakeholder management and Monsal Trail re-provisioning. The business case is sponsored by MPs Robert Lorgan (High Peak) and Nigel Mills (Amber Valley). A summary of the position can be found at the new Peaks and Dales website. www.peaksanddalesrailway.com/2-business-case

Maid Marian line

A feasibility study commissioned by Ashfield District Council into reopening the Maid Marian line, which connects the Robin Hood line at Kirkby-in-Ashfield to the Erewash Valley line, has been completed. It is estimated that the line would carry between 1.1 and 1.4 million passengers per year, and would benefit Ashfield and Mansfield Districts in particular by providing connections to the proposed HS2 hub at Toton. Railfuture believes it should not be dependent on HS2, as the line would in any case greatly improve connectivity around the East Midlands.

Corby electrification

Test trains with both diesel and electric locomotives (but no passengers) began running in April following the electrification of the Midland main line north of Bedford and from Kettering to Corby. Electric passenger trains are expected to start running to Corby from London later in the year.

Talgo UK targets HS2 train sales

Spanish train builder Talgo has set up a head office at Chesterfield for its Talgo UK subsidiary, with plans to open a research centre at Barrow Hill, and will bid to supply trains for HS2.

New date for East Midlands AGM

The AGM of Railfuture East Midlands has been postponed, provisionally to Saturday 26 September at 12:30 at the Midland Hotel, Derby. Following the formal AGM, there will be an open meeting at 14.00, where it is expected we will have a guest speaker from CrossCountry Trains.

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

Crime and thrills on this literary line

By Jane Ann Liston

If there's one thing everybody knows about *The Thirty-Nine Steps* it is that the hero Richard Hannay, wrongly pursued for a murder by the police, not to mention the gang responsible, leaps off a train on the Forth Bridge and escapes straight into the Highlands on the other side! It's such an iconic scene that two years after the Kenneth More remake of the Hitchcock/Donat original, it was parodied in *Carry On Regardless*.

There is no such incident in the novel, first published in 1915. Most of the action in John Buchan's book takes place 85 miles away from the Forth Bridge on the now-closed Dumfries to Stranraer line. Hannay, having bought a ticket at St Pancras for Newton Stewart, duly changes trains at Dumfries on to the Galloway line, and disembarks at "a little place whose name I hardly noticed set right in the heart of a bog". Could this be New Galloway station, actually situated in Mossdale (the heart of a bog)?

Next day Hannay hikes to a station further down the line, intending to confuse his pursuers by doubling back. The station he reaches is in the middle of the moorland, with no access road and "to increase the desolation, the waves of a tarn lapped on their grey granite beach half a mile away". Some have identified this as Loch Skerrow, a halt in the middle of nowhere between New Galloway and Gatehouse stations,



Newton Stewart: Destination on Richard Hannay's ticket

established simply to enable trains to take on water and to pass on the loop, rather than to serve local passengers.

Having doubled back to pass through the station where he disembarked the previous day, Hannay jumps off the train when it stops at a culvert "which spanned a brawling porter-coloured river", which could well be the Black Water just west of Loch Ken and Parton station. The last time we see Hannay on the railway is when, after several chapters of derring-do, he walks from



Moffat to "the junction with the main line" (Beattock) to catch the train to Crewe and thwart a "dastardly plan". Fifteen years later in 1930, the Galloway line played a pivotal role in Freeman Wills Croft's novel *Sir John Magill's Last Journey*. Croft drew on his experience working for the London Midland & Scottish railway, sending his characters on the 7.43 pm sleeper from Euston to Stranraer Harbour, arriving at 5.25 am just a few yards from the steamer to Larne, in the days of fully integrated transport. In pursuit of his investigations, Inspector French also travels by rail from Stranraer Town to Portpatrick, and also Carlisle to Dumfries and thence Castle Douglas. These journeys give the inspector the opportunities to admire the scenery sailing down Loch Ryan on the steamer, and to consider the romance of Gretna Green, all the while investigating the disappearance of linen magnate Sir John Magill.

Castle Douglas station is a prime location in the course of the crime. Croft describes the station in detail, even down to a wicket gate where a mysterious car had been parked around 4 am when the Stranraer-bound boat train from Euston had arrived on the fateful night. It is a pity that no



FILM STAR: The 300-yard viaduct over the Big Water of Fleet near Gatehouse on the Stranraer to Dumfries line which was a crucial link for military supplies in the Second World War

Train pictures: Frank Spaven collection, courtesy of David Spaven

trace now remains of Castle Douglas station.

In her book set in Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright, *Five Red Herrings*, Dorothy L Sayers describes the "real places" and "real trains". Indeed parts of the timetable are included and at the beginning of the book is a detailed map of Galloway, showing the rail lines. The rail interest centres on whether the murderer headed for a railway station on the Stranraer-Ayr-Glasgow line (Barrhill, Pinwherry, Pinmore or even Girvan) after leaving the scene of the crime. As the Stranraer-Glasgow line is still open one can actually read the pertinent passage, where Lord Peter Wimsey recreates the

desperate journey, while travelling along the line between Girvan and Ayr. The other line which features is the Galloway line. Sayers describes Gatehouse station, six miles away from Gatehouse itself, in detail. It "lies at the edge of the Galloway hill-country, looking away over the Fleet Valley and the viaduct and frowned on by the lofty scarp of the Clints of Dromore".

The crossing referred to is the Big Water of Fleet Viaduct, still standing, reinforced to carry munitions trains during the Second World War. Its neighbour, the Little Water of

Fleet Viaduct, was blown up by the Army in 1987 as an exercise. Sayers continues: "The railway-station at Gatehouse is approached by one of those gates so numerous in the Border Country, which provide some slight restraint upon straying cattle but to the impatient motorist appear an unmitigated nuisance."

"The line from Castle Douglas to Stranraer is a single one but boasts of two sets of rails at Gatehouse station, for the better convenience of passengers and to allow of the passing of trains."

Later, we learn that to travel by train to Glasgow takes five and a half hours, leaving Gatehouse at 8.45 and changing on to the 11.22 at Dumfries.

"That train of ours gets in at 2.16 - it's a bad train, stops at every station, and we'd have done better to wait and take the 1.46 at Dumfries."

The suspect did actually board the 8.45 at Gatehouse but then disembarked immediately out of the other side of the carriage.

He made his way back to the scene of the crime, left later than he intended because he had



Loch Ken: Where Richard Hannay 'detrained'

forgotten to wind his watch, and cycled desperately to Barrhill for the 12.35, missing it by a hairsbreadth.

By great good luck he managed to hitch a ride to Girvan from an unsuspecting motorist by hanging on to the ledge of the car's rear window. This unorthodox method of travel ensured he caught the 1.11 at Girvan, changed trains (and his clothes) at Ayr, and arrived at Glasgow St Enoch at 2.55, thus establishing his alibi because the 2.16 had as usual arrived nearly 20 minutes late. As Wimsey observes, the local trains are always late. So Sayers does not merely use the Galloway line as a geographical location, she gives some insights into the service too!

Should the powers-that-be finally see sense and reopen the Dumfries-Stranraer line, it would only be fitting that some recognition is made of its predecessor's literary heritage, and thus its claim to call itself The Crime and Thrillers Line.

The railway village that disappeared

By Allison Cosgrove

When the Waverley line from Edinburgh to Carlisle closed, it was a severe economic blow to towns such as Hawick. But 16 miles south of Hawick, Riccarton Junction, a village which grew up after the railway came in 1860, was already dying. The Waverley closure was like a stake through its heart.

Riccarton Junction is south of the Waverley route's Whitrope tunnel and summit and the Golden Bridge.

The junction station was where the Waverley route met the Border Counties Railway, a line carrying mainly fish and coal from Northumberland via Hexham. The BCR bled to death in the 1950s.

In 2020, all that remains of what was once a thriving community of 118 people forming the railway village of Riccarton Junction is the ruin of an isolated house. The tracks on the Waverley route were

ripped up immediately after closure in 1969.

Although we can now travel from Edinburgh to Galashiels, following the 2015 reopening of the Borders Railway to Tweedbank, campaigners are fighting for the rest of the Waverley route to be reopened to Hawick and then through Riccarton to Newcastleton, Longtown and Carlisle.

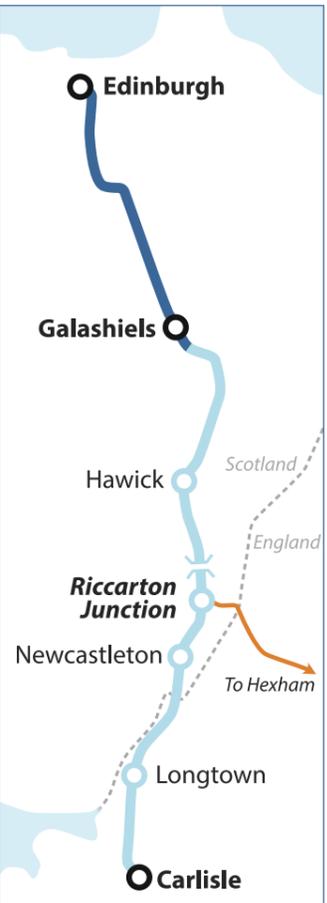
For 100 years, Riccarton Junction was a busy village, served only by the railway, and although an isolated community, it had many facilities. In 1876, the station consisted of an island platform with north and south facing lines, bay platforms at both the



LOOKING TOWARDS HAWICK: The view from the south signal box in the early 1900s, with the line from Carlisle on the left and the line from Hexham on the right



LOOKING TOWARDS CARLISLE: In 1907 Riccarton Junction was busy with trains, heading both north and south



north and south ends, an engine shed, a carriage shed, two coaling stations, two signal boxes, a cattle dock, a gasworks and a smiddy (smithy to English readers).

The last two were to serve the village that grew up around the station to provide homes for its employees, for there was no road access until 1963.

Thirty three houses formed the settlement. There was a large house for the station master and three terraces, one forming eight large dwellings for drivers and senior railway staff, and two terraces of smaller houses for

the houses, apart from the station master's house, had been demolished. The station master's house is now a crumbling ruin. Residents have relocated, the railway squad was disbanded and the village is no more.

In 1997 the Friends of Riccarton Junction was formed with the aim of restoring as much of the station as possible. Funding was obtained from a variety of sources and some work was carried out to restore some of the buildings. Sadly the group was wound up in 2008 and all work ceased.

Although many people today still remember the Junction, the population in the area is too sparse to imagine the village ever coming back to life. But it looks increasingly likely that the Borders Railway will extend, so it may be that the site of Riccarton Junction will once again be a feature of the Edinburgh-Carlisle route.



Riccarton Junction station and rows of houses (date unknown)

Thanks to Bruce McCartney and Andrew Bethune for their kind assistance in compiling this article. Further information can be obtained from *Memories of Lost Border Railways* by Bruce McCartney, *Riccarton Junction* by Kit Milligan, and *Some memories of Upper Liddesdale 1927-1942* by Robert Jardine 1982 (published by the Copshaw Resource Centre, Newcastleton) and www.disused-stations.org.uk

You can get to the site of Riccarton Junction by car and on foot from Newcastleton. See www.riccartonjunction.org/directions.html

Ray King writes: You can also cycle to Riccarton Junction as I did in 2018 from the former Saughtree station (now a B&B) You have to use the B6357, not the former Border Counties trackbed which is impassable in places.



other staff. These included a shop, later taken over by Hawick Co-op, and a school, at a distance from the houses.

There was also a village hall, the venue for regular whist drives, carpet bowling, table tennis and darts evenings.

A refreshment room was added to the station later.

When a doctor was needed, he would travel from Newcastleton or Hawick by a scheduled passenger train, or if the situation was urgent by freight train or pilot engine.

If the patient needed to go for hospital treatment they were taken by train to Carlisle. The last doctor to call at Riccarton Junction, Dr Arthur Bethune, now aged

97, recounted his interesting experiences in his book *A Doctor Remembers*.

What caused the village to disappear? With the closure of the Border Counties line in 1958, the village's decline accelerated, although it had begun earlier in the decade.

Valuation rolls from 1950 show all houses occupied but by 1955, 10 were empty. By 1973, only one property had inhabitants. The school closed in 1962, with children having to go to Newcastleton or Hawick.

By the time the Waverley route closed in 1969, the village had lost all its residents. Nearly all

Crying out for rail to come back

Throughout Scotland, campaigners are calling for the return of their railway. **Jane Ann Liston** asked what bringing the railway back would mean for them

1 Beattock, Dumfriesshire
Ron MacLean - Beattock Station Access Group



A station at Beattock would provide easy access to the rail network for about 5,000 local people, transforming their opportunities for work and access to university, by enabling a daily commute to Edinburgh, Glasgow or Carlisle in 45 minutes. Not only would it enhance employment opportunities in Beattock, it would also regenerate Moffat, allowing families and young people to stay in both places. It would improve access for the surrounding rural communities and remove the need to make a round trip of 34 miles to Lockerbie to access the railway.

2 Thornhill, Dumfriesshire
David Formstone - Thornhill Station Action Group

The 26 miles between the stations of Sanquhar and Dumfries is one of the longest stretches in Scotland with no rail access.

Thornhill, whose station was closed in 1965, is an important hub for the whole of Mid-Nithsdale, but public transport links in and out of the area are poor. A local resident writes: "I have spent several years having to travel to work in the central belt, for an employer who has a 'green' travel policy of encouraging the use of public transport. My journey from home to office takes two and a half hours each way, adding five hours to my working day.

"The half-hour drive to and from home to the nearest station at Sanquhar is especially tiring in the dark, wet days of winter, and particularly annoying for me as Thornhill station would be a five-minute walk from my home!"

Reopening the station would dramatically shorten journey times and provide greater opportunities to access work and education in large towns and cities, especially for our young people. It would also promote green tourism and help build local businesses by allowing visitors from across the UK to come by public transport.

3 Reston, Berwickshire
Barrie Forrest - Rail Action Group East of Scotland

Expected to open by 2024, the new station at Reston, which will also serve Coldingham, St Abbs and Eyemouth, will enable all ages to commute to work and socialise, enable students to further their education and also enable people to visit this area of the Scottish Borders, cut off from its rail service since 1964 and left with a two-hour bus journey, with no late service, from Edinburgh.

4 East Linton, East Lothian
Allison Cosgrove - Rail Action Group East of Scotland

Since the station closed in 1964, traffic, particularly commuter traffic, to Edinburgh has increased exponentially, driven by several phases of house building. The A1 and the Edinburgh city bypass are gridlocked at peak commuter times, so the station's

reinstatement, to take place by 2024, will mean that a large amount of commuter traffic could be taken off the road and put on to the railway. At the moment, commuters have to travel five miles to Drem to catch a train.

5 Bonnybridge, Stirlingshire
Bryan Denkin - Reinstat Bonnybridge Railway Station

Restoring rail access to Bonnybridge would help transport in the town and make it much easier for its 5,000 inhabitants to access Glasgow and Edinburgh. A station would fit nicely between Camelon and Cumbernauld.

6 Levenmouth, Fife
Allen Armstrong - Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The agreed reopening of a station at Levenmouth by 2024 should encourage a move away from the private car and enable easier commuting, plus bringing colleges and universities in South Fife and Edinburgh within an hour's travel as well as helping to revive businesses hit by the Covid-19 crisis. It is also hoped that the train will bring investment opportunities to this area of deprivation as well as encouraging environmentally friendly tourism to the East Neuk.



Artist Gill Allan's vision for a new station at St Andrews

7 St Andrews, Fife
Dita Stanis-Traken - St Andrews Rail Link Campaign

The former St Andrews station was the beating heart of the town so when it closed in 1969 the town's heart was torn out and its equilibrium lost. Nothing was left to stem soaring levels of congestion, pollution, unsightly parking and the concomitant loss of visual amenity, pedestrian and cyclist safety and the overall quality of local and visitor life.

A reopened station would go a long way to restoring St Andrews to some form of balance, not least for its visitors and academic life.

Bringing high-quality, high-speed access to St Andrews, a railway would obviate the perceived need for building unsustainable mass housing, with which the town has for years been threatened. It would enhance local, regional and national economies while ushering in simultaneous environmental benefit. A railway would make the most positive contribution towards the continued ability of St Andrews to host golf's Open Championship and other large events for which the town is renowned. A new St Andrews railway has potential to rebalance a town overwhelmed by the horrors of mass car-ownership which clashes with its status as a beautiful and ancient European university city by the sea.

8 Newburgh, Fife
Nigel Mullan - Newburgh Train Station Group

A station would give reliable public transport access to a range of places and opportunities for all residents. The planned housing in Newburgh, some of which has already been built, will increase demand for transport. A station could also facilitate inward visits and possibly create demand for a hospitality sector to develop with tourist attractions, which in turn could encourage economic development, and local businesses serviced locally, giving more employment and income to residents.

Get on with it

Thanks for another interesting and stimulating edition. Unfortunately, it made a depressing read, with so many obviously necessary and viable schemes having been on hold, for years in many cases.

It is increasingly frustrating that governments of all shades talk of reducing road traffic but do little to facilitate it.

Apparently, a fraction of the proposed HS2 funding would improve rail infrastructure for a huge number of people.

When will they grasp the nettle and get on with it?

It is particularly ironic to see so many rail lines that closed in my youth now being brought back as viable propositions.

Keep up the good work.

John Holiday, Mold, North Wales
jahsurveying@btinternet.com

Accessibility

I would like to clarify some of the points made about accessibility in *Railwatch* 163 in the article "Is your train (or replacement bus) accessible?".

It is misleading to say that "there seems little prospect of current operators seeking tenders for new DDA compliant stock in the near future" so that "passengers will have to either change their journey, go by car, bus or coach (if they can) or grin and bear it".

In fact, all new trains ordered since the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (RVAR) came into force have been DDA compliant, or, since 2005, compliant with the People with Reduced Mobility Technical Specification for Interoperability (PRM TSI).

It has been illegal since 1 January this year for operators to run non-compliant vehicles in passenger service. This is why the rolling stock companies have spent tens of millions on making around 5,000 ex-British Rail passenger vehicles compliant.

Clearly, where ex-BR stock was planned to be replaced by the new vehicles scheduled to enter service by the 1 January 2020 deadline – such as the Pacers – there was no point in spending money making them compliant.

However, delivery of some new fleets is running late. The choice for operators was either to withdraw their non-compliant vehicles to remain within the law, or seek a short-term exemption until the replacement stock is in service.

Withdrawal of non-compliant stock would have exacerbated overcrowding and possibly affected services. As a result the

decision was taken to seek exemptions covering around 1,500 vehicles, many of which are already going for scrap. The current passenger rolling stock fleet is around 14,000 so the exemptions represent 10% and shrinking.

Can I also correct the statements about replacement buses? Like rolling stock, there is a legal requirement for all public service buses to be DDA-compliant. What is at issue is the use of private hire coaches, which do not fall under the DDA, on rail replacement services.

While buses handle most rail replacement duties, they are not ideal for long distance services since they lack luggage storage and amenities such as air conditioning and toilets. The problem is that there is only a small number of DDA-compliant coaches, hence the requirement for exemptions until the number available can be increased.

My personal view is that focusing on the short-term rolling stock issues, which affect a small and diminishing number of travellers, is a distraction from the real issue of accessible stations, highlighted by the case of Walkden station in the same issue.

Access for All funding is pretty mean and, as *Railwatch* shows, its allocation is opaque.

Can I also thank Frank Salt (and Lewis) for an article which was both illuminating and enjoyable.

Roger Ford
Raifuture vice-president

Graham Collett comments: I bow to Roger's superior knowledge on these issues and apologise if my wording was misleading. I was trying to convey the message that there seems little prospect of all the remaining non-compliant stock being replaced in the near future.

The requirement for all public service buses to be DDA-complaint has only recently been clarified in relation to rail replacement services and I fully support his concern about the lack of non-compliant coaches. I certainly agree, though, that making stations accessible is the priority issue.

Team backed Ron

I was saddened to learn of the passing of Ron Cotton – the man who really saved the S&C – in *Railwatch* 163.

When I was head of publicity at British Rail's Liverpool division, Ron was my boss. He was hugely popular with all his staff and was admired across the network for his marketing skills and belief in rail.

So we were all surprised when he was removed from his position as divisional passenger manager at

SCOTLAND HAS THE HIGHEST STATION ON THE BRITISH MAIN LINE RAIL NETWORK



CORROUR SUMMIT: One of the many remote spots on ScotRail's network, 93 miles by rail from Glasgow (140 miles by road and private track) and still 27 miles to Fort William where you can catch a summer steam train to Mallaig



Pictures: NORMAN McNAB

CORROUR STATION: It is the highest main line rail station in Britain. A lonely but beautiful location between Rannoch and Fort William with views of snow-covered Leum Uilleim. In a normal year, the station restaurant is open from March to October

Liverpool and sent to prepare the Settle and Carlisle line for closure in 1983.

But of course, with Ron being a born marketing man, there was no way he was going to allow the S&C to close, and he quickly set about seeking ways to increase the patronage of the line. The only problem was that he was given no marketing budget by the powers that be at Euston, as his remit was to close the line.

So he quickly set about asking for favours off old colleagues and staff members to overcome the absence of a marketing budget.

And occasionally he called me up and asked if some promotional material for the Settle and Carlisle line could be produced from the Liverpool division publicity budget! I was more than happy to help, and somehow or other I managed to get S&C promotional material produced for him under the slightly inaccurate heading of "Liverpool-London Saver posters".

All in a good cause. How we could do with a few more Ron Cottons on today's railway!

David Latimer, Publicity Officer,
Minehead Rail Link Group
david.latimer@btinternet.com

Political viewpoints

Although I agree with Keith Bradshaw's opening sentiments regarding those Raifuture members who do not renew their subscriptions (*Railwatch* 163), I take issue with him in referring to this "miserable Tory government" while apparently castigating Brexit as well.

I should like to see personal party political opinions kept out of *Railwatch* unless they are relevant to a specific issue.

However, on this occasion and in order to provide a degree of balance, may I just point out this Tory administration is spending billions of pounds on new rail schemes, including building HS2 and reopening East West Rail after the latter was controversially closed in 1967 under a Labour government.

I look forward to reading future editions of *Railwatch* free from personal politics, otherwise I may have to seriously consider whether I should renew my own subscription after 30+ years.

John Elvin (East West Rail campaigner),
Beamish Way, Winslow MK18 3EU
john.elvin@live.co.uk

Devon direct

I would like to respond to Mr Mayes' letter in *Railwatch* 163 with the reminder that some of us prefer to receive *Railwatch* by post, not least because we have no email facility. Remember that the Raifuture membership is made up of all sorts.

I would also like to support Mr Bradshaw's letter in his assertion that people should remain in Raifuture to ensure that progress continues on the railway. *Railwatch* is wonderful value and is always a great read.

However, I do not agree with everything in *Railwatch*, including the calls to concentrate on reopening the Tavistock route from Exeter to Plymouth as preferable to the existing coastal line via Dawlish.

The Okehampton route is a long way round, and the only significant places on the route are the small towns of Okehampton and Tavistock. It was single track, unsuitable for inter-city trains, and ran alongside another tidal estuary,

the Tamar. Moreover it would bypass the populous towns of Torbay and Newton Abbot and would not serve the towns between there and Plymouth.

Maybe we should seriously consider an HS4-style new line from Exeter to Newton Abbot under the Haldon Hills which would make the journey between Torbay and Plymouth vastly faster. To make the Okehampton route suitable for inter-city trains would probably cost as much as tunnelling under Haldon.

A reopening I would like to see is from Barnstaple to Bideford.

J Evered, Goylands Close, Llandrindod
Wells LD1 5RB

Daily debate

The Great Western Coffee Shop Forum – winner of the 2018 Raifuture Best Website award – remains online through the current coronavirus crisis. All welcome and free, run by passengers for passengers at www.passenger.chat

We are now looking further ahead at the future after lockdown, including schemes outside the Great Western area. The excellent *Railwatch* magazine and other Raifuture publications bring us news of campaigns for a better and bigger railway when they drop into our letter boxes (real or online). The Coffee Shop forum cannot hope to cover topics in the depth that Raifuture meetings and publications can.

It does provide a way for those of us looking for a bigger and better railway to stay in daily touch and to

learn from others right across the UK, with a decade's archive of passenger news.

Graham Ellis, webmaster
Great Western Coffee Shop Forum,
Spa Road, Melksham SN12 7NY
graham@railcustomer.info

Free advice

The *Railwatch* 163 article entitled *Is this the start of the revolution?* referred to Luxembourg's initiative to make public transport free. Free travel has already been tested in other European cities with questionable results.

A better approach is to make public transport better on price and ease of use than the car, but not free. With cars of the future likely to be electric or hybrid, could cars become more environmentally friendly than a diesel train? Perhaps a scientist could tell me. Which is worse – a four-coach diesel train or 500 electric cars?

Raifuture is a member of the European Passenger Federation whose 2018 paper *Free Public Transport: An Appealing But Useless Idea* can be found at <https://bit.ly/39wHxTx>

Dennis Fancett, Raifuture member of
European Passenger Group
chair@senrug.co.uk

Time to save planet

What good news that our emissions have drastically fallen because of the coronavirus lockdown and that at last there is hope for the climate.

If only world governments could act as decisively to avoid the

Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups
Send material to: The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

◆◆◆◆ Rail User Express can be downloaded from www.raifuture.org.uk

deaths to come in the future as they have to save lives today due to a pandemic.

We will not get another chance to save the planet for future generations.

I do drive a petrol car and fly once or twice a year, but I strongly disagree with any UK-funded bailout for any airlines or any oil companies. I sincerely hope that UK taxpayers' money is used on helping the climate and the poor, not for assisting ailing airlines and oil companies.

Once things slowly return to normal, flights should not be reintroduced on routes readily served by train. There should be no flights by any airline on routes such as London to Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Birmingham, Manchester or Leeds, etc. It just does not make sense, except for airline shareholders.

Any cash available for airline bailouts should instead be utilised to subsidise rail, or at least make the rail fare structures cheaper than airlines.

Peter Odell, Riverside Towers, Bedford
MK42 0AU

Mind your language

I hardly think new members are likely to be drawn to join Raifuture by the inclusion in *Railwatch* 163 of a cartoon, albeit borrowed from another publication, containing offensive language. The point could have been made just as well without resorting to such terms.

David Burbidge
Milton Keynes
dave_burbidge@fastmail.fm

Beeching 'reversed'

So the Government is going to reverse some of the Beeching cuts. The optimist in me says "whoopie" but the pessimist in me says "here we go again".

I have just turned 70 and I wonder if I will ever see any of the Beeching cuts reversed in my lifetime.

As mentioned in *Railwatch* 163, the first priority is the restoration of alternative routes, including those which are missing and those which are freight lines and need upgrading to passenger standards.

With the frequent weather-related cancellation of services between Exeter and Newton Abbot along the Dawlish sea wall, surely restoration of the route from Okehampton to Bere Alston MUST be a priority.

There are those who say that Meldon Viaduct is a sticking point; the only other railway bridge construction like it which still stands being Bennerley Viaduct, but this is disused. However, a

similarly constructed bridge on the road system still carries vehicles after strengthening work (Ovingham Road Bridge) and the expert reports on Meldon Viaduct say that it is still capable of carrying trains.

Note well that the former down line viaduct at Meldon is reported capable of carrying trains. The former up line could remain as the footpath-cycle way as it is today.

Incidentally, I believe that since the Beeching cuts, the town of Bude is one of those currently furthest from a railway station, this being Exeter some 45 miles away as the crow flies and some 55 miles by road.

Bude does have a local group campaigning for the restoration of a train service to the town. If the promised train service is reinstated to Okehampton, this will help.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com

Ordsall Chord

Thanks for the latest *Railwatch*, which I read with considerable interest, particularly the articles about Manchester. I declare a slight interest, as from 1974-9 I worked for the British Rail Property Board in Manchester and was in the team involved in land acquisitions for the Liverpool Loop and Link lines, the Pic-Vic tunnel (ahem), the Ordsall Chord first time around (i.e. before it was dropped as being impractical from an operating point of view), and the early stages of the airport line.

I was accused of undervaluing the land acquisitions for the latter and making the scheme appear viable! I think my boss may have been joking, but there was a bit of the "You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off" about it.

Alisdair McNicol, Stanley Avenue,
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National railcard

I agree with the comment under Thames Valley news in *Railwatch* 163 that Labour should have supported Raifuture's campaign for a national railcard.

I have fond memories of when I had first a student and then a young person's Railcard, and was able to get a discount of 50% off the normal fare. I could also buy a ticket the day before I wanted to travel, without having to fork out more for not booking well in advance. I believe that this flexibility encouraged passengers.

Tim Mickleburgh,
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■ ■ Railfuture protest over cutbacks

Reductions in Great Western Railway services from 30 March arising from Covid-19 travel restrictions maintained a reasonable spread of weekday trains on most routes. A major exception was the Severn Beach line, which was reduced to mostly peak hours with last trains from Bristol Temple Meads at 18.03 to Severn Beach and 19.28 to Avonmouth. Railfuture contacted GWR to point out that some key workers would be badly affected, including shift workers who needed early afternoon trains. In the first week of emergency timetables, the 17.38 Bristol TM to Gloucester was removed, leaving no service to Yate or Cam & Dursley between 16.38 and 18.41. This was rectified following our representations but large gaps in the Severn Beach service remained at the time of writing. The Weymouth line was reduced to three trains each way between Westbury and Weymouth. It is believed this was to discourage leisure travel.

■ ■ Portishead £284m promise

Reopening of the Portishead line will help the area recover from the economic effects of Covid-19, said the project managers for MetroWest Phase 1 in a report for North Somerset Council's executive meeting on 29 April. Their report estimates that around 500 jobs will be created during the building of the line, and that the first 10 years of operation will bring an additional £284 million into the local economy.

number of trains calling at the station has increased considerably, notably on the TransWilts Swindon-Westbury route. More platform congestion is likely if MetroWest extends to Westbury but a four-platform station would relieve this and maximise connections there. Railfuture supports the strategy of giving more attention to north-south routes across the county and not merely those radiating from London.

The TransWilts service traverses 8.5 miles of plain single track between Thingley Junction and Bradford Junction, which is also regularly used for inter-city and freight diversions. A dynamic loop at Melksham would permit an hourly service, with less likelihood of curtailment when diversions are in force.

Devizes is three miles from the London-Penzance main line but is the furthest from a station of comparable towns in Wiltshire. A site for Devizes Parkway has been identified at Lydney, accessible from the A342 road. Wiltshire Council believes it has a strong business case because the station would also improve access to Avebury and the Kennet & Avon Canal. Within the station's catchment area, 2,400 new houses are proposed. An hourly service between Reading and Westbury is envisaged, also serving Bedwyn and Pewsey. The project has the support of local business associations.

■ ■ Gloucestershire lacks definite plans

In contrast to Wiltshire, Gloucestershire County Council had no definite plans for station reopenings in its Local Transport Plan review which closed for consultation in late March. The Railfuture response concluded that the LTP was not bold enough to seriously address climate change and that the county risked losing out to other authorities which were advancing plans for rail. Our submission highlighted two major gaps in connectivity within the county; between the Stroud-Stonehouse urban area and Greater Bristol, and from the eastern Forest of Dean to Gloucester and beyond. We urged Gloucestershire to apply for new stations funding with a view to opening a station at Stonehouse Bristol Road and another between Gloucester and Lydney. The LTP also seemed to regard train services as more or less set in stone, a view we believe is encouraged by the Department for Transport's prescriptive specification of rail franchises. Railfuture issued a press release calling for a bolder approach. Station reopenings in Gloucestershire are likely to be very popular among residents and visitors in spite of the council's lack of interest.

The LTP lists Honeybourne-Stratford reopening as an aspiration. Railfuture would like to see eventual reinstatement of a through route between Cheltenham and Stratford via the heritage Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway.

Improved connectivity between the North Cotswolds and the Oxbridge business arc would be better achieved via the North Cotswold line and East West Rail rather than trunk roads if climate change is to be seriously addressed.

The LTP has some good aspirations for modal shift away from cars and lorries but is short on developing plans to achieve this.

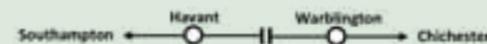
www.railfuture.org.uk/SevernsideBranch
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■ ■ Need for a national smart card

Unlike single and return tickets, season tickets are used many times. If they are made of paper, they eventually stop working at ticket gates so have to be shown to gate staff or replaced at a ticket office. The solution is season tickets on durable smart cards but, instead of a single nationwide smartcard, operators are rolling out their own branded cards.

South Western Railway has introduced its *Touch* smartcard but has so far not reached agreement with other operators enabling it to be used beyond the SWR network. Govia Thameslink Railway meanwhile offers a *Key* smartcard for use on its services, which include Southern. The result is that SWR's *Touch* smartcard works as far as Havant while GTR's *Key* validity ends at Warblington, a short walk away on the West Coastway route. So it is possible to have a smartcard season ticket for Southampton to Winchester, as both stations are operated by SWR, but only a paper season ticket for Southampton to Chichester. We have been lobbying SWR and GTR to reach agreement so rail passengers can have



smartcard season tickets for use between any two stations along the West Coastway route. Ultimately there needs to be a universal smartcard, valid across the entire national rail network.

■ ■ Salisbury-Exeter line upgrade

When Railfuture's Salisbury-Exeter Line representative, Bruce Duncan, wrote to *RAIL* magazine about the need to improve reliability, he did not expect the appearance in the magazine of a reply written by Network Rail's Wessex route director, countersigned by SWR's managing director. Bruce outlined the modest improvements being pursued under Network Rail's new continuous modular strategic planning process, while expressing frustration that the process is anything but streamlined. In the printed response in *RAIL*, the two directors pledged to make progress, ending their lengthy reply with the rallying call: "Let's work closely together to make the vision for this line a reality and show what can be done as a model for other routes". Very promising.

■ ■ GWR stations transferred to SWR

When SWR's predecessor, South West Trains, took over the stopping service between Southampton and Salisbury, we joined others in pointing out that minor stations on the line should no longer be managed by First Great Western. Now common sense has prevailed. In April, SWR took over Dean and Mottisfont & Dunbridge stations, as well as Romsey which is served by both companies.

■ ■ End of the line for Weymouth Quay tramway

The removal of track along the quay at Weymouth is imminent but Railfuture did not join those arguing for its retention. The sparse ferry services using the port do not now warrant a rail connection. A small section of track could be preserved for Weymouth's heritage. We felt tourists would be unlikely to patronise the novelty tram ride some enthusiasts are advocating.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+Branch
Twitter @RailfutureWessex

What kind of future for rail and sail passengers?

By Jane Ann Liston

Rail and sail can be an ideal way to reach some of Scotland's most beautiful locations. Travel by train to the ferry port and then on to the boat, using a single ticket.

Unhappily, the convenience of rail and sail has been whittled away or has vanished altogether. 1950s timetables gave connections at Kyle of Lochalsh, Mallaig and Oban for the Western Isles and Stranraer for Larne. Until 1990 there was a sleeper boat-train from Euston to Stranraer connecting with the Northern Irish ferry. Since then, the balance has swung heavily towards motorists, with the needs of foot passengers deemed an afterthought, an irrelevance or an inconvenience. The Mull ferry, for

example, now only goes to Craignure, rather than the "capital" Tobermory, leaving foot passengers with a bus journey. Even at Skye, where the bridge replaced the ferries, nobody noticed – or cared – that people who arrived by train at Kyle of Lochalsh faced a bus journey across the bridge or a bracing two and a half mile walk over it to Kyleakin.

Every time a ferry terminal is redesigned, it seems that the intention is to make it as much like an airport terminal as possible. Rather than boarding via a short gangplank, rail passengers, most struggling with luggage, must ascend stairs, or take the lift, wait in a departure lounge and then march along a

tube connecting snorkel-like to the vessel.

For a while, the Rothesay and Wemyss Bay facilities sternly restricted their lifts for the use of disabled passengers only, leaving holidaymakers with a week or two's luggage to struggle upstairs as best they might. Fortunately, wiser counsels have prevailed, so those with baggage in both hands no longer have to totter precariously up and down the stairs.

A recent fantasy rail network took as its inspiration the failure of the Victorians to build a line from Garve to Ullapool. Although the Act of Parliament was passed, the Scottish Office said No, against their advisers' recommendations. So when, wanting to shorten the

sea journey, the Stornoway ferry moved from Mallaig and Kyle to Ullapool, foot passengers found themselves bussed 60 miles from Inverness, 30 if one takes the train to Garve and bus thereafter.

Funnily enough, the same fantasy network suggests extending the Far North Line from Thurso to the Orkney ferry-port at Scrabster. Why should this eminently sensible idea have to emanate from a game, rather than hard-headed transport professionals? Surely it makes sense to extend the railway to the ferry port, rather than stopping two miles short?

At the other end of the country, what used to be a very easy rail and sail connection between the

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A Waverley railwayman's tale

By Lawrence Marshall
Railfuture Scotland committee
and long-time rail worker

I joined the railway as a freight guard at Millerhill depot in 1982, having just been made redundant as a bus conductor on Edinburgh's country routes. I was made redundant again just over a year later – but was offered a job as a cleaner at Craightinny maintenance depot, keeping my guard's rate of pay.

I was there for six months before taking a job as a passenger guard at Waverley station. Following in the footsteps of my dad, I was a driver for six years or so from 1990 – and a passenger guard again until last year. I am now on the gateline at Waverley – heading for retirement in the not-too-distant future. As both my mum's dad and dad's dad were on the railway, a long family railway history stretching back to before the Second World War will end with me.

It was at Millerhill that I first became interested in trying to get rail to play a larger role in moving people around Edinburgh, especially as travel around the city's south suburban line was so quick when compared with bus travel.

The city has become even more congested over the years but the south suburban line remains hugely under-utilised. I think tram-trains may be the way forward. I was glad, though, to play a small part in getting Brunstane station open, the Borders Railway up and running and the trams running, once again on Edinburgh's streets while serving as a councillor in Edinburgh from 1994 to 2007. And I am glad to be on the committee of Railfuture Scotland.

During my time on the council I sat on a body called *CREATE – Campaign for Rail Electrification Aberdeen to Edinburgh*. A fellow councillor whose dad had also been a train driver was David Begg. David did lots of good work trying to give buses more priority on arterial roads in Edinburgh, and eventually became the UK Government's chief transport adviser. He suggested that we change our call for *electrification to enhancement*. The campaign fizzled out but I



My view from a busy gateline

Working on the gateline is working on the frontline, writes Lawrence Marshall (pictured above). It has actually been less hassle than I thought it would be. Waverley is a busy station and passengers for ScotRail, LNER, CrossCountry, TransPennine Express and Caledonian Sleeper trains pass through the gateline.

am sure that electrification will be back on the cards as we seek to decarbonise our journeys.

I also sat on the joint local authority body which operated and maintained the Forth Road Bridge, becoming its chair for my last two years on the council. It certainly made me appreciate civil engineering, including the adjacent rail bridge!

Having been encouraged by the Scottish Government to introduce "smart" tolling on the road bridge, and having bought all of the

Passengers ask us a lot of questions. Waverley is probably the most confusing station in Britain. At the time of writing (in May) rail travel is almost non-existent. There are rarely more than five passengers on any regional ScotRail train and most times just two or three. Anglo-Scottish services rarely see more than a dozen

or so passengers. What a contrast with just a few weeks ago. I am sure the railway will bounce back. It is the future in a time of climate change. The railway is on a much sounder footing than it would have been had this crisis enveloped the industry when I first started my railway career.

necessary equipment, the Government then abolished tolls altogether.

Corrosion in the main suspension cable – which I thought could be fixed – led to the building of a new road bridge. It looks nice.

I led the campaign against it, although I was not a councillor by then. We lost that battle. It was David vs. Goliath really. Still, I met a pleasant civil servant who was in charge of bringing the new bridge about. He is now doing a good job as head of rail policy at Transport Scotland.



WAY TO PORTISHEAD: The freight-only line to Portbury Dock at the site of the old Ashton Gate Halt, Bristol. Passenger trains to Portishead are expected to run along here as part of MetroWest Phase 1

■ ■ Wiltshire bids to restore railway

Wiltshire Council submitted five contenders, supported by local MPs, for the Government's *Restoring Your Railway Fund*. Within Railfuture Severnside area, these are reinstatement of a fourth platform at Westbury, a passing loop on the Melksham line, Devizes Parkway station, and reopened stations at Corsham and Royal Wootton Bassett.

The importance of Westbury as a rail hub is recognised by Wiltshire Council, Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the TransWilts community interest company. Since the track on the outer face of the down island platform was removed in 1985, the

Running Scotland's railway

Alex Hynes took over in 2017 as managing director of the ScotRail Alliance – a formal agreement between Abellio ScotRail and Network Rail

By Alex Hynes
It has been a privilege to lead Scotland's railway during the Covid-19 crisis and see the hard work taking place across our industry to keep the network open. Scotland's railway has provided a vital strategic service for the nation at a crucial moment – helping to keep Scotland's supermarkets stocked, medical supplies delivered and getting key workers to where they need to be.

Like railway colleagues across Britain, our people have been working around the clock to make that happen while also delivering the maintenance and critical upgrades needed to keep lines open.

More than that, they have been doing their bit to support those on the frontline with staff at stations and depots across Scotland giving support to the NHS, care homes and charities.

We have donated thousands of sets of personal protective equipment, including glasses and visors, as well as using our vehicles and trains to distribute charity donations and move supplies.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown us all just how fragile our economic stability can be.

The industry has already played an important part during the lockdown and will be doing even more as economic and social life rebuilds.

The railway plays a vital role in the economic and social life of the country, supporting over 13,000 jobs and contributing more than £670 million a year to Scotland's economy.

We operate commuter routes and lifeline services to beautiful, but remote, parts of the country.

We look after the Forth Bridge and Glenfinnan Viaduct and are building landmarks for the future, such as the new Glasgow Queen Street station.

We manage and maintain more than 2,800 miles of track and 359 stations on a network which carries over 107 million passengers a year on more than 2,500 services a day. We are also investing in infrastructure, rolling stock and new



CHALLENGE: A new bridge installed as part of the Aberdeen-Inverness improvement project



MAN AND MACHINE: Alex Hynes and, right, a refurbished ScotRail IC125 near Drem



technologies. Between 2019 and 2024 we will invest more than £1.6 billion in upgrading infrastructure.

In the past few years, we have completed the electrification of routes between Edinburgh and Glasgow and much of the Central Belt up to Stirling, Alloa and Dunblane.

We have delivered double-tracking between Aberdeen and Inverurie and upgraded the Highland main line, to unlock more capacity and the potential to cut journey times and add services in the future.

Our £120 million rebuild of Glasgow Queen Street station is almost complete.

The new Robroyston station in Glasgow opened in December, and Kintore, in Aberdeenshire, will open later this year.

All 70 of our new Hitachi class 385 trains are now in passenger

service, and we are steadily increasing the number of refurbished IC125 trains in operation. This is all part of a £475 million investment in new and upgraded trains which will take the total number of carriages in the ScotRail fleet to over 1,000 – an increase of 28% since 2015. The Scottish Government has set Scotland's railway a target to expand by 7.5% by 2024.

So we plan to improve rail freight to encourage hauliers off the roads. At Blackford, on the Highland main line, we are creating a new freight facility.

The new signalling and track installed at Blackford has the potential to help Highland Spring move 40% of its products by rail – taking thousands of lorries off the roads.

Investment has improved the reliability of the railway by 30% in the Glasgow area, and we plan to use that approach in

other key areas including the Highland main line and Edinburgh. The infamous Scottish weather remains a challenge. Last summer, a specially developed hot weather action plan – of enhanced maintenance ahead of the hottest months – saw heat-related failures reduce by 80% year on year.

Across Britain, Network Rail has created five new regional businesses with greater devolved powers and more accountability to local customers and communities. In Scotland, that means the railway now directly oversees enhancement projects, long-term strategic planning and asset management, as well as the operations and maintenance activities.

We plan to be more responsive to the needs of operators, passengers and freight users by building on cooperation between operators and Network Rail.

Give rail and sail passengers a better deal at the ferry terminals

From Page 11

train at Stranraer Harbour and the Northern Ireland ferry was transformed into having to transfer from train to coach at Ayr, and endure a 40-odd mile shake, rattle and roll ride over Gallowegian roads to the ferry port after Stena ferries decamped six miles from Stranraer to Cairnryan.

Nobody seems to have considered extending the railway to Cairnryan. The other option of taking the train to Stranraer and then the bus to Cairnryan is not much publicised.

It is likely that rail passenger numbers have dropped as those with access to a car decide to take the easy way. For the sake of the

environment, to say nothing of the state of rural and island roads, it is essential that as many as possible of those who could take a car on the ferry opt to go by train and on foot. But it is no longer an easy option.

Transport authorities should be making the environmentally friendly option the easy one.

The new Brodick pier on the Isle of Arran has significantly increased the distance between boat and bus with its Passenger Access System (PAS), meaning passengers must move smartly to catch the bus. Some elderly passengers who could manage the old gangway simply cannot walk the whole length of the PAS and find the

offer of being pushed in a wheelchair humiliating. Over on the mainland, Ardrossan has plans for a substantial revamp, after fighting off a bid from Troon to take over the lucrative Arran service. Rail access at Ardrossan is certainly easier than at Troon, where the harbour is over a mile from the station.

The new Ardrossan terminal will have a fancy new 'Maritime Hub' right beside the ferry berths to welcome passengers.

However, by leaving "Ardrossan Harbour" station 200 yards away, where it was moved back to in the 1980s, apparently with little thought for rail passengers, an opportunity to promote the green option is being missed. One fears

that having carried their luggage from train to Hub, Ardrossan passengers will also face a long march along a PAS to embark.

The result is likely to be more potential foot passengers opting to take the car for convenience.

It is a pity that the car still reigns supreme when it comes to designing ferry services, even in these days of a climate emergency. I hope that those designing the new facility at Ardrossan will use their imagination and consider the needs of rail, foot and cycle passengers earlier in the game than hitherto.

It would send a better signal to those opting for the greener option.

SCOTTISH RAILWAY STATIONS WORDSEARCH by Jane Ann Liston

S	T	R	A	N	R	A	E	R	F	E	A	R	N	D	L	E	U	K	A	A	M	H	L	W
P	P	I	K	R	E	V	N	I	O	Z	A	S	O	A	X	I	P	C	R	J	O	C	A	R
R	A	B	N	U	D	A	B	E	R	D	O	U	R	L	T	P	H	O	I	B	R	O	R	A
I	K	L	K	I	N	G	H	O	R	N	D	K	T	R	R	S	A	N	S	I	A	L	G	G
N	R	I	A	N	F	A	K	U	E	G	H	N	H	E	A	L	L	O	A	C	R	L	S	N
G	A	L	A	S	H	I	E	L	S	A	Y	A	B	O	G	O	L	N	I	F	R	A	C	I
F	N	Y	K	D	F	A	I	R	L	I	E	S	E	C	O	G	L	B	G	O	R	B	E	H
I	A	I	D	H	U	N	T	L	Y	A	Y	J	R	H	R	A	M	R	S	C	I	D	Q	T
E	L	I	N	L	I	T	H	G	O	W	D	P	W	Z	R	H	S	I	T	H	C	S	N	I
L	Q	U	A	N	N	H	S	A	R	D	L	U	I	I	V	J	E	D	T	U	O	S	I	E
D	G	Z	B	I	I	O	R	Q	S	T	A	O	C	T	L	A	S	G	O	U	R	O	C	K
E	B	L	O	C	H	W	I	N	N	O	C	H	K	H	L	I	V	E	H	F	R	R	O	R
T	G	A	J	X	S	W	L	L	I	H	K	R	I	K	J	O	H	N	S	T	O	N	E	E
A	C	U	P	A	R	O	D	I	G	I	R	V	A	N	U	I	C	D	K	S	U	B	F	V
G	A	R	V	E	E	O	A	G	K	C	I	W	I	A	A	N	V	H	Y	M	R	H	P	N
H	T	E	X	B	V	D	S	L	O	C	K	E	R	B	I	E	O	T	R	A	A	R	H	I
T	H	N	T	B	N	T	H	X	U	D	P	S	J	G	R	C	H	K	A	Y	R	L	A	D
A	T	C	Z	D	I	I	U	P	P	E	R	T	Y	N	D	R	U	M	M	R	E	K	O	Y
B	R	E	I	R	V	L	A	N	R	E	C	E	H	A	N	S	L	A	B	D	Y	O	R	C
P	E	K	L	E	N	W	V	T	N	Q	C	R	M	L	A	I	R	G	X	E	W	S	L	E
X	P	I	G	G	R	B	S	T	K	F	D	T	V	S	X	K	J	E	B	K	A	R	L	W
Z	N	R	G	A	I	B	O	T	V	H	C	O	L	L	E	G	M	U	R	D	D	U	T	H
G	A	K	D	G	K	N	N	I	O	H	U	N	V	T	L	W	T	I	C	H	F	H	L	I
D	G	I	A	L	L	A	M	T	T	W	E	E	D	B	A	N	K	N	O	O	R	T	C	Y
L	E	U	C	H	A	R	S	H	C	O	N	N	A	R	R	O	B	R	O	Y	S	T	O	N

The names of 85 Scottish rail stations are hidden in this square. How many can you find? Words run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally but always in a straight, unbroken line. Solution: Next *Railwatch*

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■ ■ Dangerous tactics at Bicester level crossing

Network Rail has reported more than 100 incidents in the past five years of deliberate misuse of the level crossing next to Bicester Village station at London Road. In video footage released in May, a pedestrian jumps over two sets of closed barriers while a cyclist gets trapped within the crossing and is narrowly missed by a train. Because of the restricted site of the crossing, there is no space to build a bridge to replace it. Currently the line carries trains from Oxford to London Marylebone but it will soon also be on the East West Rail route.

■ ■ Open heart surgery on Bletchley viaduct



Pictures: NETWORK RAIL

BLETCHLEY VIADUCT IN MAY: Mind the gap



FUTURE: New EWR station on Bletchley viaduct

Network Rail was working during the Covid-19 lockdown to demolish 14 of the concrete pillars of the 1960s-built Bletchley viaduct where a new East West Rail link station is to be built to provide connections to the West Coast main line station below. Campaigners are hopeful that full provision will be made for EWR to be electrified, even though the original electric railway plan was shelved in favour of a short-sighted cheaper version. Even in the 1960s this section of line was scheduled for electrification but then abandoned because of cost cutting.

■ ■ EWR cutbacks are a mistake

Lord Bradshaw, a former policy director of the British Railways Board from 1980 to 1983, has pointed out how the current plans for EWR underestimate its potential, particularly by abandoning electrification. He also told *The Times* in April that platforms were being built too short (for four-car trains instead of eight), freight paths were being almost eliminated and plans for an hourly service between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes abandoned. He said people imposing these inadequate policies were ignoring the climate emergency.

■ ■ Prepare for a new Winslow station

Preparatory work for a new station at Winslow was taking place in April with vegetation being removed from the track near the former Verney Junction. Clearance work was also under way at Claydon, as was route widening between Claydon and Bicester.

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



Picture: DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

HORDEN: A 500-tonne crane was used to position the footbridge deck, stairs and ramps in April for the station between Hartlepool and Sunderland

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■ ■ New station at Horden

Work continued throughout the Covid-19 crisis on the new £10.55 million station at Horden, with the footbridge completed by Story Contracting in May with the use of a 500-tonne crane, although the station opening date had to be put back. Ray Brewis, Durham County Council's strategy and project development manager, told the *Hartlepool Mail*: "Contractors have observed strict health and safety guidance, and it is the observance of these safe working practices that has delayed completion."

■ ■ Covid-19 blow to operators

Because of the Covid-19 lockdown, two "open access" train operators have had to suspend their services. One of them, Grand Central, was preparing to introduce its sixth daily Sunderland-King's Cross train in May. It is disappointing that the start date has been put back to next year. Grand Central has invited passengers who use its online booking service to complete a survey, to provide evidence of what services will be most welcome when its trains start running again.

■ ■ Weardale heritage railway

Railfuture has passed on good wishes to the charitable Auckland Project, which launched a campaign in March to reinstate the 18-mile-long Bishop Auckland to Weardale line, once part of the Stockton and Darlington Railway which celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2025. The charity has brought the line out of administration and hopes to restore services with the help of a train operator partner.

■ ■ First for Tyne Valley CRP

The Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership was the first CRP to achieve re-accreditation with the Department for Transport by holding a virtual meeting in

which seven representatives participated, including one from Northern Rail and one from CrossCountry, participated. The online meeting involved submitting official financial and governance information to the Community Rail Network, along with a summary of the CRP's achievements and a draft action plan for the coming year.

■ ■ Opportunity knocks for Morpeth

Morpeth is a key destination in plans by First Rail for a low-cost open-access five-trains-a-day service between Edinburgh and London scheduled to start in October 2021, and which is targeted at competing with airlines, rather than other rail services. First Rail plans to buy five Azuma-like trains from Hitachi, which are being fitted out at the Newton Aycliffe factory. First Rail hopes to persuade passengers to make the switch to rail, with business travellers benefiting from the first service of the day from London arriving in Edinburgh by 10.00, more than one hour earlier than is possible now.

■ ■ Coastal line could be reborn

A Redcar-Boulby passenger train service could be reintroduced on the eight-mile-long freight-only line through dramatic cliff-edge scenery to Boulby potash mine, after Redcar & Cleveland Council commissioned a feasibility study. Stations are proposed at Saltburn West, Skelton, Brotton, Loftus, Carlin How and Easington on the line, which sees up to six loaded trains a day to Teesport, near Middlesbrough. Boulby is just over a mile from the coastal resort of Staithes where there is a Captain Cook heritage centre.

■ ■ £8.8 million emergency funding

The Tyne and Wear Metro secured £8.6 million of financial support from the Government in May to sustain its services during the Covid-19 lockdown.

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

Hot? Cold? U45 is fresh response

By Lee Davies

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Another attempt to get long-distance freight from Spain to switch to trains was launched in April when DBCargo UK and Transfesa Logistics launched a London intermodal service.

Trains carrying fruit and veg now run 960 miles from Murcia or 850 miles from Valencia to Barking in east London.

Using rail reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 76% compared to lorries.

The development of a "Unit 45" refrigerated container has been crucial. The new-style container is lighter and can be moved from train to lorry using existing equipment.

Transferring a large proportion of the daily equivalent of 20 trains of vegetable and fruit carrying lorries on to rail would go a long way to decarbonise an essential part of our food supply. The potential is enormous given that there are 35 virtually unused freight train paths available through the Channel Tunnel.

The Covid-19 crisis disrupted world supply lines. This is the chance to improve our future. We need freight trains from all over Europe to start running regularly to Britain. It's a ready-made answer to climate change.

Silk road

The new Unit 45 temperature-controlled containers have boosted the viability of freight trains



FOOD OR ELECTRONICS: The cargo is safe in these new Unit 45 temperature-controlled containers now at work bringing computers from China to Europe and veg from Spain to Britain



KEEPING COOL: Transfesa Logistics has created 2,000 square metres of cold store warehouse in Valencia for food products.

travelling the 7,000 mile journey from China to Europe. It allows high-value cargo such as computers, which cannot survive the -40° C temperatures in Siberia, to be transported. The U45s look like elongated steel boxes with a cooling unit and a

diesel tank, but this belies the fact that they are sophisticated pieces of technology opening up new markets.

They will allow meat from Europe to be exported to China.

The U45 containers can be controlled remotely by operators in control centres or even the owners of the cargo. There are now 550 of the U45s operating.

Political sanctions affecting traffic in Russia are now the biggest stumbling block to the service expanding.

Castlefield corridor

The problem of too many trains competing for space on the Castlefield Corridor was highlighted in the *Railwatch* 163 article Pinchpoint in Manchester. Ways of solving the problem of the pinchpoint have been devised by Railfuture's freight group with help from the infrastructure and networks group.

For reliable operation, a line should operate at less than 85% capacity, but the Castlefield normal is 93%, with the result

that delays and cancellations are a regular occurrence. Railfuture believes an alternative to Trafford Park railfreight depot and the Castlefield Corridor should be examined for freight.

Carrington Business Park (the former Shell chemical works) in south west Manchester could be turned into a railfreight terminal able to accommodate 775 metre freight trains.

Track would need to be reinstated on a former line from Stockport together with a new West Coast main line connection at Cheadle Hulme, south of Stockport.

These two steps would allow freight trains to travel from Felixstowe, Southampton and London Gateway to Carrington.

You can read (or download) a 16-page Railfuture report at <https://railfuture.org.uk/display2302>

Parcels train service

Doncaster-based company Varamis is planning to introduce a carbon-neutral express parcels service along the East Coast main line, with a fleet of former passenger trains capable of keeping up with express services on the London-Edinburgh route. Former ScotRail class 365 electric units are one option.

Long distance road vehicles struggle to handle the volumes that rail can, and rail has the technological edge when it comes to reducing carbon emissions. The first route is likely to be Doncaster-Glasgow, followed by Newcastle and finally London.

Track access negotiations were expected to start in April.

35 year record low

Official figures released in May showed that the total volume of railfreight moved in the year up to April 2020 has dropped to its lowest level for 23 years. The tonnage drop was the worst for 35 years.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said: "The Government must ensure we get rail freight back on the rails and that this vital sector is fully supported as part of an integrated transport strategy that will become even more vital as part of the country's post-Covid revival.

"The rail freight industry must not be allowed to wither on the vine as it has proved to play a vital role in our response to the Covid-19 crisis, moving vital medical supplies and food to

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Rowland Pittard

Railfuture, and particularly the Wales branch, lost one of its most dedicated volunteers when Rowland Pittard died on 7 April. Rowland's shoes will be extremely hard to fill, and Railfuture Cymru/Wales is looking at how the work he did (including this column) will be done. There is more on Rowland and his life in *Rail Action 18* available on the Railfuture website.

Railfuture Cymru/Wales meets online

Because of the Covid-19 lockdown, the branch AGM was cancelled. However, the committee meeting scheduled for the same day did go ahead with an online video conference, joined by William Whiting, the Railfuture board's new liaison officer to the branch. We intend to use the same technology for future committee meetings until we can meet face-to-face again. Even then we are looking at the possibility of committee members contributing to meetings remotely.

Printing of Rail Wales delayed

Another casualty of the lockdown has been *Rail Wales*. Our printer closed before he could print *Rail Wales* Spring 2020 issue and will not reopen for the foreseeable future. We hope to be able to print *Rail Wales* this summer, but in the meantime the Spring 2020 issue (and back issues) can be downloaded from www.railfuturewales.org.uk/en/news.php

New trains are not good enough

Transport for Wales has ordered 77 class 197 Civity diesel trains for long-distance services, such as Carmarthen-Manchester, Aberystwyth and Pwllheli to Birmingham and services along the North Wales coast. Railfuture will be contacting TFW after learning that there is only one toilet per two-car set, as opposed to two for the trains currently in use. Most of the seating will be airline style. No consultation was offered to users but Railfuture Cymru/Wales has written to TFW and gained coverage on BBC online. On the plus side, TFW is to pay almost £2 million to upgrade the seats from the most basic ones originally specified. TFW rightly decided that seats barely suitable for journeys of five hours or more, but we are still not convinced the proposed seats are adequate for long distances.

Valleys set for £738m upgrade

One development that dodged the lockdown was the transfer of the Core Valleys Lines from Network Rail to Transport for Wales on 28 March. This will allow Amey Keolis Infrastructure Ltd to upgrade the lines in a £738 million programme, including:

- Electrification of 170 kilometres of track
- Construction of at least five new stations
- Upgrading all other stations
- Providing capacity improvements to allow four trains per hour to the head of each valley
- Building a new depot and control centre at Taff's Well

The transfer was originally scheduled to take place last autumn but was delayed, partly by concerns of freight operators over track access rights and charges, and partly by the December general election. In Cardiff, some trains will cross from TFW into Network Rail territory and back again in the course of their



OPEN DAY: Prince Charles opens the CAF factory at Newport with Andrés Arizkorreta García, CAF chief executive

journeys. Peter Kingsbury, chairman of Railfuture Cymru/Wales, said: "This may be the first time since its formation Network Rail has ceded responsibility for significant track mileage.

Prince of Wales opens new rail factory

Prince Charles formally opened the new CAF train assembly facility near Newport in February. The factory began work in 2018, assembling Civity diesel trains for Northern and West Midlands Trains. Production of the class 197 trains for Wales is expected to start soon. About 200 staff were employed initially but this could grow to 300 if more orders follow. The site has room to expand, including the possibility of assembling electric trains.

Magor walkway station grant

Railfuture awarded MAGOR, the group campaigning for the opening of Magor walkway station (between Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction), a £5,000 grant from the Fighting Fund in 2016. The grant will be used towards completing the GRIP 3 study (to carry out an initial economic appraisal and identify options for the station). MAGOR is still short of the £160,000 the study is expected to cost, so the Railfuture Board has agreed to extend the grant for a further three years to allow the campaign time to raise the necessary funds. Railfuture Cymru/Wales has maintained links with MAGOR, which is affiliated to Railfuture, most recently in January when Peter Kingsbury gave a presentation on our work.

Trains on the move

Six class 142 and 143 Pacer trains have been removed from service sooner than expected. All Pacers are expected to leave the South Wales valleys by the end of July, when the derogation from the Persons of Reduced Mobility (PRM) regulations runs out. The lockdown means that far fewer services than normal are running, allowing these units to be released early. Valleys Lines rolling stock will soon be boosted by class 769 Flex bimode trains (electric with diesel back-up). These and others are destined for the Rhymney Valley line until purpose-built tri-modes (electric, diesel + battery) are ready in 2023. A further boost was the arrival in April of a class 67 loco with four mark 4 coaches which will take over from non-PRM-compliant trains on the Cardiff-Holyhead route. Two more sets are expected.

Access for All funding for Newtown

UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak's budget in March added Newtown to the list of stations to receive *Access for All* funding. www.railfuturewales.org.uk
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New Bolton rail development officer

The newest community rail partnership in Britain has appointed Dr Stephanie Dermott as development officer. The Bolton and South Lancashire CRP was formed last year and supports the routes from Bolton to Wigan, Manchester, Preston and Bromley Cross. The post is funded by Northern with contributions from CrossCountry, Avanti West Coast and housing organisation Bolton at Home. Other CRP partners include the University of Bolton, Transport for Greater Manchester, Network Rail, TransPennine Express and Bolton Council. Bolton Station Community Partnership chair Julie Levy welcomed the appointment of Dr Dermott, who has experience of working with Bolton's diverse communities. They will be working together on next year's Mela event, an annual festival of Asian culture in Bolton.

Metrolink's lockdown money

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham said in May that the £11.6 million Government support for Metrolink was not enough because it was losing £5 million a month in revenue as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown. Metrolink's new £350 million Trafford Park line extension opened in March. It connects the Trafford Park Centre to other Metrolink services at Cornbrook, with new stations at Wharfside, Imperial War Museum, Village, Parkway and Barton Dock Road. The Government is in favour of extending the network further, using existing rail lines, to towns such as Wilmslow, Marple and Wigan.

Oldham MP is shadow transport secretary

Lorry driver's son Jim McMahon (MP for Oldham West and Royton) became the new shadow transport secretary in April. Mr McMahon was leader of Oldham Council in 2011 and also served on the Greater Manchester Combined Authority with lead responsibility for transport before becoming an MP in 2015.



Wait goes on for new bimode service

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Northern delayed its driver training on new trains and the class 769 bimode converted units (electric with diesel back-up). The bimodes are two years late and are intended for Alderley Edge-Southport services, using overhead electric power from Alderley Edge to Bolton and diesel power for Bolton to Southport. Northern has six of the eight trains accepted into its fleet, with two undergoing conversion at Brush in Loughborough.

Pacers beat a retreat from Morecambe

The Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group is pleased to report that Pacer trains have all but gone from its line, apart from one isolated Sunday working. The Leeds-Lancaster-Morecambe route is now worked largely by two-car class 158 Express Sprinters, with the occasional use of class 150 Sprinters. Reaction of staff and passengers to the improved trains on the line has been universally favourable. It represents a long overdue step forward. In early May, however, an emergency bus timetable replaced all the trains on this route, although trains between Lancaster and Skipton were expected to be restored on 18 May.

www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthWestBranch
[Twitter @RailfutureNWest](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNWest)

Politicians fail Scottish railfreight test

By Ralph Barker

Passenger train use dropped by 80% during the Covid-19 crisis while passenger train frequencies fell by 50%.

Freight has reduced to essential traffic only – and railfreight will return only if the Scottish and UK governments mean what they say about fighting climate change.

Governments recognise that railfreight produces less emissions than road freight and a climate emergency has been officially declared. But is it just words and no action?

For most of the railway's history, freight and minerals funded construction and maintenance of the whole railway. This stopped when a modern road network was built at public expense.

There are still people in transport ministries and even in the rail industry who think freight is too heavy on the tracks and slows down more important inter-city passenger services.

Railfreight is often losing out on costs. Road haulage is essential and hard-working but is a highly subsidised industry. It does not pay the full cost of road damage or environmental damage, let alone the capital cost of road building.

Yet railfreight is expected to operate commercially – with occasional grants. For a decade the UK Government has frozen road fuel duty and oil is now cheap, undermining any financial advantage railfreight has in terms of energy efficiency.

The Scottish Government continues with a £9 billion roads programme which allows lorry speeds to increase. The £2 billion cost of the new Forth road crossing was to cater for today's heavier lorries. Meanwhile spending on the freight railway is minimal.

Why do governments deliberately make freight by rail and water uncompetitive?

What happens when rail does have the advantage? The Office of Rail and Road decided that road haulage could not compete with rail for long-distance mineral traffic including coal, so it increased rail's track access charge!

However, the ORR did not increase the road tax for freight where rail could not compete. What railfreight is left in Scotland could easily end up back on the roads with just a small change in cost. Surprisingly, a few flows of bulk freight continue in Scotland, with some internal to Scotland (but mainly from the north of



IRONY: Electric wires, renewable electrical energy being generated on the hills, but a diesel locomotive hauls this freight train over Beattock summit on the West Coast main line

England) including fuel oil, cement and chemicals and occasional coal and steel. All timber traffic has been lost to road and coastal shipping. Most railfreight now originates from long distance inter-modal and deep-sea containers.

The major part of inter-modal freight is organised by well-established Scottish and Carlisle road hauliers although, in reality, they are logistics companies, often with a long history of using railways to carry freight and trying to make it work. They, though, are subject to competition from smaller truckers ready to make cost-cutting bids.

There is also tough competition between railfreight operators. A Scottish container rail terminal recently lost flows to another rail operator resulting in redundancies and a concern that the terminal may close altogether, provoking the usual crocodile tears from politicians. A railway site near Glasgow closed a year ago and although another rail business was interested, the site owner found

housing developers would pay much higher prices. Similarly, a coal rail terminal near Lanark was closing, but before the operator went bankrupt planning consent for housing was granted. Fortunately, a new operator took over and has leased it to a rail ballast quarry with an aspiration to send aggregate by rail.

There is some other good news. For years expansion of an existing freight terminal near Bellshill was held up by objections from a modern housing estate which persuaded the local council to refuse planning consent. The Scottish Government eventually overruled this refusal.

Governments have to do more if they mean what they say about the climate emergency.

They need to change the cost base and protect rail sites from adverse development. Then railfreight operators and their customers can make reductions in carbon emissions. Freightliner has operated its class 86 freight electric locomotives, now over 50 years old, on long-distance

freight, demonstrating how rail can reduce emissions both in energy and manufacture. These locomotives are to be replaced by class 90 electric locomotives, themselves 30 years old, being made redundant from passenger work but being recycled not scrapped.

The long life of locomotives is good for our environment, but new freight locomotives with the latest technology are better. Direct Rail Services' new class 88 electric locos use computerised adhesion control so at 85 tonnes and with four-drive axles, they can pull an intermodal train of 144 axles over Beattock Summit on the West Coast main line unassisted up a 1 in 75 gradient. They have a small diesel engine for work in loading sidings.

To get the best for our economy and environment while addressing climate change, more investment is essential in track, trains and depots.

But above all a rail and road user charge is needed which recognises the social, environmental and energy-use benefits of shifting more freight to rail.

Railfuture Scotland

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

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

facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign

LevenMouth Rail Campaign:

www.lmrc-action.org.uk/
facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/

Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG):

www.capitalrail.org.uk/

Newburgh Train Station campaign:

http://newburghtrainstation.org.uk/

Forth Rail Link (*Dunfermline-Kinross-Alloa*):

www.forthraillink.com

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Sheffield blues

Congratulations to Peter Gray (*Railwatch* 163) for his shrewd assessment of South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive. As a rail supporter in South Yorkshire I must warn other rail campaigners to be prepared to be depressed.

The executive and the transport authority, together with four local authorities, have presided over a shambles for years, short-sightedly promoting buses rather than trains. The city of Sheffield has a deep-rooted prejudice against rail, with the mistaken belief that trains are for toffs.

As one of the poorest areas in Europe, it is crying out for rail investment but a complete change of mentality is essential.

Sheffield has benefited from no significant rail investment since the electrification of the Woodhead route in 1954 under Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Subsequently Sheffield has achieved the distinction of being the only city to lose its electrified passenger railway – in 1970, a dubious decision by the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his transport minister Barbara Castle.

Sheffield is now in a sad state, devoid of any rail ambition or

vision and at a major disadvantage to other cities.

In 1999, £12 million was spent on Sheffield station, compared to the £165 million invested in Leeds station two years later and the £161 million in 2019.

Sheffield has a long way to catch up. Apart from Meadowhall in 1990, not a single new station has opened in Sheffield since 1974.

In 1999, consultants identified 36 potential new station sites in South Yorkshire but nothing happened. Then in 2003, the executive recommended that the sites should no longer be safeguarded.

Three sites out of the 36 sites were reprieved – Finningley, Millhouses and Waverley, but I believe there were 12 worthy of protecting. Not one has been built.

Now the executive is boasting that the tram train, foisted on it by the Department for Transport, has carried 1 million passengers and exceeded expectations. But it has refused to reveal the passenger forecasts. The key is the use generated by Rotherham Central and Parkgate, the trial element of the tram train.

Both the executive and Sheffield City Region want to extend the tram train to Doncaster which

would involve removing local train services.

The tram train was five times over budget, is unpopular with some staff, has suffered technical problems and is less user-friendly than the original trams.

Rail by contrast has enormous potential which has been suppressed throughout South Yorkshire.

Bolton-on-Dearne, Swinton, Wombwell, Darnall, Dodworth, Silkstone Common and Penistone have experienced housing developments close to rail stations. Penistone has a population of 22,000 but the Barnsley-Huddersfield line was cut back in 1989 after the 1983 closure threat. Not surprisingly car ownership in Penistone exceeds the Barnsley average.

MP Miriam Bates wants to see the Sheffield-Stocksbridge line reopened but what is really needed is the restoration of the Deepcar-Penistone gap.

A feasibility study means any reopening is unlikely until 2030 but we cannot wait that long. The creaking infrastructure of the Upper Don Valley demands action now, and the reopening of the Woodhead route to Manchester.

A restored Woodhead route would allow the younger generation to commute to Manchester and provide an alternative to the Hope Valley route.

Sheffield City Region has revealed its lack of vision by relegating the electrification of the Midland main line to Sheffield to a mere aspiration in its integrated rail plan, when it is really essential to the city's future.

When Railfuture held its AGM in Sheffield in 2014, no one from the executive was available to speak. Perhaps they knew they would be exposed. Ideas and imagination have been squashed for decades.

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

Inter-city stations

I was interested to read in *Railwatch* 163 about plans for a new station at Grove, two miles north of Wantage on the Great Western main line from Paddington to Bristol. The 35-mile section between Didcot and Swindon is typical of many inter-city lines which have been left bereft since the six intermediate stations were closed in 1964.

On the 40-mile Swindon-Bristol Parkway stretch eight stations

closed in the 1960s. Opening Grove station on this 75-mile inter-city route would be a modest step towards reversing some of the problems caused by the Beeching cuts.

There is now a two-tier railway system in Britain, with the 31-mile Castle Cary-Taunton section left with no stations after eight stations were axed in the 1960s, compared to the 110-mile Salisbury-Exeter section where most, but not all, of the intermediate stations survived. Although, thankfully, surviving branch lines such as the Heart of Wales line and the Barnstaple line retained most of their halts and stations, people in London and other large cities would be surprised at the lack of staffed stations the further one gets from the capital.

One admirable exception to this is Kemble which is a well-preserved, admirably atmospheric station. It would be lovely, however, to see the sad, disused curved platform reopened for trains running again to Cirencester (closed 1964).

J Evered, Goylands Close, Llandrindod Wells LD1 5R

East West shock



I was shocked when the entire train service on the Bedford-Bletchley line was withdrawn on 3 April. After 45 days without trains, we were told that from Monday 18 May train operator London Northwestern Railway would be reinstating a BUS service instead.

The "stopping" bus is an 18-seater mini-bus and they are only permitting three passengers per journey. What a nonsense! Nobody will use the buses as the risk of getting marooned at intermediate stations would put anyone off. I believe this is a dangerous situation for the wider social-railway network and it is not being taken seriously enough. My local MP's office has been excellent but the recent response from LNWR stated that it was "pleased" to inform the MP that a bus service would be provided between Bedford and Bletchley. Pleased!

I am worried that everyone is taking this closure too calmly.

Richard Crane, Hatfield Crescent, Bedford MK41 9RA
DickCrane@aol.com

This book points the way to a better future

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

I must confess that I am usually overawed by the hundreds of titles of railway books that I see on the shelves of bookshops.

It is not only the sheer quantity of such books, but also that the titles and subject matter tend to presume much existing knowledge on the potential reader's part.

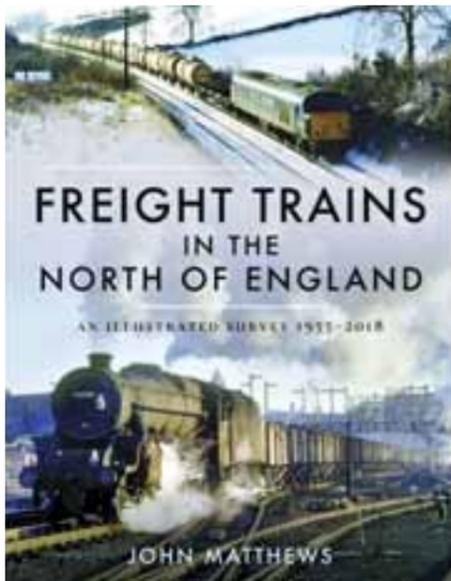
The text tends to be less appealing than the historic photographs, often being either dry and factual or over-emotional and, potentially, written with rose-tinted varifocal lenses!

John Matthews' new book is, fortunately, not in that category. For such a comprehensive and detailed survey, *Freight Trains in the North of England* is an enjoyable reading and browsing experience.

The author himself admits that "a picture is worth a thousand words" but also states that there will be "good detailed captions" alongside each photograph.

Happily, Matthews keeps to his promise and gives the reader exactly this. The captions are clear, jargon-free and informative. In his short but useful introduction, the author gives a brief outline of the history of the goods train in Britain and how events such as the 1980s miners strike affected the rail industry. Industry initiatives such as Freightliner and Speedlink are briefly covered too.

The nine chapters in the book take the reader on a northbound journey which starts in Nottinghamshire, passing through Derbyshire, Humberside, Yorkshire and the North West,



Published 30 June 2020. Price £25. Introductory offer on the Pen & Sword website of £20 for a few weeks

eventually reaching Carlisle and the North East. Each chapter is in chronological order starting in the mid-1950s and going right up to just two years ago, an era that saw the closing of so many railway lines and, of course, goods yards and sidings.

Although the book focuses on freight trains, it inevitably touches on line closures and the happier tales of the revival of lines such as Settle

to Carlisle and the Copy Pit route between West Yorkshire and East Lancashire – both of which, of course, nearly closed. The quality of the photographs – a refreshing mix of black and white and colour – is excellent, many taken by the author himself.

As a rail campaigner, I understand about the need to move materials across the country by train rather than road. Each freight train takes dozens of lorries off our roads and each tonne of freight transported by rail cuts carbon emissions.

I live two minutes from the Calder Valley line and see and hear the daily toing-and-froing of the Drax trains. Each time I read about developments in freight in the rail media, my mood is either brightened by the good news of some large company making such an environmentally sensible decision, or I become downhearted by the news of another freight service being wound down!

Clearly, what is required is for governments – present and future – to have a proper strategy for freight with targets and, if necessary, legislation to increase the amount of freight movements on our rails.

Let us hope that, at the end of this year's lockdown during Covid-19, there will be a vigorous and positive discussion about the future of both freight and passenger traffic.

Railfuture's campaign for railfreight will be more important than ever. Colleagues will find John Matthews' book both fascinating and inspiring.

Richard Lysons MA is chair of the Friends of Littleborough Stations

How local campaigns can make a difference

By Jen Overett

Needham Market Access for All Campaign Co-ordinator

Needham Market station is not yet accessible. One platform is reached by a non-compliant ramp, the other via 49 steps, and the shelter on the least accessible platform is not step-free either.

Yet against all expectations this small and rural station has just been granted funding from the "CP6 Mid-Tier fund" for a ramp to the inaccessible platform, a further ramp at the front of the station, and the subway to be turned into an open and accessible underpass.

Graham Collett (*Railwatch* 163) is right that the greatest need is for a far bigger access funding pot.

However, just for now, the Needham Market Access for All group is celebrating! I like to think that some aspects of our campaign directly influenced the result we dreamed of for so long.

Building on our chair Peter Feeney's earlier account (*Railwatch* 161), I have outlined below some of the 'nuts and bolts' of our campaign.

Although mindful that a dose of good fortune is needed, I hope this might encourage users of other relatively small and equally inaccessible stations to continue putting pressure on Government and the railway companies to fulfil their access obligations.

It is a long-haul challenge so resilience and stamina are vital. In Needham Market a passionate plea led several residents to get in touch with memories of intermittent campaign efforts stretching back 17 years.

Others new to the area injected energy with a fresh dose of moral outrage.

A petition, on paper and online, is a good next stage – ours had around 3,000 signatures at the time of our final bid – helping to secure local media coverage and alerting the railway companies to the strength of public concern.

Our campaigners brought experience in surveying, photography, media, disability rights, local government, accountancy, management, and strong links with local community groups. All of these helped to improve our effectiveness and profile.

Several councillors, cross-party, were involved as campaigners from the outset, and proved invaluable at every stage.

For example, many railway



Campaign activists meeting with former transport minister Nusrat Ghani in 2018. Left to right: Wendy Marchant, Jo Churchill MP, Terence Carter, Ms Ghani, Jen Overett and Jennifer Nott

stations are listed buildings so early liaison with a council heritage officer is useful.

Our MP Jo Churchill generated letters of support for our goals, helpfully increased pressure on Greater Anglia and Network Rail when she attended one of our campaign meetings, and facilitated two visits to Westminster in 2018 to present our case to the Department for Transport.

We have always maintained transparency and invited stakeholders to regular local meetings. Although our town council was less supportive, we had a link to our petition on their website and kept residents updated via the newsletter.

We have run stalls and held well-advertised social gatherings such as coffee mornings to consult with residents on plans and raise funds for future costs. Local charities have contributed financial assistance for specific improvements such as landscaping and signage once access work is complete.

We have used Facebook and Twitter, posters and leaflets, and secured ourselves space on the under-used station noticeboard.

We could have developed our online profile further and 'branded' more effectively. We became a community interest company and opened a bank account for financial transparency.

We regularly raised our wider concerns around disability (the many inadequacies of the *Passenger Assist* service for example) with the rail companies, ensuring they got the message that we were here to stay.

We have valued our links with the Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association and Railfuture East Anglia, local disability groups, station adopters, community rail partnership advocates (the Cambridge to Ipswich line does not yet have a CRP), village

newsletter editors, national railway access campaigners, local charities and businesses. Numerous organisations and individuals see the benefits of an accessible local railway service and will provide encouragement and practical support.

In return, we offered talks at meetings and articles for newsletters and websites.

After consulting with local disability groups, we resisted Greater Anglia's initial insistence on lifts, holding out for ramps as a far cheaper and more practical choice, with GA ultimately taking this on board.

District and county councils stepped forward with match funding that massively strengthened our case, and a Community Infrastructure Levy application added to this and is an option well worth exploring for any local campaign group.

The District Council external funding officer advised us on the complex funding processes, the campaign then writing detailed and evidenced reports both in applying for CIL funding and to inform GA in its bidding process with Government. I believe our report was included as an attachment to GA's final bid.

Planned improvements to Needham Lake Country Park highlighted the importance of a fully accessible railway station, the lake being the most-visited free attraction in the East of England and five minutes' walk from the station.

We got there in the end, against the odds and after 20 years of campaigning, with a good mix of resilience, passion, communication, strategy and a large dose of luck. If you are part of an access campaign as yet unsuccessful in securing funding, don't give up! I hope your turn will come very soon.

Railfuture Lottery winners

March: Roger Blake, A T Hill, Graham Collett, Martin Adams, John Tarbuck, Graham Smith

April: Richard Nuttall, Mark Edgell, Roger Blake, John Henderson, Ian Sesnan, John Fancourt

May: Graham Smith, Graham Smith, Allison Cosgrove, John Davis, David Porter, Mike Kneen

The lottery raises cash for campaigning and can also benefit members. Six prizes every month, ranging from £40 downwards.

Check and pay via the website or send a cheque for a multiple of £12, payable to Railfuture Lottery, 213 Stories Park, East Linton EH40 3BN

Queries: allison1314@gmail.com

Scotland's Far North line – remote but remarkable

By Ian Budd



In the UK perspective, many lines in Scotland seem remote. In Scotland itself however the Far North line really is remote. If you set off from Edinburgh by train to reach the end of the line at Wick, you would spend well over seven hours on trains. If you had set off in the opposite direction from Edinburgh, you could have settled in to a café in Paris in that time!

The line passes through a wide variety of scenery, including some beautiful sections beside the sea. What really sets the FNL apart scenically is the section from Helmsdale to Georgemas, which passes through the eastern part of the Flow Country. This is the largest area of "blanket bog" in Europe and the RSPB now occupies the former station building at Forsinard, from where you can explore. The Friends of the Far North Line see the railway as the land link between Orkney and the rest of Scotland, via the Thurso branch. The line was saved twice from closure in the 1960s and 1980s because it is relied upon as a vital service for Caithness and Sutherland. Quite drastic economies were made in the 1980s to save the line. Most stations are now unstaffed and the signalling is radio-operated from Inverness, along with the Kyle line which branches off at Dingwall.

The FNL is entirely single track and has the longest distance between passing loops to be found in the UK – 24 miles. Between Georgemas Junction and Helmsdale, a distance of around 46 miles, trains can cross only at Forsinard. This situation naturally causes massive delays on occasion and the effects of any late running to be hugely amplified.

The southern section of the line from Tain to Inverness is now used by a substantial number of commuters, and work is currently being sponsored by Transport Scotland to provide a passing loop on the erstwhile double-track section near Lentrán. A substantially redesigned service pattern is envisaged, after much research by ScotRail. A decision has yet to be taken about exactly what form it will take. Future traction of passenger trains on the line will naturally be electric and it will be interesting to see what mix of OLE, hydrogen and battery power will eventually be used.

■ Ian Budd is convener of Friends of the Far North Line

LAIRG

DORNOCH FIRTH



A CLASSIC CASE OF DISCRIMINATION: When a new road bridge was built across the Dornoch Firth in 1989, the Scottish Office ignored campaigners' pleas to incorporate a rail bridge. So the railway still goes the long way round

It would be good to see improvements on the Far North line, but sadly I have had to accept that the Dornoch Rail Link will never happen and I believe there is a long-term threat over the future of the Far North line in its current form. This is gloomy, but we need to be honest about the current grim circumstances confronting the railways and the Far North line in particular.

DINGWALL

INVERNESS

THURSO

GEORGEMAS JCT

WICK

My view

By Mark Norton

A disillusioned former rail campaigner

The Far North line from Inverness to Thurso/Wick is 161 miles long and suffers a major disadvantage in that it takes twice as long to go to either Thurso/Wick or Inverness by rail (four hours) compared to road (two hours).



It has suffered a lot of service disruptions and delays over the past 10 years or so, making the journey longer still. This is a disincentive for most people travelling from the Caithness area and elsewhere by rail. Surveys by the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group in 2011 and the North Rail Line Action Group in 2016 show that the improvements most people want are rail journey time reductions between Caithness and Inverness. This must be the focus if the line is to remain useful to residents as well as tourists. There has been some progress in improving service reliability as a consequence of the Far North Line Review Group, set up by the Scottish Government in 2016 to bring about improvements in performance and to propose future improvements.

This has led to a stop in the previously ongoing decline in passenger usage of both Thurso and Wick railway stations, and others, in the 2018-19 station usage statistics. However, I believe that the following things need to be done to secure the Far North line's future:

1. Recognition that the length of the line and the fact that it will never be electrified presents a massive problem for battery or hydrogen powered trains to replace diesels by 2035. There are no battery-powered trains to enable direct Inverness to Wick services yet, and it is unlikely that a viable hydrogen-powered train will be available by that date – a derogation is needed to extend diesel train use beyond 2035. This may also apply to other rural lines.

2. Scrapping the Helmsdale Hub idea from the Far North Line Review Group. If they ever get around to building the Lentrán Loop (a passing loop between Inverness and Beauly, highly unlikely given our parlous financial situation after the Covid-19 emergency) then it is proposed that Caithness gets six services each way per day rather than four. Two are direct limited stop to Inverness and the remaining four will run from Thurso/Wick to Helmsdale only. This applies to trains from Inverness as well. This is madness, as most passengers who get on at Caithness go to Inverness and beyond, not Helmsdale, Lairg or anywhere else in Sutherland or Ross-shire. All six trains must run direct to and from Inverness to both Thurso and Wick as limited stop expresses. A Georgemas Chord should be built to speed up services from Thurso southward, avoiding Georgemas Junction.

As regards to the Dornoch Rail Link, we disbanded the Dornoch Rail Link/ North Rail Line Action Group in 2016 for two reasons. First, it was felt by me, our committee and the wider membership that the rail industry was simply not interested in helping us make the case for any journey time reductions on the Far North line, let alone the Dornoch Rail Link.

Second, we did not have enough support locally or regionally to help make the case for these improvements. There have been many changes in my personal circumstances which have removed any time or motivation I or others had to do any rail work on the Far North line or elsewhere, and I do not use the line at all from Caithness any more.

The regional transport partnership covering the area served by the Far North line is HITRANS, based in Inverness.

■ ■ Farewell to Tony Ross

Railfuture member Tony Ross, a well-known rail activist in Yorkshire for many years, died on 22 April, aged 83. Tony, by profession a chemical engineer, served on Railfuture's freight group for 25 years until his retirement for health reasons. He contributed hugely to its work, for example enabling a very successful visit to Hull Docks 10 years ago. He was Railfuture Yorkshire's freight officer for several years. He bore his health problems of the last few years with uncomplaining patience.

Tony was a founder member in 2001 of the Minsters Rail Campaign to promote the reinstatement of the Beverley-York line and remained on the campaign committee until 2018, contributing considerable knowledge and experience. He also came up with the name of the campaign. On his home territory, in the mid-1990s he re-founded the Hull & East Riding Rail Users' Association after it had fallen into a period of inactivity, and was for many years its secretary. His minutes were a model of precision, accuracy and clarity. HERRUA led to his involvement in the Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership and he was a member of the Friends of the National Railway Museum, as well as being a volunteer at the museum.

Anthony Michael Ross was born on 21 April 1937, and his early years were spent in the West Riding. Later, now in Bridlington, he became a keen photographer and took many outstanding studies of the rail scene in the East Riding from the 1950s onwards. He bought his first camera out of paper-round earnings. Many of his photographs – including many of lines now lost – were published in various collections. But Tony will be remembered above all as someone who in all his wide range of rail-related activities was an unassuming lovely man.

David Pennie, Hull & East Riding Rail Users' Association



SYMPATHETIC: Tony Ross helping at a 2014 rail information stall, organised by the Hull & East Riding Rail Users' Association

■ ■ York prepares for a new station at Haxby

Nina Smith, chair of Railfuture's Yorkshire Branch, welcomed news in May that the City of York Council is consulting about opening a station in Haxby, five miles from the city. She said: "It is extraordinary that Haxby does not already have a railway station. It is one of the most populated residential areas in Yorkshire without a station. A station would reduce car commuting into York and allow people to travel easily to Scarborough."

■ ■ £300 million for rail link to Doncaster Sheffield airport

An outline business case for a £300 million new rail link to Doncaster Sheffield airport at Finningley was submitted to the Government in March by Sheffield City Region, Doncaster Council and the Peel Group (the airport owners). Doncaster mayor Ros Jones said the GatewayEast Growth Hub Rail scheme is "oven ready" and requires only 4.5 miles of new track from the East Coast main line at Bawtry to the Lincoln-Doncaster line. The scheme will deliver £22 in overall economic returns for every £1 invested.

■ ■ Harrogate improved service promised after record delays

Harrogate Line Supporters Group welcomed the news that trains between York and Harrogate will be doubled next year to a half-hourly service all day. North Yorkshire County Council had hoped that the track would be doubled between Knaresborough and Cattal but a cheaper method of increasing line capacity has been devised by Network Rail. The 07.13 Harrogate-Leeds commuter train was revealed in March as Britain's most cancelled service, failing to run on 55 days.

■ ■ Ale welcome for Nodding Donkeys at Wensleydale

A special Nodding Donkey keg ale was produced by the Wensleydale Brewery for a Pacer Fest in February to welcome two class 142 trains, which were donated to the heritage Wensleydale Railway by Angel Trains.

■ ■ Mayor plans to run local service on Camp Hill line

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street travelled in March on board a special inspection train along the Camp Hill line to Kings Norton from New Street, Birmingham. The mayor has drawn up plans to use the line for a regular local passenger service. Freight trains have continued to use the line to avoid New Street station and some passenger trains still use it. The Government has pledged £15 million to help build three stations at Moseley, King's Heath and Hazelwell. King's Heath and Hazelwell stations have already been granted planning permission with the application for Moseley expected shortly.

■ ■ New community rail partnership for Worcestershire

Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership was formed recently to enable local communities to work with the three train operating companies running services within the county. There are 18 stations within the area.

westmidlands@railfuture.org.uk
www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch



INSPECTION TRAIN: West Midlands Mayor Andy Street (centre) with Johnny Wiseman, left, and Geoff Grant from Transport Focus, right, with special train at Kings Norton station

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

Flitwick success

Access for All funding has at last been given to Flitwick station in Bedfordshire, following the appeal from Ian Cook featured on the front page of *Railwatch* 161. It will provide for a new footbridge with lifts for the 1.6 million passengers a year who use the station, to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the station this year.

Ian, founder of the campaign group Step Free Access, said: "We are incredibly pleased at the success of our community's campaign to have lifts and ramps installed at Flitwick station, and look forward to being involved in the design stage to ensure that the needs of everyone with mobility problems are accommodated."

"Meanwhile we will not rest until we have a firm decision from the Government of the day and all parties involved, that all stations and all trains are fully step-free."

Online campaigning

Railfuture has continued to campaign for rail despite the Covid-19 lockdown. Branch committee members and the divisions have used video conferencing for excellent shorter but more effective meetings, with no time spent travelling. Topics included the future of season tickets and Railfuture aspirations for the future train service on Thameslink, Southern, Great Northern and Southeastern.

Restoring Your Railway progress

Two years after Railfuture joined other campaigners to deliver a petition to the Transport Secretary calling for a network development fund, we can report progress: Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has since launched his *Restoring Your Railway* fund.

MPs were invited to submit bids by the end of February for support in developing business cases for new lines. In April further bids were invited – before the end of May. The Department for Transport also has an "accelerating existing proposals" fund and a third round of the *New Stations Fund* was launched in February, with proposals having to be submitted by June.

Prime candidate in our area is the Hoo Peninsula railway, which has been freight only since 1961. Now it is a candidate for a sustainable mass transit system to service house building needed to ease pressure on the Medway towns.

Railfuture responded in May to Medway Council's consultation "Planning for growth on the Hoo Peninsula" which can be viewed on the Railfuture website. Search for consultation+responses.

The Government is aiming to see concrete results from its *Restoring Your Railway* initiative by the end of Network Rail's control period 6 in 2024. For that reason, reinstating the Uckfield-Lewes rail link is not a suitable candidate yet. Railfuture is calling for reinstatement based on providing for new housing.

Railfuture anniversaries

Railfuture campaigners have reason to celebrate the anniversaries of five summer station openings:

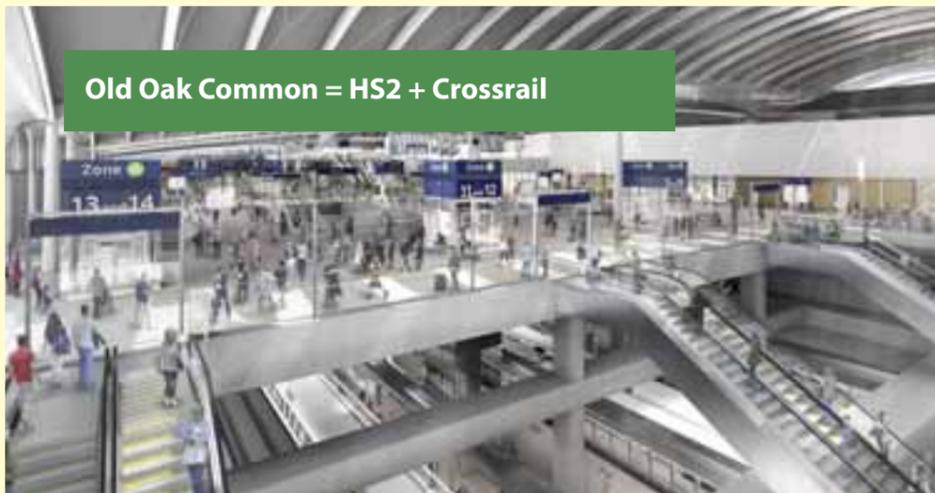
- ▷ Stevenage (July 1973) now has 4.8 million passengers a year. An additional platform is expected to open this year.
- ▷ King's Cross Thameslink (July 1983). Replaced by St Pancras Low Level in 2007 when there were 10.8 million passengers a year.



Well done, Ian. Access for All at Flitwick

CAMPAIGN SUCCESS: Station manager Bernie Lee, Step Free Access campaigner Ian Cook, centre, and Bedford Commuters' Association chairman Arthur Taylor observe social distance advice as they celebrate securing funding for lifts at Flitwick station

Picture: Govia Thameslink Railway



Old Oak Common = HS2 + Crossrail

THINKING BIG: Work on Old Oak Common station is expected to start this summer after it was given planning permission in May. Bringing HS2 and Crossrail together, the £1.3 billion station in west London will have 14 platforms, with six dedicated to high speed trains, and should be operating by 2026. HS2 trains are expected by 2029

Picture: HS2

- ▷ Mitcham Eastfields (June 2008) now has 1.4 million passengers a year.
- ▷ Southend Airport (July 2011) now has ~611, 000 passengers a year.
- ▷ Lea Bridge (May 2016) now has 415,000 passengers a year.

New station for Brent Cross West

Plans have been approved for a new station at Brent Cross West, between Cricklewood and Hendon Thameslink stations in London. The 12-car platforms will serve the four-track Midland main line.

An eight-car platform for a new passenger service along the Dudding Hill line to link with the Crossrail Old Oak Common station could be added later.

The West London Orbital proposal envisages reopening the Dudding Hill freight line to passenger services and running trains from West

Hampstead and Hendon to Hounslow, via Old Oak Common. A detailed business case is being prepared.

Britain's Growing Railway

More than 400 new and reopened stations since 1960 are described in Railfuture's book *Britain's Growing Railway*. You can buy it for £9.95 (includes postage) via the Railfuture website. Search for BGR1.

Updates from Railfuture London & SE

You can subscribe free to our monthly two-page newsletter inter-railse. It fills the gap between the quarterly eight-page raise, sent to branch members with each *Railwatch*. Both newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from the Railfuture website. Search for South+East.

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

Campaigning after Covid-19

Chair's column by Chris Page

It is a strange time to be a campaigning organisation for a bigger and better railway when the Government is asking people to return to work but to avoid travelling by train.

Social distancing reduces capacity on trains by 90%, which is clearly not financially sustainable in the long term, but fortunately the Government has recognised the need to keep the trains running and is providing the money to do so.

Passengers who need to travel are strongly advised to wear face masks, but to give them confidence that they will be safe, operators should also provide markings to aid social distancing, and be seen to be cleaning the trains and stations frequently, sanitising door buttons, handrails and ticket machines.

Train operators should also consider the practicality of making hand sanitiser available on trains and indicating which seats to use and blocking off others. LNER has made all journeys reservation-only, which must only be a temporary restriction. We do not want to lose the "walk-up and go" flexibility of our railway permanently. It is unlikely that rail staff will be expected to enforce social distancing (although safety marshals trained in crowd management may be deployed to do so) so passengers must use common sense.

In time the country will return to something near normal. We do not know exactly when that will be, nor do we know what the new normal will be. We do, however, expect the new normal to be different from pre-Covid-19 and that it will impact upon the railway. It is likely that trends such as



working from home and video conferencing will accelerate, so more people will commute fewer than five days per week. Surveys have shown that around 20% of people expect to travel less.

Railfuture has identified five key policy topics which will be important in the post-Covid-19 world. The Railfuture board and groups are currently working to define our policy position on each topic, and will start campaigning on them when government and public attention starts to shift away from the health risk:

- Attracting passengers back to rail – how to improve the travelling environment
- Climate change and modal shift – how can the railway reduce the carbon footprint of transport?
- Restoring Your Railway – line and station reopening
- Fares and ticketing – making the system easier and fairer, and accommodating new work patterns
- Industry structure and outcome of the Williams review – taking the opportunity of the present emergency measures to move to devolution and concessions.

Although the Government is going to have to borrow heavily to finance the lockdown, it still seems to be planning for major infrastructure investment (which may be a way of restarting the economy),

but the priorities for investment may change. Increased capacity will still be needed to relieve key pinch points such as Castlefield Corridor, but in the immediate future the higher priority may be to reopen lines and stations, expanding connectivity to the rail network in areas that are currently isolated so that people can get to work and help to rebuild the economy. Railfuture submitted its candidates for the Government's *Restoring Your Railway* fund to the Department for Transport shortly before the closing date for the first round of bids to the Ideas Fund, and was invited to meet with officials managing the process.

The Government has recently announced major funding for charging points for electric cars. This approach to decarbonising transport will not work for lorries, so the most significant carbon reduction rail can make may come from modal shift of freight from road to rail, coupled with electrification of the rail freight network.

If you would like to help to form our policy or to campaign on these topics, please contact the appropriate national group. Go to the Railfuture website and search for national+groups.

Social distancing measures have also impacted upon Railfuture events. The AGM this year has been cancelled, and its business held over to the AGM next year. The national conference which was due to take place in Leeds on 3 October will now take place online on the same date. As we are unable to hold physical board, group and branch meetings, we have started to use video conferencing. Interestingly attendance has been higher, so saving journey time is winning over technophobia.

Make sure you keep up with the Rail Action

The importance of email is becoming more obvious following the Covid-19 outbreak. Railfuture published an online *Rail Action* briefing in mid April. It was also available for download on the Railfuture website. An

April edition of *Rail User Express* was also published.

Members are reminded of the need to ensure Railfuture has up-to-date email addresses. You can email changes to:

renewals@railfuture.org.uk or update your details at www.railfuture.org.uk/selfcare

Railfuture is now able to supply a digital version of *Railwatch* to those members who prefer it.

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

railwatch

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Tel: 020 8985 8548 editor@railwatch.org.uk
Printer: Print-Out, High Street, Histon
Cambridge CB4 4JD Tel: 01223 232709
Distribution: Intercity E2 9HE 020 8923 8080

Non-members can subscribe online at www.railfuture.org.uk/shop or by sending £12 (cheque payable to Railfuture) to: Alan Cocker, 11 Derwent Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 0QR
Copy deadlines: The next issue is published in October. Please email material as early as possible to editor@railwatch.org.uk
Late copy: Saturday 29 August
Emergency late news: Saturday 5 September
Advertising: Full page: £190. Half page: £95. Quarter page: £45. Small ads are free to members
Otherwise: 30p per word
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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture: HS2

BIRMINGHAM HIGH SPEED: The HS2 station at Curzon Street was given planning permission in April. Features will include solar panels, parkland, rain gardens to capture water, wildflower grassland, insect and bird boxes, forest-scale tree planting and an area of new broadleaf woodland to provide a natural habitat for local wildlife. The new station will incorporate the 1838 entrance to the original station of the London and Birmingham Railway which was engineered by Robert Stephenson

Another successful Railfuture campaign

By Roger Blake
roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

In May 2018 Railfuture launched a joint campaign for a network development fund for England and Wales. Two months earlier, Transport Scotland launched its own local rail development fund, thanks to successful lobbying by Railfuture Scotland.

Further inspiration came from the repeated success of the Department for Transport's *New Stations Fund*.

Just 20 months from launch, our campaign succeeded, when in January the Department for Transport announced the *Restoring Your Railway* fund. In April the DfT confirmed that 60 MP-sponsored bids had been

received during the first round. The funds will support business cases for *New Ideas* for line and service reopenings. A second round was opened in April, with initial bids due in by 22 May followed by full submissions by 19 June.

Meanwhile a third *New Stations Fund* was opened for bids on 28 February, closing on 19 June, with an explicit requirement that works must be completed by March 2024 and trains serving the new stations no later than May 2024. Railfuture submitted 80 potential projects, collated from input by 13 Railfuture branches and with assistance from an experienced independent rail adviser. In May the first 10 schemes to benefit

from a share of the £500,000 Ideas fund pot to help develop their business cases were named. Railfuture continues to campaign for a rolling programme of electrification. More details on the website; search for electrification+policy and electrification+programme

A partial success on Access for All

Last autumn Railfuture announced a campaign for *100 more by '24!* calling for a further £200 million to be added to the 2019-24 *Access for All* programme. In the March Budget the Chancellor announced funding for a further 12 stations.

The campaign must continue.

October webinar

Railfuture is organising a free online event (or webinar) on Saturday 3 October 2020, in place of the planned national conference in Leeds cancelled because of the Covid-19 crisis.

The topic will be *Attracting passengers back to rail*. Railfuture plans to have four speakers from train operators, transport authorities, Transport Focus and employers, presenting views of what can be achieved and how potential travellers will respond post-Covid.

If you are interested in joining the event, which will run from 11.00 to 12.30, please check at

www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/

Appointment of secretary to the Railfuture board

Railfuture's directors are seeking to appoint a volunteer to act as secretary to the board. The board meets four times a year and there may be additional meetings as required. Reasonable travel expenses to attend meetings of the board will be paid.

Description of the role

1. Ensuring papers for meetings of the board are obtained from directors and submitted before each meeting of the board in accordance with

timescales agreed for submission of papers.

2. Agreeing the agenda for board meetings with the chair and subsequently distributing to directors with relevant reports/papers.

3. The accurate recording and distribution of the minutes of the board of directors' meetings within seven days of the date of the meeting. These minutes should reflect the format and level of detail that the board has determined.

4. Ensure actions required

by each director are followed up.

5. Arrange for booking of venues of board meetings or alternatively video conferences in consultation with the chair of the board.

6. Maintenance of the contact list for directors and ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

The appointed person will have:-

1. A commitment to and clear understanding of the mission of Railfuture.

2. Access to internet and use of a computer for word processing purposes.

3. The ability to communicate effectively, including writing proficiently.

4. The ability to listen to a discussion and to summarise the key issues and actions which are required.

If you are interested, please contact Chris Page, chair of the board by 6 July 2020: chris.page@railfuture.org.uk

Pass it on

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