

*rail*watch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Caledonian sleeper train gives travellers a unique experience. Story: Page 2

Picture: Norman McNab

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Labour proceeds with caution on its radical plan

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

There is plenty to like about the Labour announcement on rail, but there is a lack of detail about the long-term future structure of the railways. In fact, there is little new about the main policy measure, the renationalisation of rail operations, as this has been a Labour commitment back to the days of the now unmentionable Jeremy Corbyn and has been reiterated at several subsequent Labour conferences, notably the latest one. The policy looks modest and hardly radical. The franchise system effectively came to an end as soon as Covid hit in March 2020, as franchises were turned into management contracts with no risk to the operator when ridership fell to 15% or even less of normal rail usage. Covid exposed the fact that, in many respects, the railways have never been really privatised. The state has always been there to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. That is precisely what happened with Railtrack. When it collapsed after the Hatfield train crash and the debacle over West Coast modernisation, Railtrack ended up in a new guise as Network Rail, a government

company with an ever-growing massive debt that will never be repaid. Labour's latest plan is not, as some have tried to imply, an attempt to recreate British Rail. That is, sadly in my view, simply not possible. British Rail ran everything, from building and operating the trains to ensuring the safety of the track and providing catering. Little of this can be reclaimed or brought back in house given that even left-luggage offices are now contracted out. Thirty years of privatisation and outsourcing cannot be reversed without considerable investment, which Labour has insisted cannot be made as there are so many other priorities for the limited funds available. Indeed, rather Janus-like, the document lauds the potential of the private sector and there will be no attempt to renationalise the rolling stock companies or create the unique ticket marketing organisation that the original Williams-Shapps document outlined. Trainline can breathe easy, especially as shadow

transport secretary Louise Haigh's announcement was made from its offices. The biggest question remains over the nature of Great British Railways. Labour has endorsed the idea of creating this organisation, but has not yet pronounced on whether it supports the model proposed by the Tories, with Network Rail at the top. Labour is right not to blindly support this idea. Network Rail needs to focus on engineering, not on running trains and deciding on long-term strategy. Its leadership has lobbied for it to be given the top role, arguing that it would be a very different organisation from the one which has been in charge of the infrastructure since Railtrack collapsed. As one of my industry friends put it, Network Rail should be at the service of the operators, not in charge of them. None of this should distract from the importance of the Labour announcement. Ending franchising and creating a unified organisation



Christian Wolmar

Sleeper train provides a unique experience

By Norman McNab

Our page one picture shows the Fort William-bound Caledonian Sleeper about two miles south of Corrour.

There is no doubt that, for a rail traveller boarding the sleeper in London Euston and waking up to such a contrasting wilderness, this is a truly unique experience.

The snow on the mountains emphasises the remote area that the line passes through and underlines the fact that no other line in the UK can provide such an experience.

The picture is taken from a hill about three kilometres from the line and is approached from Corrour station, now one of the busiest intermediate stations on the line because it is hugely attractive to hillwalkers and mountain bikers and accessible only by rail. There are no public roads.

The view is across the Blackwater towards the hills of the Blackmount and Meall a' Bhuidh, the home of the Glencoe ski centre.

ScotRail's addition of the specially adapted 153 unit for bikes is proving very popular and underlines why railways can and should be proactive rather than reactive to demand. However, that is a political issue about the need to increase capital expenditure on railways rather on the road network.

STATION CAR PARKING

By Ann Hindley

Railfuture passenger group members are picking up on a number of issues around station parking and would be interested to hear from other members about how important these issues are for them.

We are conscious that one of Railfuture's ambitions is to get people out of their cars and on to rail, but we have to be realistic in acknowledging that not everyone can reach their local station by foot, by bike or by bus, especially in rural areas



or where people have mobility problems.

Where that is the case, it needs to be easy to do otherwise potential passengers will just drive to their end destination.

Thus, car parking needs to be available, and without impediments, so that people use the car park rather than not using rail at all.

The issues that have arisen so far include:

- Difficulties of paying for parking, particularly as cash payments have in many cases been replaced by on-line methods

- Time taken in paying for parking, which may cause the driver to miss their train

- More TOCs are introducing car parking charges where parking was previously free

- Recent issues of fraud by sticking false QR codes over genuine ones, making people feel very cautious

- Issues of non-rail user parking clogging up free station car parks, preventing daily passengers from parking

- Issue of car parks being too small to cater for demand, especially for passengers travelling later than the morning peak

- Limited free short-term parking in drop-off areas, especially during times of disruption

We would be interested to know of members' experiences – both good and bad – so that a decision can be made about whether or not this is an important matter for Railfuture to campaign on.

Please let us know on:

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ann.hindley@railfuture.org.uk



Aerial view of the Fife town of Leven and the surrounding countryside. The river Leven flows into the Firth of Forth with its long beaches

Skyhigh hopes for Leven's new railway line

The railway returned to Levenmouth in June, and brought with it high hopes for the town of Leven and the surrounding area.

As Alastair Dalton remarked in *The Scotsman*: "It may only be a nine-minute journey off the main line, but the branch to Leven is likely to transform one of the most deprived areas of Scotland for decades."

It is also hoped that the railway will bring tourists and holidaymakers to Leven's mile-long beach, as it used to do before the railway closed to passengers 55 years ago.

The reliability and popularity of rail travel in 2024 is expected to inject confidence and investment into the conurbation of Methil, Leven and Buckhaven which has a population of 30,000.

Ten times that number of people are expected to use the railway in its first year of use.

Every hour a train from Edinburgh will arrive at Leven and Cameron Bridge stations, taking just over an hour. Network Rail says it is 30 minutes quicker than the fastest bus. There will also be twice as many trains a day compared to before closure in 1969.

Opening the £117 million Leven link was a pleasant assignment for Scotland's new First Minister John Swinney. He said: "It was a day of unbridled joy for the communities of Leven and the Kingdom of Fife."

Dr Allen Armstron of Levenmouth Rail Campaign said: "Levenmouth is back on the map and regeneration prospects aided by other projects in the pipeline are brighter now."

He said the community-led campaign, supported by council and elected representatives, was a source of both surprise and pride.



Scotland's First Minister John Swinney (second from the right) with, from left, Network Rail Scotland managing director Liam Sumpter, ScotRail managing director Joanne Maguire, Fife Council leader David Ross and Transport Secretary Fiona Hyslop on opening day, 29 May



Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove, RAGES president Tom Thorburn and Railfuture members join the crowds alighting at Leven station



A dinosaur – and students – welcome trains and visitors to Leven station



Campaigners take the train to a better future

By Allison Cosgrove

Members from Rail Action Group of Scotland (RAGES), Friends of the Far North Line and Dunder Community Council in East Linton visited Levenmouth on Sunday 2 June on the first day the newly reopened branch line was open to the public.

The journey from Edinburgh takes 67 minutes and stops at seven stations on the Fife coastal route on the way, before branching off at Thornton Junction, north of Kirkcaldy.

The first train stopped at Cameron Bridge, and then went on to Leven, where it terminated. The train was packed with travellers anxious to experience the new line.

Fife College students greeted passengers, presenting them with a foldup map of the town showing local amenities – a great initiative and much appreciated.

Leven is a small town with a lovely beach, a swimming pool and a quaint High Street with many old buildings.

The station is located beside the bus station, with the town centre conveniently situated just across the road.

A street market was set up to welcome visitors, with many stalls selling locally produced goods.

Live music was playing with a local dance group and excellent refreshments were on offer at the community-run Levenmouth Hub, in the centre of the High Street.

A lovely visit to a town where the reopening of the railway was very welcome and confidence was high that it would contribute to the regeneration of the area.

After 25 years of pain, we demand a fair deal

By Dave Hagerty
info@smart-rail.co.uk

Alan Whitehouse gave a comprehensive narrative in *Railwatch* 179 of the stop-start (but mostly stop) nature of the Transpennine Route Upgrade and all of its previous incarnations.

We go back further than the announcement of electrification in the 2011 autumn statement, to a public meeting in Marsden in October 1999, at which Railtrack (as was) set out the capacity constraints and limitations of the Manchester to Leeds via Standedge route, and proposed some enhancements which would address those constraints.

This, for the first time, held out the prospect that our hourly stopping service with additional trains in the peaks could be enhanced to half-hourly. Glossy brochures were handed out.

Fast forward almost a quarter of a century to the present day, and very little of the route has been enhanced, and we are still to discover not just when, but whether, TRU will deliver those two stopping trains per hour.

Over recent years, we have experienced an unreliable and infrequent stopping service, culminating in the infamous May 2018 timetable which could have been designed only by someone with zero knowledge of commuting patterns along the route. It was so bad that our MPs arranged in December 2018 for the rail user groups covering Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite to meet in person with the then Secretary of State Chris Grayling.

At the end of that meeting I asked him whether TRU would deliver our aspiration of two stopping trains per hour.

He said he did not know but would



WARNING AFTER WARNING: Whether it is April, May, June – or any other month – passengers expect trouble

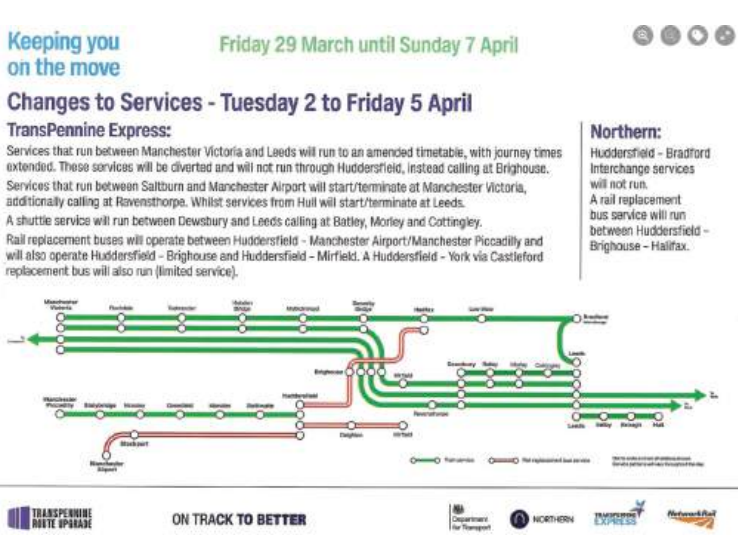
find out. In spite of constantly asking the same simple question, neither he nor any of his successors, nor Network Rail nor anyone else in the railway industry has been prepared to give an answer.

The only response that we are given is that it will deliver “up to two stopping trains per hour”, which is meaningless and may even require a reduction from the current inadequate service.

Not only that, but we have been told that improving the stopping service is at the bottom of the list of priorities, behind an increase in the number of (already frequent) expresses and semi fasts, and freight services.

It is clear that if any descope takes place, it will be to the detriment of communities like ours.

We are not asking for anything more than most routes in the Leeds and Manchester city regions already take for granted.



This has added resonance now that works have started at other locations along the route causing disruption at our stations.

Last spring the route was blocked at Stalybridge for a month, condemning commuters at the stations between there and Huddersfield to bus replacement, tripling their daily commute times.

Throughout the rest of 2023 and 2024 to date, there have been weekend and weekday closures because of works at Stalybridge and to the east of Huddersfield.

It is not unreasonable for passengers and residents in our communities to ask what we will get in return for all the disruption, which started more than a year ago and for which no end date has been set.

Yet we are repeatedly met by a refusal to answer that simple question.

One of the proposals which currently forms part of TRU is the

provision of a third track between Huddersfield and Marsden, partly for freight but also to enable fast trains to overtake stopping trains.

We regard this as essential for resilience and the ability to meet the modest aspirations of the communities along the route for a more frequent stopping service.

We share Alan’s concerns that the key section between Stalybridge and Huddersfield is even now only at an early stage of design, with the risk that it could be descoped.

We will not, however, be fobbed off by a bit of public relations fluff. We have waited long enough for TRU (and its various predecessor acronyms) to deliver for our communities, and have no intention of settling for something which is at best the same as we currently have and potentially worse.

■ *David Hagerty is chair of Slaithwaite & Marsden Action on Rail Transport*

How John won back business for ailing rail

By Trevor Garrod

John Davies became a station master aged just 20 after starting work as a freight clerk in Swansea.

His new book reveals that it took him 10 years before he had an opportunity to take on a commercial job, which was dismissed at that time as “not real work”.

His railway career started in the 1960s when the rail industry underwent fundamental changes. It had to become innovative, attracting more business and regaining some business that should not have been lost. John later became divisional passenger manager in Cardiff and went on to become the first all-Wales railway manager. He said: “I had a baptism

of fire because things were really bad. Business was on the floor. I was surprised to find how unprofitable it was. The trains in West Wales were costing four times as much as the income they were bringing in. We promoted services to get more business and then cut costs where it was not going to hurt. We cut the fleet but carried more passengers and ran more miles with a smaller fleet. We also cut the fares dramatically at the top of the valleys.” While in East Anglia for three years from 1979, he was a

good friend of the Railway Development Society (Railfuture’s predecessor) when he was passenger sales and marketing manager based at Norwich.

Some of us recall working with John to promote and develop the Anglia Day Ranger, which had been introduced as an experiment by his predecessor. We also cooperated in running Merry-maker promotions, notably in response to

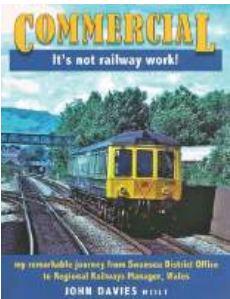
long-distance coach competition, as well as supporting local campaigners in running charter trains in the name of the RDS to

such places as Dereham, Wisbech and Aylsham.

John laid the foundations for the early 1980s modernisation of the East Suffolk line. He recounts how he spoke at an East Suffolk Travel Association meeting in Saxmundham, sharing a platform with the late Gerard Fiennes.

He defiantly announced the topic of his speech as: “How Fiennes saved the line in the 1960s and how I am going to save it in the 1980s.”

After a lifetime devoted to helping the railway come to terms with change, he could also proudly say: “I brought a lot of business to the railways, making them more relevant to the country’s transport needs.”



COMMERCIAL – It’s not railway work!
By John Davies
ISBN 978-1-3999-7550-6
Platform 5 £15

Railfuture member of the year

By Wendy Thorne

Do you know someone who in 2023-24 has contributed to the success of Railfuture or raised our profile, by for example campaigning successfully for an improved or new rail service?

Perhaps they work behind the scenes, helping their local branch or engaging stakeholders.

If you think they deserve recognition then we want to hear about them – by Monday 1 July.

Nominations may be made by any member of Railfuture, and but only Railfuture members are eligible to be nominated.

To submit a nomination, send a written statement of not more than 500 words identifying how the nominee has contributed to Railfuture’s mission to be the number one advocate for rail users and the rail industry, and how they have enhanced Railfuture’s campaigning for a bigger better railway. Send to Wendy Thorne no later than Monday 1 July at: wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk

The 2023 Award (renamed from Railfuture Campaigner of the Year) is due to be presented in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July 2024, immediately following formal business of Railfuture’s national AGM.

East Midlands

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NW Leicestershire local plan

Railfuture East Midlands has responded to the consultation on North West Leicestershire District Council’s draft local plan. There are no railway stations in North West Leicestershire, but two lines with potential for reopening pass through the district. So Railfuture emphasised the need to safeguard land at all possible station sites on the Ivanhoe line. It is not enough to protect Coalville and Ashby which feature in Network Rail’s current plan, but also possible sites at Moira, Swannington and the Bardon employment area. Railfuture also pointed out that reopening the line between Stenson and Sheet Stores Junction would provide the fastest journeys between Nottingham and Birmingham (now that HS2 will not be providing such a service), and that a station at Castle Donington could be opened on this line. Finally, Railfuture noted that the planned new town to the south of East Midlands Airport would need efficient bus or tram connections to the nearest railway station at East Midlands Parkway.

Corby’s dual celebration

Corby Rail Users report that, in April, its station celebrated 15 years



By Roger Blake

The final call for nominations for Railfuture’s tenth Awards for Rail User Groups (which includes similar organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships) closed on Easter Saturday.

This year there are just seven nominations across four of the six award categories from four of Railfuture’s 14 branches – North East, North West, Scotland and West Midlands.

The awards and commendations will be announced after this year’s national AGM in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July.

Full and illustrated details of all the RUG Awards and Commendations from 2023, and previous years since their inauguration in 2012 and Campaigner of the Year in 2019, are in Railfuture’s national website, under What’s on.



Two of last year’s winners are pictured left

They took home four of Devon’s five Awards

Councillor Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport, won last year’s Judges’ Special Award for Devon County Council

The Tarka Rail Association’s Tim Steer won Gold Awards for Best Campaigner (joint) and also Best Social Media plus a Bronze Award for Best Campaign

and for engaging constructively with us in how best to seek service enhancements.

MEMRAP at Belper

Labour contender Claire Ward was elected mayor for the new East Midlands Combined County Authority on 2 May. The new mayoralty is expected to have a significant devolved transport budget.

The previous month, Ms Ward was one of the candidates who attended a public meeting at Belper which called for the reinstatement of the lines from Matlock to Buxton and Chinley. The meeting, organised by MEMRAP (Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership), was well attended. After introductions by both MEMRAP and Railfuture, the MEMRAP presentation for a Derby-Manchester reinstatement was followed by an opportunity for the mayoral candidates to outline their transport policy proposals to a full hall.

The four candidates present were appreciative and complimentary of this opportunity to meet more of their voters.

As time was limited, MEMRAP gave Railfuture, Transition Belper and

local councillor John Porter the opportunity to submit questions to the candidates in advance. One of these was whether the candidates would back the railway reinstatement. All of the four candidates in attendance (Conservative, Labour, Independent and Green) committed to a study, should they be elected.

Access improvements to the Peak District National Park would be dramatic, as it appears the restored rail service could remove three to four million vehicle movements from Bakewell, based on Department for Transport data. Overall, the line could remove 10 million vehicles, including heavy lorries, from the roads annually. Derbyshire Dales District Council, which is home to the popular Monsal cycling and walking trail, is becoming interested in the line’s potential to remove lorries off the crumbling roads in its area. The involvement of the district councils near the line is encouraging and rail campaigners recognise the importance of providing reliable data backing up a rail option to the politicians.

www.railfuture.org.uk/
[East+Midlands+Branch](#)
[X @RailfutureEMids](#)



Progress at bottleneck station

Yorkshire

davidpennierail21@gmail.com
Dore & Totley gains platform
Rail Minister Huw Merriman formally opened the rebuilt Dore & Totley station on 8 April. Rationalisation in the 1980s had seen the then two-platform station reduced to a single platform, and the main Sheffield-Manchester line through the station reduced to a bi-directional single line. This succeeded in creating one of the worst bottlenecks in the North of England, which has contributed to delays reaching as far as Scotland and Cornwall for the past 40 years.

The existing platform at Dore & Totley has now been extended to accommodate six-car trains. A matching new platform has been constructed, complete with customer information screens, waiting shelters, help points and tactile wayfinding. Access to the new platform is via a new footbridge, with lifts also provided. Railfuture was invited to contribute on accessibility issues in the design of the new station and Yorkshire branch vice-chair, Andrew Dyson, represented Railfuture on the industry-wide accessibility group.

Trains began to use the new platform on 25 March, following a nine-day closure of the line. The headline objective of the scheme is to increase the number of fast services on the Hope Valley route, but capacity constraints at both Sheffield and Manchester mean it will be some time before any additional services are delivered.

York and North Yorkshire Mayor
Labour's David Skaith was elected as the first mayor of the newly formed York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority on 2 May. The mayor will have powers and funds to improve transport through a consolidated, devolved, multi-year transport settlement. On 4 April, Railfuture Yorkshire held a rail issues hustings attended by five of the six candidates, and branch officers met separately with some of the candidates to stress the need for high quality rail services across the area. Railfuture Yorkshire will be trying to arrange an early meeting with the new mayor.

TPE speaker at Leeds AGM
Railfuture Yorkshire's AGM was held on 27 April in Leeds with guest speaker Chris Jackson, managing director of TransPennine Express. Chris described the steps he has taken to make TPE's services reliable again, and he outlined desirable timetable improvements for the remainder of the decade and infrastructure priorities for the next 10 years. He pointed out that the Huddersfield-Wakefield-Castleford-York service is attracting new customers. The service was increased to six trains per day from



The formal opening of Dore & Totley station took place on 8 April. Left to right: Chris Morgan (chair, Friends of Dore & Totley Station), James Martin (Sheffield Access4All), Sarah Dines MP (Derbyshire Dales), Rail Minister Huw Merriman, Neil Holm (managing director, TransPennine Route Upgrade), Andrew Dyson (Railfuture Yorkshire vice-chair)

Picture: Volker/Story



Network Rail image of what Haxby station could look like

the timetable change in June. More will be added in December when the four trains per hour Leeds-Manchester frequency will also be restored.

Bradford £24m upgrade
Bradford Forster Square Station is to have a £24 million upgrade, including an extra platform. Railfuture was asked for its views on the upgrade. Railfuture's accessibility adviser Graham Collett attended a diversity impact assessment meeting and suggested some important issues that needed to be addressed during the work and after its completion.

Eight miles north of Bradford, Menston station (on the Wharfedale line) is to be provided with a new footbridge. Graham sought comments from his contacts who were familiar with the station and fed these back to the consultation team.

Northallerton and Thirsk
Railfuture Yorkshire branch is working with the York and North Yorkshire and York Combined Authority with a view to establishing a new rail user group for Northallerton and Thirsk.

York station gateway
A key stage in the York Station Gateway project was the removal

of the Queen Street bridge, which took place at the end of April, with a temporary access road created through the station car park. We have expressed our concerns about the new bus interchange and pedestrian access arrangements.

Haxby station
A planning application for the £24 million Haxby station, on the finally agreed (and arguably less convenient) site on Towthorpe Road just north of Haxby, was submitted in February. Subject to planning consent being granted, final detailed designs will be completed by Network Rail throughout the remainder of 2024, with construction of the station on the York-Scarborough line expected to start on site in spring 2025 and opening in 2026. The previous Haxby station closed in 1930.

Railfuture webinar
Railfuture Yorkshire organised a webinar with Network Rail's North and East region route director Jason Hamilton on 30 April. His presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch
Railfuture Yorkshire Facebook:
www.facebook.com/groups/3116771821782626/

Funding freeze threatens railway upgrades

By Roger Blake

Network Rail will have nothing to spend on enhancements in the five year "control" period from 2024 to 2029.

The stark facts were revealed in Network Rail's GB Delivery Plan which provides only enough funds to keep the existing railway ticking over.

Separate funding is available for the Great British Railways transition team and high speed rail, which are dealt with through "other arrangements".

Despite this official negativity, Railfuture will continue to lobby for a bigger and better railway because we know it boosts economic growth and the environment.

The country needs sustained investment in rail, as was once promised by the rail network enhancements pipeline.

The rail network benefits 100% of the population by reducing pollution and providing a sensible alternative to cars, while rail freight delivers goods in the most energy-efficient and safe way. Railfuture will concentrate on arguing for cash-efficient loops with faster



Picture: Great Western Railway

INTERMEDIATE INFRASTRUCTURE: The high cost of traditional electrification has frightened successive governments, even though the benefits of rail electrification are huge. So now Great Western Railway is conducting a 12-month trial of a rapid-charge battery train on the Greenford-West Ealing branch line in London. The GWR team is pictured above with an ex-Vivarail train which has been fitted with batteries. On the right is the charging apparatus at West Ealing station which boosts the batteries in the former London Underground District line train during four-minute turnarounds at West Ealing. GWR managing director Mark Hopwood said the technology will be a "vital" part of the industry's efforts to phase out diesel-only trains by 2040. He added: "I would like to see more electrification happening, but I think it is being made clear that we are not likely to see government funds available to electrify the whole network."

turnouts and modern signals suitable for 75 mph container trains and 60 mph aggregate trains. Railfuture will also campaign for new rail freight interchanges. New and reopened stations and lines are also essential, to extend the rail network to more people.

Enhancement of the railway network spreads other socio-economic and environmental benefits. We need round four of the government's new stations fund, a policy which has proved popular with almost every voter.

Thanks, Nigel

A magnificent gesture from Railfuture activist Nigel Bray has given Railfuture's finances a big boost. Stationmaster's son, railway author and campaigner Nigel, who died in 2021 aged 69, left Railfuture £50,000 in his will.

Nigel started campaigning for rail in the aftermath of the Beeching cuts when he was at York University.

Requests from members are crucial in keeping Railfuture campaigning. That is one reason why Railfuture is inviting campaigners in our branches to come forward with bids for funding from Railfuture's fighting fund, which was originally set up to fight rail closures but can now be used for active campaigning for rail improvements, including research needed to convince politicians and officials.

Railfuture board member Owen O'Neill is rewriting the Fighting Fund application process to make it simpler for campaigners to claim from the fighting fund.

Join the Lottery

Lottery winners

March: W Buttigieg, M Waller, A McFie, D Brady, M Edgell, M Waller
April: J Ward, R Saxby, I Clatworthy, G Smith, A McFie, G Wood
May: T Gauntlett, R Grainger, R Hall, L Butler, J Henderson, P Fox

Railfuture Lottery profits go towards the Fighting Fund, which supports the campaigns our members are working on. For £12 per year for 12 entries, you can take part and could win one of six prizes every month. Multiple entries are possible.

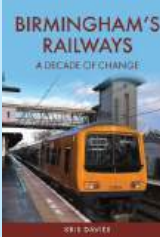
Taking part is easy – contact lottery@railfuture.org.uk and decide how many entries you want every month and how you would like to pay: via online banking, Paypal or cheque. With 72 winners every year and increased prizes in the December draw, give it a try – who knows, you could easily be a winner!

By Richard Lysons
Birmingham

Growing up in the north west and living in that region for most of my life, the railways of Birmingham and, indeed, the West Midlands, were virtually unknown to me. Like many students in the 1970s, I had had to endure changing trains at Birmingham New Street, but that was about it.

Last summer I decided to tackle this gap in my knowledge and explore the region. I based myself in Rugeley and spent a couple of days roaming Birmingham's lines. I wish that I had had this book with me when I was visiting the area!

Davies' book comprises 10 chapters covering the city centre, routes to nearby towns and the two cross city routes. The final two chapters on the new West Midlands Metro system and the future and past of the city's railways are the most interesting to me. This Metro is the most recently completed light rail system in the UK and has clearly learned many lessons from its



Birmingham's Railways – A Decade of Change.
Kris Davies
Amberley Publishing ISBN 978-1-3981-1734-1 £15.99

How railways coped with change

predecessors. When I used the Metro between Birmingham and Wolverhampton I was impressed with its cleanliness, the diligence of the conductors in checking and selling tickets and the general atmosphere and ambience of the trams. It is clearly a big success and I look forward to the system's expansion.

Davies' photographs are of outstanding quality and the book gives the reader a feeling of optimism with so many improvements in stations and infrastructure. The elephant in the room – the HS2 link from London – will inevitably spotlight Birmingham in the years to come. I look forward to a book that will include the city's HS2 stations!

Lancashire

Hilbert's two books, *Network North West* (2017) and *Network Greater Manchester* (2019) were useful books for both rail campaigners and rail historians. His latest book is a history of Lancashire's railways from 1978 to the present day which covers from the end of the British Rail regional area through sectorisation to privatisation. Lancashire is a huge county, even after the creation – and separation – of Merseyside and Greater Manchester half a century ago. It stretches from Morecambe in the north to Blackpool in the west, the Ribble Valley in the east and

Burnley in the south east. The book also includes such former Lancashire towns as Bolton, Bury, Oldham and Wigan which are now part of Greater Manchester. Despite the Beeching cuts, the rail network in Lancashire is effective and well used. It would have been good to see a mention of the well established and effective community rail network in Lancashire which has its base at



Lancashire's Railways 1978-Present.
Martyn Hilbert
Amberley Publishing ISBN 978-1-3981-14715 £15.99

Accrington Eco Station. Hilbert's book takes a north to south journey and includes main lines, secondary routes as well as branch lines and others. The photographs in the book are of an excellent quality and the author's captions are informative and interesting.

North Wales

Like the author, I have known North Wales since family holidays in the 1960s. However, apart from a short trip on the Ffestiniog Railway and a brief visit to Prestatyn in my teens, all my visits were by car. In recent years, I have made up for lost time and

Pro-rail election action

For May's local elections, Railfuture London & South East took the initiative with its rail manifesto, sent to mayoral and London Assembly candidates.

All Railfuture branches will ideally be taking action to canvass candidates during the general election campaign culminating in the election on 4 July.

In April, Labour published *Getting Britain moving: Labour's plan to fix Britain's railways*, and Railfuture tested it against Railfuture's 10-point *Rail Action Plan* published on our website in February. Railfuture also provided input to the Labour-commissioned Rail and Urban Transport Review, led by former Siemens boss Juergen Maier.

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight & Logistics Groups via our dedicated campaign web-page www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway

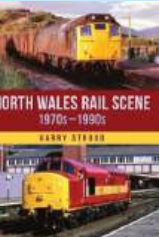
Also on X (formerly Twitter):
[@RailfutureNetws](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNetws)
[@RailfutureFret](https://twitter.com/RailfutureFret)

■ Roger Blake is Railfuture's director for Infrastructure & Networks

enjoyed rail holidays travelling nearly all the routes in the region. I finally made the "round trip", travelling from Chester along the North Wales coast before taking the Conwy Valley Line to Blaenau Ffestiniog and using the Ffestiniog Railway to Porthmadog to reach the Cambrian line. This spectacular route goes past Barmouth over the Mawddach estuary to Machynlleth and on to Shrewsbury. I urge *Railwatch* readers to do the same, if they have not already done so.

Stroud has carefully documented the North Wales rail scene over three important decades for the region. He does, of course, focus on the actual trains, but the beauty of the landscape and the changes in the infrastructure are apparent in nearly every photograph. Looking through this fascinating book makes me eager to return to North Wales this summer and take some photographs myself.

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



North Wales Rail Scene: 1970s-1990s.
Gary Stroud
Amberley Publishing ISBN 978-1-3981-16269 £15.99

HS2 way ahead

Although Railfuture chairman Chris Page said that the Euston terminus for HS2 must go ahead (*Railwatch* 179), Euston has its own problems. It is not well placed for the City of London, theatreland, the South Bank, Docklands or London's main shopping centres.

Thanks to the Elizabeth line, people from Abbey Wood in south-east London will be able to get to the HS2 station at Old Oak Common quicker than getting to Euston.

Again using the Elizabeth line, which has frequent services, people from Essex and east London will be able to gain access to Old Oak Common with a rail journey only five minutes longer than going to Euston.

The Elizabeth line does not, however, connect Old Oak Common directly with London Bridge, Waterloo or Victoria. Nevertheless, the journey to Old Oak is likely to be only 10 minutes longer than travelling to Euston.

The Elizabeth line connects with 15 rail or Tube routes, while Euston and Euston Square can muster only five.

If only a little investment money is available, it might be better spent on improving Birmingham-Crewe HS2 links.

Railwatch 179 also has a picture of East West Rail work at Calvert, Buckinghamshire. A simple connecting station at Calvert with HS2 could bring substantial financial benefit to both rail projects and help prevent HS2 looking useless.

Graham Cole, Chickerell, Dorset

M-ways into railway

The Transport and Health Science Group, whose Railways Group is affiliated to Railfuture as a user group, has called for motorways to be turned into railways.

In its evidence to the Juergen Maier review of railways, the THSG suggests that three lanes of motorway plus a hard shoulder could be turned into four tracks of railway, two of them with high-frequency vehicle-carrying services replacing the highways function of the motorway, one of them a W12 or UIC-C freight line forming part of a national multimodal freight network, and one of them a high speed line forming part of a national high speed rail network.

The evidence also criticises Treasury assessment processes, which overvalue road schemes and undervalue rail schemes, and it calls for benefit-capture and externalities charges to be seen as part of the market, not part of the burden of taxation.

The evidence also pursues the five



RED TRIANGLE: Carriage signs at the North Norfolk Railway

The original No Smoking signs on trains bore the legend "No Smoking Allowed".

A male passenger found smoking in one of these designated compartments travelling from Oxford to London was asked to stop but refused. In court, he pleaded not guilty to the charge of breaking a byelaw.

He admitted he was smoking but said that the wording of the sign meant that it was permissible not to smoke, not that it was forbidden to smoke.

The court agreed to hear from an "expert witness", a professor in English language at Oxford University, and it was agreed that, for future clarity, signs should be changed to the familiar red triangle with a simplified message: "No Smoking".

Peter Desmond-Thomas, Alton, Hampshire

objectives with which THSG has tasked its Railways Workstream – explaining the health benefits of railways, promoting the train-cycle combination as a distinct transport mode, making railways accessible to disabled people, promoting sensible safety arrangements in place of the current excessive safety bureaucracy, and advocating for rail greenways in which 15 inch gauge railways engineered to run at 50 miles per hour using high speed rail technology run parallel to cycle paths.

Steve Watkins, co-chair (policy) Transport and Health Science Group thsgchair@gmail.com

Editor's note: Former Siemens UK boss Juergen Maier was appointed by the Labour party in December to lead a review into how the delivery of major rail projects can be improved.

Flexi-tickets needed

Neil Middleton, in his article in *Railwatch* 179, states that "travelling further afield involves a bit of planning... it becomes a natural extension to book our travel as well". However, planning a trip is not the same as booking a trip, especially if booking entails nailing you down to a particular minute of the day (the time your train leaves) or losing the whole trip.

Yes, you might make plans to visit or meet family or friends, but if you are a few minutes early or late that is not a problem. You might even

want to change your plans or meeting place on the day.

Even accommodation facilities these days usually offer a flexible option that is a factor of only 20-50% above the cheapest fixed deal – not five times as much as some rail tickets are!

Having to book your ticket weeks in advance in order to get something even remotely reasonably priced and then having to pay through the nose if you want to change is a strong barrier to getting more people travelling by rail.

On a completely separate point, I am sure I am not alone in having my mathematical feathers ruffled by the article on the back page. Do Freightliner want to "increase rail freight by 300%" or "treble it"? Both are claimed in the article, but they are not the same! It should either be +300% (= 4x) or +200% (= 3x).

David Burbridge, Milton Keynes
dave_burbridge@fastmail.fm

CrossCountry

We have family in Bristol and my wife and I travel regularly from Stirling. We prefer not to have to cross London so tend to travel via Birmingham (Avanti) or Manchester (TransPennine Express).

We then have no choice but CrossCountry on to Bristol.

So, CrossCountry! The trains are worn out, smelly and uncomfortable and do not have enough luggage space. This is why

we avoid them for most of our trips.

The new TPE trains are generations ahead. The CrossCountry trains are always packed solid, especially between Birmingham/Manchester and Bristol. One four-car Voyager train is not enough. Why did CrossCountry scrap its IC125 trains? I would suggest money saving?

As far as I can tell, CrossCountry is the only operator on the Birmingham/Manchester to Bristol route.

I wish Great Western, London Midland or any train operator would provide a "local" service at least from Bristol to Birmingham. That would be better than the crushed and standing everywhere conditions on CrossCountry.

This looks like a perfect opportunity for an open access operator.

Alexander Taylor, Grampian Road Stirling FK7 9JN
Sandytrains@protonmail.com

Editor's note: My family has also been regularly inconvenienced by CrossCountry. Attempts to improve CrossCountry's services in the past have been unfairly hampered by government insisting on penny-pinching train procurement. Maybe MPs in marginal constituencies on CrossCountry routes would be worth lobbying in the run-up to the general election.

Hope for Haverhill

I read the letter Haverhill Memories in *Railwatch* 179 with special interest because I used to live in Stansfield, Suffolk, and used Clare station regularly.

At one meeting in Clare in the 1960s, I spoke up for the line through Haverhill and Clare but was shouted down. To my surprise, the late Eldon Griffiths MP came to my rescue and demanded that I should be heard and had the right to speak.

The 1967 closure of the "extremely useful" line was a cruel blow to many people, especially patients and visitors to the Sue Ryder home at Cavendish.

Six months after the closure, Haverhill was named as a London "overspill" town.

A revived rail service to Haverhill is a great idea and when I visited Clare recently, I wondered if the gap between Haverhill and Sudbury, via Clare and Long Melford, would ever be filled.

Roderic Beale, Vanbrugh Hill, London SE3 7UF

Focus on rail maps

I look forward to receiving *Railwatch* and always find the articles to be encouraging and informative. But one of the things I

find difficult concerns the size of lettering used on some of the illustrations. Three examples: On page 5 (Whaley Bridge and Peaks and Dales Line), on page 20 (TransPennine transformation work) and on page 21 (Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line).

These illustrations are important and so reading the print is vital – but the size of lettering makes it impossible (for me) to do so except with a magnifying glass which I do not always have to hand. Please, could those responsible for layout make sure these important illustrations can be read?

John-Francis Friendship, The Old Fire Station, Eaglesfield Road, London SE18 3BT
jff2209@yahoo.com

Editor's note: Fair criticism. Unfortunately *Railwatch* does not have the financial resources to pay professional map designers. We often have to make do with maps made for some other purpose and hope that they are adequate. Volunteers with map-making skills are welcome.

Low fares essential

Covid has reduced the number of people commuting by train, with working from home having a massive impact. Thus, it is all the more important that rail companies encourage leisure journeys.

I cannot therefore understand why cheaper fares for turn-up-and-go travel are being gradually abolished. Surely someone realises that decisions to go on a seaside day out or to a cricket match are often made at short notice, depending on the weather?

I am afraid I would not book well ahead for any outing which would be ruined by a day of heavy rain.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP
timmickleburgh9@gmail.com

Railway library

The Railway Library is reviving an old tradition and is an example of working class self-help at its best.

Many older rail workers remember the MIC – the Mutual Improvement Class. Its origins go back to the early years of railways when railwaymen – particularly footplate staff – formed their own self-help education classes.

They became known as mutual improvement classes and lasted until the end of steam in the 1960s – and even for a few years after. Sadly, the MIC has become a thing of the past on the modern railway.

The Railway Library at Kents Bank

Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups

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



Dez (LoveArtPix) is an 'inspiration'

Picture: Northern

Railway platforms for art

Train operator Northern has agreed with artists that stations are a great "platform" for art.

They have recruited artist Dez, who also goes by the name LoveArtPix.

Dez, who is autistic, is on a mission to inspire neurodivergent passengers.

Artwork from Dez from Middleton, Rochdale, Greater Manchester, can be found at transport hubs across the North West.

During Autism Awareness Month in April, Dez said: "Not everyone will find themselves in an art gallery or exhibition hall, but millions of people pass through stations every year as they go about their daily lives. It is in these everyday moments that you can really inspire someone."

Station on the Lancaster-Barrow line has revived the name for its monthly talks. They take place on the second Wednesday of each month at 1400.

In March, former Blackburn driver Raymond Watton, who started his footplate career on steam, gave a talk on his *Memoirs of a Lancashire Locoman*.

He was fireman on the last British rail steam run on 11 August 1968, from Blackburn to Carlisle.

I am a former work colleague of Raymond.

All the MIC talks are free but pre-booking is essential:
info@stationlibrary.org.uk

We have a monthly open day from 1100 to 1600 when there is tea, coffee and biscuits, bonhomie and an opportunity to browse the collection, borrow books or even

Dez's first artwork at a railway station was unveiled at Manchester Oxford Road in 2020, and just under a year later his work appeared at Manchester Victoria.

At Victoria, two of his biggest pieces of art can be found, with a huge mural of the Manchester skyline.

Other stations on the Northern network that have inspired artwork by Dez include Blackpool North and Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria.

Craig Harrop of Northern said: "Dez is a real inspiration. We are happy to support him."

For more information about Dez and his work:

www.loveartpix.co.uk

buy a book or two. The library has also launched a supporter category.

We have had some very generous donations, both in cash and in gifts and we want to recognise and encourage that by creating a special category of supporter.

We will keep our supporters informed of new book additions, access to archive and other specialist material, occasional social events and discounts on book sales. Above all, supporters will be helping the library to develop, with improved facilities.

We suggest a cash donation of around £25 to become a supporter of the library.

Details can be found on the library's website:
www.stationlibrary.org.uk

Kents Bank Station Library already has a collection of over 3,000 books on railways and other aspects of transport. It was officially opened in January by Lord Hendy, chairman of Network Rail. The not-

for-profit body which manages the library and owns the collection is run by a small group of trustees who have over a hundred years of railway experience between them. It is the only publicly accessible library on a working railway station and has one of the biggest collections of railway books in the north of England, second only to the National Railway Museum in York.

Professor Paul Salveson MBE, Station House, Kents Bank Station, Kentsford Road, Grange-over-Sands LA11 7BB
paul.salveson@btinternet.com

Walsall direct trains

More than 20 years ago, I wrote to the *Birmingham Mail* calling for a Walsall to London direct train service, pointing out the disadvantages for passengers of changing trains at New Street.

Now I read that Alstom wants to run an open access rail service from London to Shropshire and north Wales with a stop at Walsall, but not calling at New Street to avoid congestion there.

I hope that the new service will hasten plans to fill in any gaps in electrification.

Interestingly, green FLIXBUS coaches have now invaded Britain's roads from the continent, with the result that National Express coaches face more than just competition from Megabus.

Wesley Paxton, Annerley Road, Annan DG12 6HE

Editor's note: The new Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway service from Euston would call at Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Coleshill Parkway, Walsall, Darlaston, Wolverhampton, Telford Central, Shrewsbury and Gobowen.

WSMR will avoid congested New Street by sharing the Sutton Park line with existing freight trains.

Although well-known as a train builder, Alstom is not a train operator in Britain. It does, however, have experience of running trains in America.

Alstom's partner is SLC Rail, whose managing director Ian Walters said: "From the Welsh borders to the Midlands, our routes will forge new connections, linking overlooked regions of England and Wales with direct services to and from London."

"Passengers will benefit from more competitive fares and new technology to simplify ticket purchasing for our new services. Delighting the customer will be at the forefront of what we do."

"We want Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway passengers to experience a new excellence in customer service onboard our intercity trains."

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Going for Growth

Shortly before the general election announcement, Railfuture Wessex chair Mike Southgate had a constructive meeting via video link with shadow rail minister Stephen Morgan, who is campaigning to retain his Portsmouth parliamentary seat. Railfuture called for reinstatement of three trains per hour off peak from both Portsmouth and Southampton to London. Mike suggested that growth in rail patronage would most likely come from improvements in leisure travel, adding “it is frustrating to see perfectly usable rolling stock languishing in sidings when that additional capacity is much needed in the South. Potential travellers would be dismayed by the cramped, two-coach rolling stock now often used on the Portsmouth to Cardiff service, and they would not be impressed by the poor advice and contingency planning we often experience during service disruption.”

Mike also attended a thought-provoking presentation by Martijn Gilbert, managing director of First’s open access operations. There has been impressive growth in traffic on the East Coast main line to above 2019 levels, thanks partly to open access. In Wessex, Railfuture is told there is no business case to reinstate the pre-covid timetable for either South Western Railway or CrossCountry Trains. We believe levelling up needs to be applied “Down South”.

West of England progress

Railfuture received a fairly upbeat report from our affiliate, the Salisbury to Exeter Rail User Group. SERUG tells us that Natalie Edwards has been appointed to the new post of general manager for the West of England line, and has set her sights on delivering a more resilient passenger service through direct involvement with all relevant parties, especially Network Rail. The result so far has been some very good days, with services running to time. Despite strikes and other difficulties, ridership has been very good, helped by the reinstatement of the second hourly Waterloo-Salisbury service. More passengers mean extra revenue, a success which is not being matched on SWR’s commuter services.

SERUG has been involved in discussions about replacement rolling stock, and one idea under consideration is refurbished class 450 electric units with batteries added to run beyond the third rail DC supply. SERUG is supportive of the new technology, but infrastructure upgrades must not be compromised while also representing value for money. The group thinks there is little likelihood of hitting the promised 2030 date for decarbonisation.

Network Rail’s engineering work to cope with extreme weather is reaching its conclusion, having dealt with Crewkerne tunnel problems, Axminster river surges, and the embankments at Gillingham and elsewhere.

West Coastway timetable

Govia Thameslink Railway introduced a new Monday to Saturday timetable on the West Coastway route in June. The former service pattern whereby alternate hourly trains from Southampton (or from Portsmouth) went to Brighton or to London Victoria is replaced by a half-hourly service between Southampton Central and Brighton, and a half-hourly service between Portsmouth Harbour and London Victoria. While regretting the loss of the direct train service between Southampton Central and Gatwick Airport, Railfuture Wessex hopes the new regular services to Portsmouth and Southampton will be more reliable. Railfuture was pleased that all London Victoria trains would run through to Portsmouth Harbour instead of some terminating at Portsmouth & Southsea, and that Portsmouth would continue to have direct hourly trains to Brighton following representations from stakeholders during the timetable consultations. Railfuture also argued for better Sunday services on the West Coastway.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch
X @RailfutureWessx

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

Timetable review

In April, Railfuture Wales attended the first Transport for Wales Rail liaison group meeting held face to face since covid. There were also online participants.

The review of existing and proposed timetables attracted most interest. Demand has changed post-covid, with less commuting and peak hour demand. Longer distance travel has largely recovered to pre-covid levels.

The changes are the first substantial timetable updates since KeolisAmey took on the franchise in 2018, before the Welsh Government took over in 2021.

In its consultation response, Railfuture welcomed the proposed recast of North Wales coast services from 2026. The recently restored Liverpool-Chester service will be extended to Llandudno, while the existing Manchester Airport-Llandudno service will be diverted to Holyhead. This will provide one additional train per hour for most of the day, but the changes along the North Wales coast line are dependent on level crossing improvements.

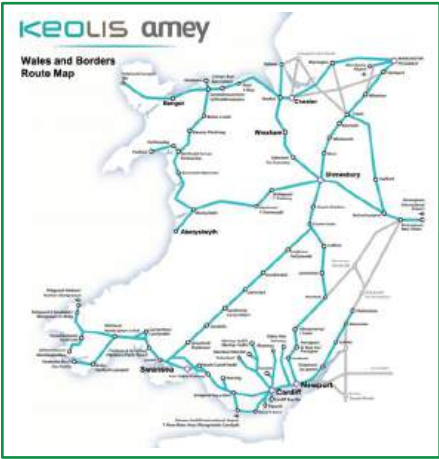
Railfuture also welcomes plans for more summer services to Tenby. The Cambrian lines, however, will gain more services in summer but have fewer in winter from December this year. Plans for a Cardiff-Liverpool two-hourly service are delayed for at least five years. This is disappointing because it would have provided a half-hourly service on the Marches line, allowing for more regular trains at some of the smaller stations, while still allowing for accelerated services.

Railfuture is particularly disappointed by proposals to reduce services on the Heart of Wales line. A fifth through train was introduced in 2022, but since then the service has been dogged by delays and cancellations. TFW argues that revenue support must be reduced and the Heart of Wales line loses too much money. The poor service, until recently, has kept people away. Reliability has improved, but it takes time and marketing to attract people back. This should be given a chance before a decision is made to reduce the already sparse service to one leaving gaps of over four hours.

A separate presentation explained the *Local Railway* concept, involving TFW Rail staff working closely with Network Rail on the Cambrian line to improve the service. One result has been the reversal of a previous NR decision to limit Cambrian Coast trains to two-car units. Four-car trains were able to operate last summer for the first time for several years and revenue rose by 22%. This initiative has now been launched on the lines west of Swansea, including the Heart of Wales route. It could be considered a precursor to some of the benefits that might flow from Great British Railways.

Other topics presented included station infrastructure and staffing. TFW Rail said it does not intend to close any ticket offices, although roaming staff called “travel companions” will be introduced at the five busiest stations on the network.

TFW Rail has a comprehensive programme of rolling stock replacement, but the poor reliability of the new class 197 and 230



The Welsh rail network which was operated by KeolisAmey from 2018. It was expected that the KeolisAmey franchise would last 15 years but in 2021 the publicly owned Transport for Wales Rail took over. As part of the original agreement, Keolis and Amey continue to be involved in the infrastructure on the Core Valley lines, where the South Wales Metro upgrade is taking place

units has created many problems. We were told most of these are now behind us.

Ringling the changes

At the Railfuture Wales AGM in April, Peter Kingsbury stood down as chair after nearly eight years in the position. We welcomed our new chair, Richard Wilcock, an experienced campaigner who has been on the branch committee for a similar length of time. Richard also sits on Railfuture’s national passenger, infrastructure and freight groups, as well as actively lobbying in the Liverpool City Region. We thanked Peter for his leadership and he remains on the committee as editor of *Rail Wales*.

Bangor-Afon Wen study

Lee Waters, deputy minister for climate change in the Welsh Government, has written to Railfuture stating that TFW is “undertaking an initial feasibility study on the route between Bangor and Afon Wen, which will identify the best alignment for a connection and current constraints”.

Following this, Railfuture wrote to Ken Skates, cabinet secretary for North Wales and Transport, emphasising that Mr Waters had already indicated that there is a strong business case for reopening Bangor-Caernarfon. This section should be considered on its own merits, not just as part of a line to Afon Wen, for which the business case is unlikely to be as strong.

Reopening to Caernarfon has long been a Railfuture campaign. It has also been included in the Welsh Government transport strategy for several decades. Railfuture is concerned that changes to the North Wales Metro project could push a rail link to Caernarfon into the long grass! If it happens only as a light rail link to Bangor, this would be far less effective in generating passenger growth than would through trains from Manchester Airport and Euston to Caernarfon, which could be provided without any additional rolling stock. Caernarfon would also be a much more convenient rail head for points west and south than Bangor could ever be.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
X @RailfutureWales

West way forward for Manchester airport

By Simon Barber
Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

The Manchester Airport western link is an idea whose time has come. It has been one of the longest-running campaigns of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association, which is affiliated to Railfuture.

The 3.5 mile connection between Manchester Airport rail station and Mobberley on the Mid Cheshire line was proposed by British Rail in the early 1990s, a few years before privatisation. It was the western half of the original Manchester Airport rail link project, but only the eastern part (Heald Green to Manchester Airport) was built because economies had to be made in the run-up to privatisation.

However, the route at Manchester Airport station is safeguarded and can provide a through line, allowing trains from North Wales and Chester, direct to the airport.

It will also deliver time savings for passengers from Chester and north Wales, as it is 21 miles shorter than the present route from Chester via Warrington Bank Quay and the Castlefield corridor.

The western link would avoid the need to use Castlefield and the conflicting junctions at Warrington, Earlestown and Ordsall Lane. Today’s journey time of 84 minutes from Chester to the airport on the Tfw through service would be cut to about 40 minutes.

Benefits

There would be a big financial advantage. Network Rail has calculated the financial benefit of saving one pair of hourly paths through the Castlefield corridor as £800 million over 60 years.

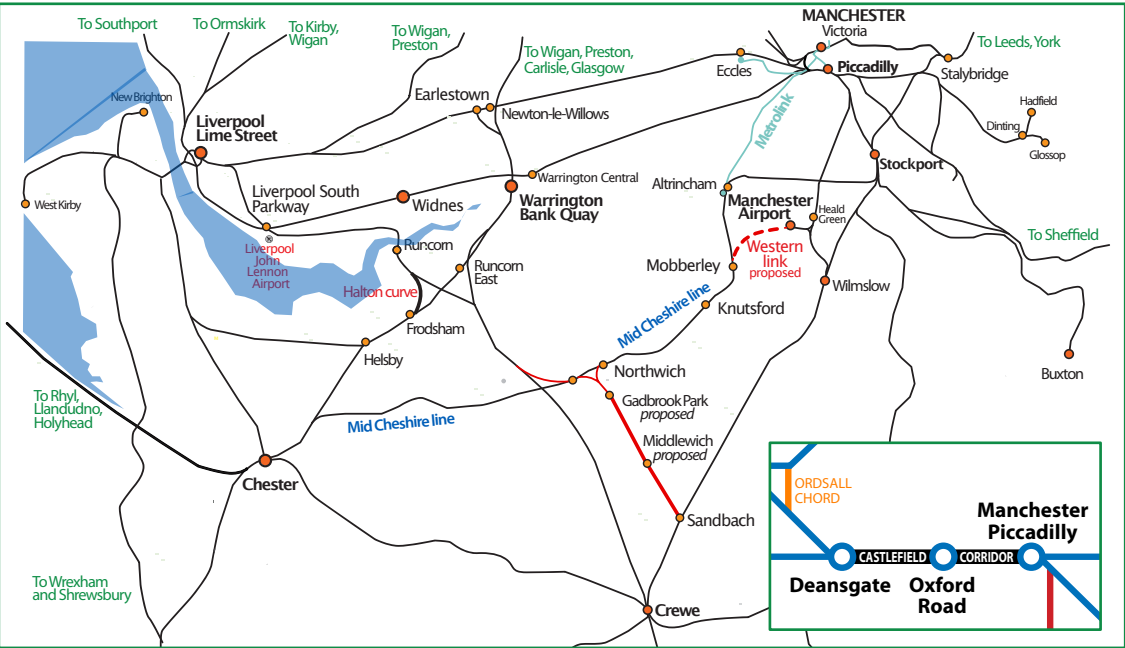
The western link would provide the shortest route between Liverpool and Manchester Airport, via Liverpool South Parkway, the station for Liverpool airport.

There would be major benefits for Mid Cheshire passengers and the economies of the towns which would gain a direct route to Manchester (via the airport) for the first time since 1989.

That was when Mid Cheshire trains were diverted via Stockport so that the former Altrincham line could be handed over to Metrolink.

The western link route to Manchester is six miles shorter than the Stockport route.

Today, trains from Knutsford (14 miles from Manchester in a straight line) take 44 minutes and trains from Northwich (20 miles in a straight line) take 60 minutes. Congestion at Stockport and on the approach to Piccadilly means there is never more than one train an hour to Manchester. Knutsford has the unenviable distinction of being the busiest station in



How the Manchester airport western link fits into the complex rail network south of Manchester and, inset, the overcrowded Castlefield corridor which the airport western link would help to relieve

England by annual footfall with only a basic hourly service. This slow and infrequent service means that Mid Cheshire residents cannot easily reach jobs in Manchester, and Mid Cheshire employers cannot recruit staff – such as young graduates – who live in Manchester. Yet this modest 3.5 miles of new railway can deliver congestion busting and journey time savings.

Map

Our map is based on a 2007 Cheshire County Council map but has been simplified. The proposed western link is shown as a dashed line. The map shows the number of lines that the western link could connect to, via the Mid Cheshire line.

Current status

Rail planners and consultants are well aware of the proposed link but it lacks a major sponsor. We believe this is because the proposed route crosses the boundary between two transport authorities – Greater Manchester and Cheshire East.

The benefits are split between two authorities (and beyond), and neither has so far taken the lead.

Some proposed train services on the western link were analysed in 2020 as part of the *Middlewich and Mid Cheshire Rail Reopening Study*, commissioned by Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership. It said there was a strategic outline case for reopening the Middlewich freight line to passenger trains, and action is now awaited from the Department for Transport. The Western Link is complementary to the Middlewich reopening. Taken together, they would provide a new route from Mid Cheshire towns to Manchester, via the airport. It could be operated by extending existing services that

terminate at the airport, not requiring extra capacity between the airport and Piccadilly, and relieving pressure at Stockport.

The authors of the report recommended that a feasibility study should be commissioned into the western link by the local enterprise partnership with the aim of obtaining an estimate of the cost of construction. This has been delayed by the changes to LEP funding. Network Rail places such a high value on each pair of hourly paths through the congested Castlefield corridor (£800 million over 60 years was the figure a few years ago), any project which frees up paths there is worth investigating.

No duplication with HS2

There has been confusion between HS2 and the western link, with some commentators saying that the HS2 station at Manchester Airport will make the western link unnecessary. This was always a misunderstanding, because HS2 is a north-south railway whereas the western link is east-west. The places that would benefit from the western link are not served by HS2. The lines serve different markets. Fortunately, the HS2 proposals did not impede or obstruct the route of the western link in any way.

Northern Powerhouse Rail creates an opportunity

In contrast to HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail is east-west, but it does not serve any of the towns that would benefit from the western link. The route of NPR is not yet agreed and there have been no proposals to run NPR services to Chester or Wales. The western link, only 3.5 miles long, could be built in a fraction of the time that it will take to plan and

build NPR, and could quickly bring benefits to Wales, Cheshire and Greater Manchester.

If NPR proceeds with a route via Manchester Airport, we would propose a junction with the Mid Cheshire line where the two cross, probably near Ashley. Links with other rail lines were not planned as part of HS2 because the speed differentials would have been too great. NPR, however, will not be a 400 kmh railway, and a link to the Mid Cheshire line could be a good alternative to the western link, bringing extra traffic which helps the case for NPR.

Union Connectivity Study

The 2021 *Union Connectivity Study* report by Peter Hendy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-final-report> acknowledges the western link idea and its potential benefit in providing economic links between the towns of north-east Wales and north-west England as well as Manchester Airport. There are many cross-border economic links.

Many people cross the England-Wales border for work. The Hendy report argues that these links should be improved, and running train services to Manchester Airport and Manchester via the western link is one of the ideas proposed. At the time of writing the report is awaiting action from the government.

■ *Simon Barber is treasurer of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association. MCRUA supports the Manchester-Altrincham-Northwich-Chester line, and the Crewe-Liverpool line. The group was established in 1987 and has over 200 paid-up members, making it one of the largest rail user groups in the north of England.*

Will election give the railways a clear road?

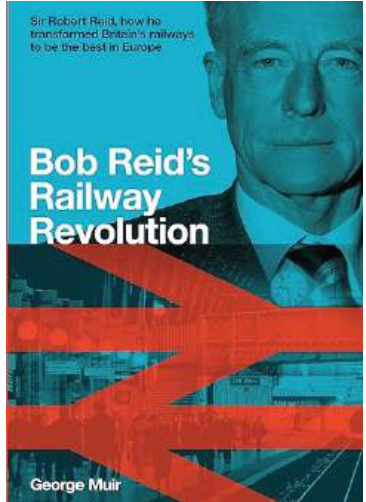
Words and pictures by Ian Brown

We all know that government leadership of Britain's railways is in the remedial category, as evidenced by the progressive destruction of HS2 as a viable project for Britain, thus wasting billions of pounds of public money. It is as if the government's aim was "maximum spend, minimum benefits".

Railfuture members had mixed views about High Speed Two, with a fair proportion claiming that the project addressed the wrong priorities. Railfuture recognised this from the start and campaigned for HS2 to be integrated into the rail network, serving whole regions and adding capacity to core routes such as the West Coast main line. We could have claimed some success if it were not for the prime minister cancelling HS2 north of Birmingham at the Tory Party conference in the former Manchester Central station. It suddenly seemed that "levelling up the north" would be about filling potholes, caused by increasingly large and overweight cars.

Was political leadership always so poor?

I think the answer is probably "Yes". There was one big difference when we had a national railway, British Railways. BR had good management, particularly at the time when it was abolished to make way for privatisation. BR's enlightened management did not stop Beeching-style closures of course, because BR was usually kept short of money by the government. However, because BR



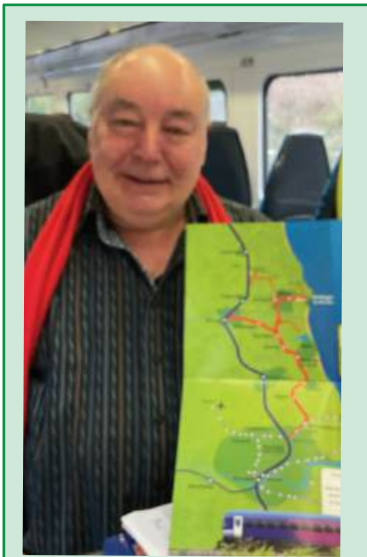
Sir Robert Reid turned British Rail into one of the best railways in Europe when he was BR chief executive in 1980-90. InterCity become profitable, Network SouthEast was created and, for the first time in 30 years, passenger numbers and freight grew



BACK TO THE FUTURE: Devon County Council is probably the leading shire council sponsoring rail development. This picture looks like a heritage railway on a gala day, but it is Okehampton on a summer weekday. Regular, daily passenger trains from Exeter to Okehampton were reinstated in 2021 after 50 years, following a joint project by Great Western Railway, Network Rail and Devon County Council. A visit to Crediton, Barnstaple and Okehampton illustrates what can be achieved by the county council and its partners

had a relatively strong leadership team, it did enter into a meaningful dialogue, sometimes an intensive dialogue, with government on behalf of the rail industry. BR was able to reduce the social and financial impact of some government interventions. At the end of the day, BR always held a losing hand, because the Treasury determinedly held on to the national purse strings. BR therefore became resigned to managing a progressively obsolete set of kit with ever greater skill in sweating its limited assets. British Rail then was on a hiding to nothing. Since 1993 and even now, the Treasury maintains its grip on the flow of investment cash. Partly as a result, privatisation became largely a money-go-round system moving financial resources between players that sometimes looked like some form of computer game. A lot of taxpayers' money did go into financing the railway "game". The aim seemed to be that the private sector companies "playing the railway game" continued to make money. At the same time, the railway continued to need investment at a key time when its importance was increasingly being recognised, with growing acceptance of the dangers of climate change and pollution. The privatised system did, after its infamous 1,000 days start, result in investment in new trains. However, it is probably fair to say

that if all the profits created by individual private companies had been invested in rail infrastructure, we would have a much better railway today. The train operators and Network Rail are actually quite well managed now. Management is not really the issue. In the case of the train operators, management has a contract and manages its affairs to deliver the contract while ensuring that they play the money-go-round game and squeeze some profit out of it. The train operators have generally managed this process reasonably well, although the Covid outbreak put paid to the ticket revenue



North East progress
Northumberland County Council acts as an effective client for rail development in promoting the reopening this year of the line from Ashington to Newcastle.
The line has been dubbed the Northumberland line and is, in effect, a very cost-effective addition to the Newcastle Metro network.
Train operator Northern run a familiarisation trip along the line attended by Railfuture's Dennis Fancett (left) who led the South East Northumberland Rail Users Group campaign.
Evidence that it can be done!

system for the future. This will be crucial to achieve modal shift to rail. The basic requirements to achieve that modal shift are a modern, high capacity, electrified freight and passenger railway with modern train control (signalling) systems. **Re-establishment of the client team**
The government recognised the client issue and started to set up Great British Railways, with much fanfare. This has now lost its way, with the government preoccupied with the coming general election. The GBR transition team is still beaver away but there has been a lack of top level leadership in driving the initiative forward. Getting parliamentary powers will not now happen until well after the general election. The danger is that if there is no one driving the process forward, the trade unions will fill the vacuum. If they play havoc with the system it could threaten the credibility of rail as the transport system for the future.

Plus ça change?
The Labour Party has realised that transport is an issue but, beyond the simplistic slogan of nationalisation, it still needs a well-thought-out policy that might actually work. Great British Railways sitting on the shelves was a marvellous opportunity for the Labour party. The idea behind GBR had been well and truly thrashed out over a lengthy period by civil servants working for the incumbent government. You could say that by adding an ombudsman or two and changing the stupid name, you have a workable system of running our railways brought to you by the Conservative government – waiting to be implemented by an incoming government of any colour. With the general election now agreed for American Independence Day on 4 July, both parties have essentially the same plan for the railways! So let's get on with it. The government can set the strategic objectives, and Great British Railways must then be allowed to run the industry focussed on passengers and freight customers. GBR must be allowed to make investment decisions and to maintain an investment pipeline with delivery partners. This will require increasing the productivity of, especially, electrification and control system (signalling) upgrades. Modal shift to rail is essential for environmental reasons and rail



NEXT PLEASE: Tim Steer of the Tarka Rail Association has made a good case for bringing regular train services back to Bideford

must have the capacity to accommodate transfers of passengers and freight from road efficiently. Roads go to your front door while railways do not. Planning transportation in an intermodal integrated way is essential and it will of course mean investment. **Putting some effort into devolution**
The politics of Scotland may look problematic compared to the rest of the UK, but the Scottish government has established itself as an effective client for Scotland's railways. Wales could be the same, although its railway client credentials are only now just starting to show, as major investment in electrification in the South Wales valleys is getting into gear. Trying to commission five new, or substantially modified, rolling stock fleets simultaneously was a serious strategic error which inflicted serious hardship on passengers in Wales and also those using cross-border rail services. Hopefully much of the pain is over and passengers will start to see the benefits of investment in new rolling stock. However, the train operator which tackled rolling stock best was not a

devolved authority but Greater Anglia, which completely replaced its whole fleet with three new types which work, all capable of running on the electrified network using electric traction. No more old-fashioned diesel multiple units! **Devolution to cities**
If Britain is really serious about providing effective transport systems in our cities and large towns, rail must be part of a properly planned transport solution. All modes of transport, including rail and light rail, must be glued together by an easy-to-use ticketing system and integrated system maps. This worked in London with the London Overground and Crossrail projects. The inspiration for London came from Paris, which established RER (Réseau Express Régional or



EXAMPLE: The latest Paris RER train is double-deck but with three entrance doors per car

Regional Express Network). The RER routes across the centre complemented the Paris Metro. Trams and light rail, like a doughnut all round the city's circumference, completed the rail magic. I was involved with creating Crossrail, Thameslink and the Overground projects in London. We did not, however, finish the job with light rail on the scale of Paris. It is unlikely that any of this progress would have been achieved at this scale in either city without devolved transport authorities. For Paris, it was Régie autonome des transports parisiens (Parisian Autonomous Transport Administration). For London, it was Transport for London. Britain's GBR plan involves limited devolution in two conurbations, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, both areas where rail, complementing and integrated with light rail, can play a far greater role in providing a cost effective transport solution. This can be driven effectively only from city government which has the need and the means to plan proper transport networks. This model already applies in most European cities where the national rail system can be a cost-effective partner conveying high volumes of passengers. Other cities should follow. **Railfuture's role**
Railfuture understands enough about railway economics to be able to focus on viable proposals for expanded rail service and reopenings. Indeed there is now some momentum behind reopening proposals, as evidenced in Scotland with new stations on the East Coast main line, light rail to Newhaven and now the Levenmouth Rail Link. Campaigners, managers, officials, planners and politicians have put in some admirable hard work to make these projects happen. It seems pretty clear that forward-looking projects are more likely to succeed where effective rail governance, including devolved political governance, is in place. Benefits need to be real and relevant but they also need to be made visible to the promoters – and the public. The post-election changes to our railways, if implemented with some real drive, will give a much better prospect for Railfuture's campaigning. But it will remain difficult to produce a convincing business case Plenty to go for. ■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture's policy director

Buying a rail ticket is a minefield

Neil Middleton's article in Railwatch 179 emphasised how buying a train ticket has become far from simple. Instead the whole process is mired in complexity.

David Butterworth discovered a minefield of fares when he tested the ticket machine at Stockport station while on his way to the TravelWatch NorthWest conference in the town in March.

He presented his observations to the attendees, including industry representatives, and an interesting discussion resulted.

The creation of a simple, easily understood fares system needs to be high on the agenda for Great British Railways, when it finally appears.

By David Butterworth

There are many railway routes in England which are served by a single train operator. On these (mainly rural) routes there is just one single off-peak fare for each of the possible journeys along that route. There are however a number of routes which are served by more than one operator and it is common practice for each operator to set its own fares, which may differ from those of other operators.

A glaring example of this situation is the just over 5 mile journey from Stockport to Manchester Piccadilly. This route is served by no fewer than six train operators, each of which has a set fare for the single leg. Over the half-hour period between 15.55 and 16.26 there are nine trains available for use, but the intending traveller must quickly become aware that a ticket bought for one operator's train is (generally) not valid on that of another operator. For example, there is a TPE train at 15.55* for which the single fare is £3.30. Two minutes later a slightly quicker journey can be taken on an Avanti West Coast train at a cost of £4.80. Wait another four minutes and the single fare on the Transport for Wales train will cost a mere £1.60. However, Code C Restriction states "Seat reservations are compulsory". Yes, you must (in theory at least) reserve your seat for the 14 minute journey!

Overall the single fare range spans from £1.60 (TfW), through £2.10, £3.30, £4.80, and £5.00 to £5.10 (any train). Brfares.com lists another 11 fares, but these are not quoted on ticket vending machines for the journeys in question.

For the non-expert, perhaps first-time traveller there is an inherent threat when choosing the 'right' ticket to buy. The Stockport station TVM specifies the operator by name (or abbreviation), but the naïve user won't have a clue whether it's a blue train or a red and white train or whatever. If a £3.30 ticket has been purchased for the 15.55 (TPE) train and the 15.57 (Avanti WC) train arrives first, because the TPE train was running late, the passenger will be committing an offence if he/she joins the Avanti. It is just possible that an enthusiastic conductor or revenue protection officer will check the ticket and impose a massive penalty.

The above case is just one example of the multi-fare issue which will apply to all routes served by multiple operators.

Representatives of the railway industry claim that the wide number of fares is necessary to avoid falling foul of competition regulations. Such regulations have created a system which actively deters many people from using the train (rather than the car, perhaps) unless they have prior experience of the need to select a ticket with care.

There is a better way. In Switzerland there is just one fare for each journey, regardless of who



Passengers were invited by East Midlands Railway to Nottingham station for one day in March to learn how to use digital tickets.

They were shown how to download the EMR app, and how to buy and use digital tickets and smartcards.

Explanations were given into how barcode tickets work, from downloading and storing them in the app to printing them at home. Also explained was how to add a ticket to an EMR Smartcard using a ticket vending machine. A similar event took place at Sheffield station in May.

Simon Pready, Commercial Director at East Midlands Railway, said: "Using digital products is incredibly convenient. They enable customers to save time by allowing the purchase of tickets at any time.

"They are also better for the environment since they reduce the use of paper, and customers need not worry about losing or damaging their tickets".

The picture show EMR's advertising mascot Miles holding a mobile phone with a digital ticket on it.

operates the train. The single quoted fare from Interlaken Ost to Spiez is CHF 5.20 (for Half Fare Card holders). This fare can be used on any train (including the occasional DB train to Berlin or Hamburg) or the local bus if desired. You just pay the fare and hop on. Simple.

Is it not surprising that the Swiss are super-enthusiastic users of public transport, whilst in GB every obstacle is presented to make a journey plan more complex than it need be?

* Train times and fares were correct for March 2024

David Butterworth is chairman of TravelWatch NorthWest. He is a former national treasurer of the Railway Development Society, Railfuture's predecessor. He was in the executive team which achieved the opening of the extension of the railway northwards from Blackburn into the Ribble Valley (Clitheroe). He said: "This year we celebrate 30 years of steadily increasing patronage – but no new trains, yet." More than 515,000 passengers used the Clitheroe line stations last year.



Smart tickets in the cloud

A national rail ticket hub has finally been set up which should allow rail passengers throughout Britain to enjoy London-style contactless Smart ticketing, using both bank cards and mobile phones. The Unicard Ltd system uses a centralised cloud-based system, instead of separate data centres for each train operator and regional transport authority. It is hoped that it will spell the end of "fragmented and complex ticketing infrastructures". The system may also be expanded to include buses, bikes and other modes. Unicard incorporates EMV and non-EMV ticketing. EMV is short for Europay, MasterCard, and Visa. The Unicard ticketing hub was first used by Transport for Wales in September 2023.

Merseyrail tap and go ticket

Merseyrail is introducing a £10 million tap-and-go ticketing system which guarantees passengers the cheapest fare for their journey. A Metro card linked to passengers' bank accounts will be launched this year, followed by use of an ordinary bank card, phone and watch next year. Mayor Steve Rotheram has promised to provide a London-style transport system making journeys smoother, quicker and more affordable for all.



Steve Rotheram, mayor of the Liverpool City Region, with the Metro card

ScotRail kiosk ticket machine

ScotRail is trialling a new Smart Kiosk ticket machine giving customers more options, including buying cheaper advance fares and choosing a seat preference. The machines will also issue QR barcoded tickets, which are expected to become standard throughout Britain. The first Smart Kiosk was installed at Glasgow Central.

Easy tickets

Train operator Northern has appointed Nick Clarke as its head of retail with a mission to make buying a rail ticket as easy as possible. Northern is the second largest train operator in the UK, with 2,500 services a day to more than 500 stations.

Liberty rail card

French rail passengers can buy a Liberty card for €350 which gives them discounts of 60% on TGV Inoui tickets. SNCF says that the card pays for itself after just three round trips in a year.

Rail strategy lost in a sea mist

By David Henshaw

With an election fast approaching, now might be the time to begin campaigning in a high-profile way for the "lost" sections (often quite short sections) of railway trunk lines.

I will not list them all, but in the West Country, Okehampton to Bere Alston surely tops the list.

A great deal of money has been spent on making the sea defences just a little more resilient at Dawlish, and Network Rail and its contractors have done a great job of defending the station, but the billions thrown at the project did nothing to improve defences on the equally exposed railway north and south of the town.

Reopening Okehampton-Tavistock-Bere Alston is a relatively easy win, and once done it is permanent, unlike sea defences.

Yes, money will have to be thrown at Dawlish for the foreseeable future, but the engineers will never win against the might of a steadily rising ocean ... apparently rising at a faster rate than the scientists expected.

Dusting off the files, my Dawlish photo was taken on a relatively calm day in October 2023, when the gentle wind worked with the tide and swell to overwhelm the sea wall with some ease, and spray reached the station through the completed works too.

The train emerging is a Hitachi bimode incidentally! There were few cancellations that day, but a very large number in the days that followed, and this was not an east wind or a named storm.

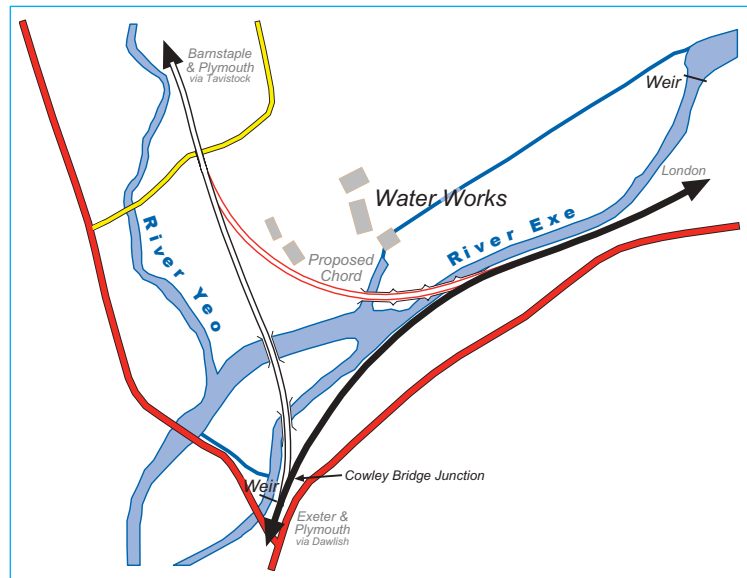
I produced the map below in 2015 to demonstrate that a west-north chord was a relatively straightforward option near Cowley Bridge Junction just north of Exeter. This, of course, is another place where flooding is frequently an issue on the main line, caused



WAVE GOODBYE TO BILLIONS OF POUNDS: The sea shows the railway who is master at Dawlish, Devon

again by climate instability, in this case heavy and prolonged downpours affecting the River Exe. A low viaduct across the valley would avoid the whole Cowley flooding issue, and allow trains to take a direct link to the more resilient Tavistock route to Plymouth and beyond.

There are always sceptics: Meldon viaduct would cost hundreds of millions to restore. Tavistock is impassable. The whole line would be slower. It will bring about closure of the coastal route. There were plenty of sceptics about forging a route through Galashiels too when Scotland planned to reopen the now highly successful Borders Railway. And do not forget how British Rail told us Ribbleshead Viaduct was collapsing when it wanted to close the Settle-Carlisle line. Once the political will is



FREQUENTLY FLOODED: Cowley Bridge Junction, near Exeter

"Flying taxis... should be a reality by 2028," said Department for Transport in March



OKEHAMPTON: Busy after resumption of regular services in 2021

sorted, these impossible engineering issues mysteriously vaporise. The time has come to put prospective politicians on the spot. The Tories could have promised to fund these major trunk-line projects when they shamefully cut HS2 back to a laughable rump, but they promised much of the money to road projects.

Without wanting to appear partisan (I have voted left, centre,

right and green over the years), the time has come to back those who share the same transport vision.

David Henshaw lives in Dorchester and is editor of AtoB Magazine. He is a former national executive member of the Railway Development Society (Railfuture's forerunner). He is the author of The Great Railway Conspiracy and Brompton Bicycle.



MELDON VIADUCT: A potential alternative rail way to Plymouth

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Campaign for better service for Eden

The Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group has been looking at what plans there might be for an improved service on the Morecambe line once the new Eden Project is completed.

The group was considering proposals from Railfuture member Simon Temple for an increase to an hourly service on the Leeds-Skipton-Carnforth-Lancaster-Morecambe route (Bentham line), with a Lancaster-Morecambe shuttle run in the alternate half hourly slot to make an overall half hourly service on the Lancaster-Morecambe stretch. Group members thought the hourly service on the Bentham line was optimistic but are liaising with the community rail partnership, in an appeal to Northern to improve the Leeds-Morecambe service to serve the Eden centre. One member had suggested services from Bradford should be considered. Northern is aware of the issue and is responding positively, although no specific service proposals have so far been tabled.

Direct trains to Morecambe from Leeds (avoiding a reversal at Lancaster) would involve crossing the high-speed section of the West Coast main line at Hest Bank. The group would prefer further investigation of the possibility of installing two way running on the two-mile northbound stretch of line from Lancaster to Morecambe South Junction. Together with the use of platforms 1 and 2 for the Morecambe trains, this would reduce the need to cross.

The current generation of battery trains, which can be charged while running under the wires, could help make the case for electrification of the short section of the line from Morecambe South Junction to Morecambe, as this would enable through running of battery-electric trains all the way to Leeds and through electric train services from Liverpool and Manchester, major visitor source areas for the Eden centre.

Electrification has a lot of support locally. The Morecambe MP, Lancaster City Council, the community rail partnership and Lancaster Civic Society are already on board and Lancashire County Council is looking at the issue.

Station improvements at Lancaster and Morecambe to cater for additional visitors are being considered by the local transport authority and the station operators.

Liverpool service is restored

Following a long campaign by North Cheshire Rail User Group with many stops, starts and false dawns, Transport for Wales restored hourly services from Chester to Liverpool Lime Street via the Halton curve in the December timetable change, albeit with an afternoon gap. The group is still campaigning for an extra early departure from Chester to allow access to Manchester Airport and Liverpool John Lennon Airport to coincide with the first wave of departures from the two airports. The group believes the potential market is huge.

The group is, however, disappointed with the recent TFW news of postponement of extension of Manchester Airport services through to Bangor and Lime Street to Llandudno until late 2026 because of alleged costs. Work is also needed on upgrading a level crossing on the North Wales coast line before more services can be accommodated. TFW has deferred a commitment to have a Cardiff Central to Liverpool via Shrewsbury service. TFW gives the reason as “the levels of Network Rail infrastructure enhancement required”.

The group welcomes the recent announcements



Northern’s ‘museum’ tickets

Train operator Northern is predicting that ‘magstripe’ train tickets could be museum exhibits within five years.

So many passengers are choosing digital tickets that 2.3 million fewer ‘magstripes’ were issued in the past 12 months.

Fewer than 20% of journeys on Northern services in 2023-24 were made using a ‘magstripe’, following a 12% fall the previous year.

Northern said: “All of our standard tickets are available in electronic format and people are able to store them on mobile phones or tablets.”

It is also possible to buy paper, rather than ‘magstripe’ tickets from ticket offices run by Northern, which added: “While ‘magstripes’ might generate a sense of nostalgia, they are made from more than one material, and are less recyclable. Paper tickets can be easily recycled with other paper products.”

Northern released the information to mark World Environment Day on 5 June.



The rail ticket has been adapted in many ways. This is a Railway Development Society recruitment leaflet produced around the time our name changed from RDS to Railfuture

by the Liverpool Metro mayor Steve Rotheram on possible extensions to Merseyrail services beyond Ellesmere Port to Daresbury using battery powered class 777 units, and thinks there is huge potential for regular services beyond Ellesmere Port. It is hoped that ultimately these extended services will rejoin the Merseyrail northern line to form a complete circuit around the Mersey basin with a shuttle-style service.

The group was saddened to hear of the recent passing of Bob Florence, who was a committee member for many years, performing the roles of treasurer and membership secretary. Bob represented NCRUG for several organisations including Travel Watch. With his encyclopaedic

knowledge and wry wit, he will be sorely missed.

Blackpool tram extension finally opens Blackpool's tramway extension to Blackpool North station welcomed its first passengers in June. Fylde Coast residents were invited to enter a draw to travel on a special service on Wednesday 12 June, with the tram travelling from Blackpool Transport's Starr Gate tram depot at Squires Gate to a new terminus adjacent to Blackpool North station.

The first regular trams taking fare-paying passengers were expected to start on Sunday 16 June, with tram tours on 13-15 June.

The short extension from Talbot Square on the main north-south route near the North pier has cost £23.42 million and has been delayed for a few years from the original planned opening, because of various building and planning issues.

New initiative for Liverpool-Manchester

A new rail board to look at options for improving the connectivity between Liverpool and Manchester could now be established following the outcome of the mayoral elections in May. Steve Rotheram, who was returned as the Liverpool Metro mayor, and Andy Burnham, who was returned as mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, both pledged to create a new public-private Liverpool-Manchester Railway Board.

The two mayors hope to see progress on the project to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the world's first passenger railway in Rainhill in 2029. Mr Rotheram said he was opposed to upgrades to existing freight lines rather than the original plans of a new twin track line across the Liverpool City Region and beyond. Rail Minister Huw Merriman confirmed that previous “unpalatable” options would no longer be considered in a letter to Mr Rotheram and Councillor Liam Robinson, leader of Liverpool Council.

Mr Merriman wrote: “I am committed to continuing to work with yourselves and other local leaders toward identifying the best solutions for this corridor. I can confirm that we are willing to look at alternatives to using the West Coast main line into Liverpool and station options as part of the next phase of work once the high-level strategy for this corridor is confirmed.”

www.railfuture.org.uk/North+West+Branch X @RailfutureNWest



A total of 35 new waiting shelters are being installed by train operator Northern as part of a £1.9 million investment.

Stations benefiting in the Railfuture North West area are Aspatia, Bare Lane, Belle Vue, Chassen Road, Cherry Tree, Clitheroe, Humphrey Park, Northwich, Pleasington, Ryder Brow and Widnes.

Rail freight – a quick green win for us all

There are two clear messages for any incoming government: Create a fair playing field to allow freight to be transported on clean rail - and electrify 60 vital miles of infill track to allow many freight trains to switch from dirty diesels to clean electric.

The message came in a rare objective look at rail's potential to tackle the climate crisis from Channel 4 News.

Chief correspondent Alex Thomson's message was clear and unequivocal: The government should back rail freight. The green dividend is obvious and there for the taking.

Mr Thomson started his report at Southampton docks where more than 1.5 million containers (known as boxes) arrive by ship per year .

He said: “Transporting those boxes on land to where we want them should be ideally by train but in reality, in the UK it is all still a bit of a mess. Too much transport goes on carbon-polluting roads and too little on much cleaner rail.”

Every box moved by rail saves large amounts of carbon emissions.

DP World's John Trenchard said: “The net saving is a quarter of a tonne per every delivery for every box which we can switch from road to rail.”

So DP World is paying customers to put their boxes on cleaner, greener trains and off dirty roads. So far the policy has taken a large number of trucks off our roads each year.

DP world said: “We think we have taken off approximately 13,000 road journeys which have switched to rail. That equates to around 4,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide by using the assets of the British economy in a slightly more useful way.”

Alex climbed aboard the daily freight train from Southampton Docks to Coatbridge with the reminder: “Even hauling boxes on polluting old diesel trains is far greener than roads of course.”

Freightliner has 150 diesel locomotives and 25 electric trains which are virtually zero emission, so there is a “long way to go”.

Freightliner's Tim Shoveller told Channel 4 News that electrifying just a few miles of line in the UK would revolutionise rail freight.

He said: “If we had little bits of line, adding up to 60 miles of electrification, we could run a third of our trains entirely on electric power, compared to 10% now.”

Mr Thomson said: “A massive increase in green electric freight needs investment but making road freight ever cheaper and rail freight more expensive is no route to net zero which is just what we have done.”

Mr Shoveller added: “Track access charges have increased by 140% since 2010. It makes no sense that the cleanest form of transport is penalised. Rail is paying more while other forms of transport are paying less. It is a very strange situation.”

On board the freight train, Mr Thomson concluded: “Progress is leisurely. Freight trains politely stop to let the human freight (passenger



Railfuture AGM: Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh 13 July 2024



Coatbridge rail freight terminal, near Glasgow, which is now operated by Russell Railroad Ltd



trains) go by.” At Crewe, he watched the embarrassing process of uncoupling diesels for electric locos to come on for the continuing journey to Scotland. Freightliner sustainability director Louise Ward said: “There is not one

West Midlands

Walsall to London open access bid

Rail travellers could enjoy change-free travel between Walsall and London Euston from next year under open access proposals. The service from London to the Midlands, Shropshire and North Wales, could run up to five times per day and is being planned by train builder Alstom. The service could call at Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Coleshill Parkway, Walsall, Darlaston, Wolverhampton, Telford Central, Shrewsbury and Gobowen. Train operator Avanti West Coast withdrew its current daily return service between London Euston and Shrewsbury from June. Alstom's proposed new operation is named Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway and is being developed in partnership with consultancy SLC Rail. An application to run services was submitted to the Office of Rail and Road in March. Alstom UK's managing director Nick Crossfield said: “As the country's leading supplier of rolling stock and train services, it makes perfect sense that we now move into operating our own fleet to serve passengers directly.” SLC Rail managing director Ian Walters added: “From the Welsh borders to the Midlands, our routes will forge new connections, linking overlooked regions of England and Wales with direct services to and from London. “Passengers will benefit from more competitive fares and new technology to simplify ticket purchasing for our new services.”

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

route which we can run end to end with electric traction.”

Ms Ward said that 52 trucks can be taken off the road for every intermodal train from the port. She said lorry drivers would not be out of work. They could do first and last mile to service distribution centres. Even at Crewe, industrial estates are not connected to the rail network.

You can watch the six-minute report at:

https://www.channel4.com/news/why-is-the-uk-not-exploiting-technology-for-net-zero-trains

Lincolnshire

Railwatch promotion

Railfuture member Graham Lilley from Ruskington organised a rail campaign display for Sleaford and District model railway club's annual exhibition in June. He said: “Luckily, my 'pitch' was squeezed in between the Branston and Heighington, and Blankney potato railways layouts of Lincolnshire. Unfortunately, the opportunity for a photograph did not arise.”

Graham, who received help from members of visiting railway clubs, said: “Although the experiment was not a complete success, I managed to give away some editions of Railwatch and exchange views and suggestions with visitors. I found that visitors were a little shy of taking free back issues of Railwatch and had to be prompted into accepting them. Also, they were very reticent about writing down comments – even anonymously.” Graham is hoping to organise a Railfuture station display when special trains visit the area and was also booked for the RiverLight Festival 2024 at Sleaford in June. He was also hoping to attend Metherringham Feast, Heckington Show and Helpingham Feast.

He added: “I am looking forward to starting the 2025 season with a wallop.”

Boost for rural stations

East Midlands Railway is installing customer information screens at 20 more rural stations, including four in Lincolnshire: Gainsborough Lea Road, Hykeham, Ruskington and Swinderby.

Cleethorpes direct trains

Direct trains from Cleethorpes to London King's Cross are expected to be restored by London North Eastern Railway in December. A year ago, a test train from Doncaster checked clearances at Grimsby Town, Cleethorpes, Barnetby and Market Rasen.

https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Lincolnshire-Branch

East Anglia

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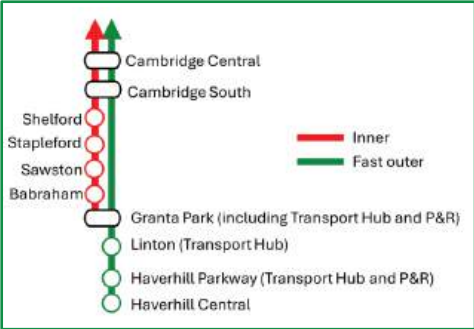
Big role for Haverhill Rail

For many years, Railfuture East Anglia has promoted the restoration of the railway from Cambridge to Haverhill that would transform travel along the A1307 corridor. We submitted a bid to the Department for Transport’s *Restore Your Railway* team which assessed it as “a good case for future development”.

Railfuture took this a step further by using funds donated by the now closed Rail Haverhill campaign to commission a Haverhill report, following on from our recent *New Geography for East Anglia* study by Jonathan Roberts Consulting.

Now Railfuture has published *A big role for a Haverhill Railway* report and we are delighted it backs our earlier high-level conclusions showing a strong case for the restoration of the railway, truly living up to its title.

The conclusions of the study are that the railway will serve large populations and support the local economy, linking Cambridge with Haverhill and serving principal stops at Cambridge South (Biomedical Campus), Granta Park, Linton, Haverhill Parkway and Haverhill Town Centre. The modelling shows that, in addition to these places, the railway’s catchment area would cover 100 parishes, as far as Thaxted, Braintree,



Map: Railfuture

Halstead, Sudbury and towards Bury St Edmunds. The total catchment area population would be between 90,000 and 165,000, that is three to six times more than Haverhill on its own.

Potential rail passenger numbers are considerable: 2,000 and more per hour during the peak period. These are significant numbers (a total of 36 carriages of passengers during the peak – so perhaps a six-carriage service every 20 minutes) and will underpin a business case.

Over time, such commuting could double, with Cambridge city car restraint policies, the stimulus of Cambridge North, Central and South stations, and increasing dormitory area populations.

A 21-minute journey time from Haverhill to Cambridge South could be achieved with a fast limited stop service serving Haverhill Parkway, Linton and Granta Park. For places further into Cambridge, an additional interleaved inner service could serve places between Granta Park and Cambridge such as Babraham, Sawston and Stapleford. Railfuture East Anglia has sent the report to over 250 local councillors, politicians, local authority organisations and other key decision makers, with extensive local press coverage.

Cambridge South inadequate

Cambridge South station is fast becoming a reality. Despite Railfuture East Anglia warnings to the planners, the new station has an air of “do only the minimum”. It is being equipped with double lifts on each platform, but the platform canopies are inadequate for a station serving nationally famous Addenbrookes Hospital and the growing Cambridge Bio Medical Centre employment centre. The canopies provide for a four-car train, when the station will be served by 12-car trains. The planners and politicians need to take into account the fact that climate change is likely to bring stronger winds and heavier rain storms.

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House building for expanding city of Norwich should boost lonesome rail station

By Ian Couzens

Salhouse is the first station out of Norwich on the Bittern line at only five miles. Yet it sits surrounded by fields and has one of the lowest footfalls of any station on the line. This will not be the case for much longer however. Nearly 4,000 new homes at North Rackheath are being planned to the west of the line, with Salhouse station sitting

conveniently near the middle. A recent consultation has been carried out by developers Taylor Wimpey on the latest proposals. Railfuture has made representations to both developer and local authority to ensure that the station is fit for purpose as the new development takes shape. The station will require a substantial upgrade including, at minimum,

a footbridge, since the Norwich-bound platform can be accessed only by a foot crossing at present. However, proper disabled access to both platforms, adequate shelters and car parking provision will all need to be considered. On the plus side it is good to see the developer’s plans showing decent walking and cycle links to the station. Railfuture has also been lobbying for further

feasibility work to be carried out on the proposed Broadland Business Park station, to be located between Norwich and Salhouse. Although contained within the county council’s forward infrastructure plan, progress has been slow. Development of these two stations can only strengthen the case for a half hourly service from Norwich to North Walsham.

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Bring back our trains

Train operator Great Western Railway and two MPs are being urged to back a campaign to provide a reliable direct train service from London Paddington to Wiltshire, which has been hard-hit by post-pandemic cuts.

Two of the three bimode trains, promised in 2019 for an attractive new service pattern but subsequently post-Covid diverted elsewhere by GWR, should be given back to the thousands of rail users in east Wiltshire and west Berkshire who are dissatisfied with the current service, which involves inconvenient connections and delays. A detailed 41-page document making the case for bringing back the trains has been published by Railfuture-affiliated Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group.

This document proposes a compromise, involving redeployment for part of the day of two of the three originally promised Bedwyn train sets. The group’s Steve Smith said in May: “We have sent

printed copies to GWR’s senior management team and MPs Laura Farris and Danny Kruger.

“To have any hope of success it will require MPs putting pressure on the Department for Transport. We have requested a meeting with the MPs.”

The general election will delay any such meeting but the document is also available at

https://tinyurl.com/ReinstatingTwoClass800bi-modes

The Bedwyn group believes that the Department for Transport has quietly and without consulting passengers dropped its agreed “service level commitment” and replaced it with a “train service requirement” which has created anomalies.

The shortcomings of the current service are increasing the number of people who drive to Newbury, where there is a much better rail service. Passenger Catherine King said: “My main reason for moving to Bedwyn was the train service, but in the 23 years I have lived here it has changed beyond recognition – for the worse – and most of the problems stem from the need to

change at Newbury.” Other passengers complain of “severe mental anguish” because the connections are a “lottery”, working “only 50% of the time”.

MP backs Langport station

Liberal Democrat Sarah Dyke has helped campaigners for a new station for Somerton and Langport on the Great Western main line between Castle Cary and Taunton by raising the subject in Parliament at prime minister’s questions in March. She said: “People in Somerton and Frome, working with the Langport Transport Group, submitted a robust strategic business case to the government in July 2022 for the reopening of a train station in the Somerton and Langport area.

“Such a train station would connect over 50,000 people to the rail network, boost the local economy and support local people to reduce their reliance on cars. Almost two years on, they are still waiting for a response.”

The secretary of Langport Transport Group is Railfuture life member Simon Taylor. The group bid

unsuccessfully this year for GWR customer and community improvement funding to support two pieces of research to further strengthen the case for the reopened railway station. It has, however, been encouraged to apply again next year and views the decision as a temporary setback. LTG works collaboratively with strong support from stakeholders. The business case has been described as compelling. Phil Edge, chair of LTG, said: “With rail industry input, the business case showed sufficient pathways exist on the line for a new service.”

The second part of the research would identify land value capture opportunities to partly offset the £15 million cost of the new Somerton and Langport station.

LTG is now seeking other potential funding sources who recognise the social value of a reopened station. Clarity on train service provision should speed up a decision from the Department for Transport.

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A new Alliance is born

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance was inaugurated at an informal event, organised by Railfuture, in Bideford’s historic Royal Hotel on Friday 1 March. Representatives from 13 stakeholder organisations gathered to share perspectives on the value of returning rail services to Bideford, and upgrading the capacity and performance of the existing services on the North Devon (Tarka) line between Barnstaple and Exeter.

The new alliance is modelled on other successful partnerships, from the Cotswold Line Promotion Group to the East London Line Group, and the Thameslink Consortium to the East West Rail Consortium. The gathering included representatives from local councils, train operating company Great Western Railway, and Network Rail, with supporting statements from two MPs.

Railfuture’s press release generated social media coverage and was followed up by the *Crediton Courier*, *Chime Whistle Publishing*, *Rail Advent*, *North Devon Gazette*, *Devon Live*, *RAIL magazine*, and the *North Devon Journal*. Roger Blake was interviewed on BBC Radio Devon. *Voice FM* hosted the Tarka Rail Association’s ACE Rail project campaigner and Railfuture RUG Awards-winner Tim Steer. Related press and social media coverage has continued unabated. Torridge District Council voted to join the new alliance soon after the inaugural event.

Consultation responses

Railfuture has responded to Peninsula Transport’s consultation on its draft strategy to 2050. Railfuture also provided input to the proposed Devon & Torbay devolution deal, which could create a new combined authority.

Appeal for funds

Railfuture Ltd acted on behalf of the new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance to submit an application to Great Western Railway’s customer and community improvement fund. The financial support would enable the alliance to commission a study which would lead to a strategic outline business case. Torridge District Council has committed some match-funding from its shared prosperity fund and in April a specialist consultancy had been selected.

Railfuture research

In April Railfuture Devon & Cornwall published two pieces of significant research based on official data sources. The first was on passengers’ top destinations from the four main North Devon (Tarka) line stations in 2022/23, which showed Exeter’s three main



ALLIES: Mayor of Barnstaple Louisa York (left), ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer and Mayor of Bideford Jamie McKenzie (right) including, in the background, Railfuture directors Roger Blake and Ian Brown CBE, Doug Bushby of Torridge District Council, Tom Hart of Harland & Wolff’s Appledore shipyard, Marcus Jones and Victoria Storey of Network Rail, Matt Barnes of GWR and Jamie Hulland of Devon County Council



My carriage awaits: Tarka Rail Association vice-president elect Peter West OBE, on his way home from the alliance event, is reunited with the class 150 named after him

stations together as the top destination grouping for between 59% and 65% of all passengers from Barnstaple, Umberleigh, Eggesford and Crediton. More surprisingly, Barnstaple emerged as second only to Exmouth as the top destination from Exeter Central. 2023/24 was another record-breaking year, with an all-time high of 785,000 journeys, representing an 11% annual increase.

Connect Bude

Railfuture affiliate Connect Bude was awarded funds from Railfuture’s Fighting Fund, with

local match funding, to develop the case for improving rail connectivity in that part of North Cornwall. Following the restoration of regular passenger rail services between Exeter and Okehampton, connecting bus services between Okehampton and Bude were introduced in 2022. More passenger growth is expected after the opening in 2026 of Okehampton Interchange – the West Devon transport hub.

Heathfield test bed

Railfuture member Michael Cooke, chair of Heathfield Rail Link

Association, reports interest by rolling stock company Eversholt in using the “temporarily out of use” branch line from Newton Abbot to Heathfield as a test-bed for its Revolution VLR vehicle.

Combe Rail

Railfuture affiliate Combe Rail is preparing to mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the railway with an exhibition in Ilfracombe Landmark Pavilion on Saturday 20 July. The group made an unsuccessful bid to the *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund for TawLink, a light railway between Barnstaple and Braunton.

Mid Cornwall Metro

Transport Secretary Mark Harper visited Cornwall in March to check on progress with the Mid Cornwall Metro, to be delivered in two stages in 2025.

Next May should see an increased service frequency on the Newquay branch, followed in December by direct services via Par, St Austell and Truro through to Falmouth. The following day he visited Barnstaple and received a comprehensive briefing about the capacity requirements of the North Devon line from Mike Day, the outgoing chair of the Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association, Devon County Council’s Andrea Davis and North Devon MP Selaine Saxby.

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Could Tories embrace rail renationalisation?

Note: This article was written before the general election was declared. Railfuture is non party political and does not argue for or against nationalisation. It does not argue in favour of or against any political party's ideology

By Oscar Hilder

Given the many important issues faced by Great Britain's railway system in the present day – high fares, ongoing industrial action and an overly complex system of operation – it is no wonder that in 2020 the Conservative government made the decision to reform how the privatised system works, replacing franchising with a concession-based model.

Yet, four years on, franchising is still in place, the promised Great British Railways has not been established and the same problems plague Britain's railways.

The Conservative party has been opposed to renationalising the railways, rejecting any suggestion of bringing back British Rail, the state-owned body that managed Britain's railways between 1948 and 1997. Yet, both ideologically and practically, there is ample reason for the Tories to back renationalisation.

Although British Rail struggled with a number of issues throughout its existence, by the 1990s sectorisation, the introduction of new rolling stock and a modernised corporate image were all helping to attract passengers.

Despite this, Conservative politicians clamoured for privatisation during the premiership of Margeret Thatcher, who sold off numerous state assets to the private sector.

She believed, though, that the railways should stay nationalised, because of their complex, integrated nature and the risk to the parliamentary seats of Tory MPs who represented areas where “unprofitable” lines ran.

However, her successor, John Major, was committed to selling off the railways, and pushed forward the franchising system as a way to ensure the competition of privatisation while retaining the integration of nationalisation.

On 1 April 1994, British Rail ceased to exist, with rolling stock transferred to leasing companies and individual groups of routes bidded out as franchises to private operators.

Franchising continued up until 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting falls in passenger numbers prompted the government to introduce plans for the concession-based Great British Railways, although this body has yet to be established.

Proponents of retaining the privatised model cite the numerous



Weather-stained BR logo at Manchester Oxford Road station

improvements to services since the 1990s, such as the continuous introduction of newer and more capable rolling stock and large increases in service frequency, which are often seen as responsible for the dramatic increase of passenger numbers since privatisation began.

However, these benefits are undercut by more fundamental issues, such as fares, which have consistently risen faster than the rate of inflation. The government uses the retail price index to calculate increases, which is different from the more widely used consumer prices index.

Earlier this year the government raised fares by 4.9%, despite the CPI showing an inflation rate of 3.9%.

Ironically for a privatised system, it is the government that sets the rate of fare increases, with caps on some types of tickets and exponential prices for other types. For example, between 1995 and 2013, which saw a retail price index inflation rate of 66%, the cost of a season commuter ticket rose by 65%. By contrast, the cost of a single ticket rose by 208%.

Franchising has also seen the near destruction of the UK's rail manufacturing industry, because of the stop-start procurement pattern inherent to franchising. Rolling stock, such as Thameslink's class 700s, has been outsourced to foreign firms instead.

Privatisation was supposed to create a dynamic and efficient system of private competition and innovation, free from government interference, yet the franchising model fails to deliver on any of these requirements.

On the investment front, only 1% of

the money that goes into the railways annually is genuine private investment, with the cost of new rolling stock, for instance, being underwritten by the taxpayer.

Efficiency has generally not improved, as the duplication of functions across different train operators has meant that the cost of managers and administrators has increased substantially since privatisation began.

Despite being privatised, the railways see more government interference now than at any point during British Rail's tenure, such as with the aforementioned price capping.

Nor has franchising resulted in much private competition.

Many operating companies have almost total monopolies in their regions, such as GWR in the west of England, Greater Anglia in the eastern counties and Southwestern Railway in areas of suburban London.

That private competition has not been properly established is endemic to the system as a whole. The railways are a natural monopoly and are not the same as, for example, air travel, where customers have the time and motivation to choose between different competing companies.

Rail is a system where different services and operations are intended to work together in an integrated fashion.

Private competition on the railways can work effectively only at limited levels, such as open-access operators. Three of this type run services on the East Coast main line, which has prompted the Department for Transport-run LNER to improve services.

Proponents of privatisation often cite the faults of British Rail – inadequate rolling stock, unreliable services and government interference – to argue against renationalisation, yet in many ways privatisation has failed to resolve these issues.

British Rail's problems can be largely attributed to a consistent lack of funding from numerous anti-rail governments of different colours, especially when compared to the large subsidies given to private operators today.

Even despite these hurdles, BR was still able to demonstrate the strengths of a nationalised system, modernising both track and trains, as well as defining the image of the railways with a strong corporate identity and effective marketing campaigns.

No other country has taken rail privatisation as far as the UK. In most other countries there is a mixture of fully nationalised and private-public services. In France,

the government has allowed state-owned SNCF to develop a strong high-speed rail system and a thriving manufacturing industry, with rolling stock from French companies such as Alstom being used domestically and abroad, including in the UK. The same can be said for Germany, which has also sustained its rail manufacturing sector, with companies including Siemens having provided many of the new classes of rolling stock for the British rail network.

Renationalisation could be seen as an attractive option to any political party because public opinion supports it. According to YouGov, 60% to 70% of UK adults either strongly or tend to support bringing the railways into the public sector.

These numbers also cut across party lines and voting intentions, suggesting that voters of all shades would rather see nationalisation than privatisation. It could be beneficial for all parties to align themselves with a policy that has such clear support.

These practical reasons, it could be argued, are strong enough to override any party ideology, even in the party which privatised the railway.

Post-Brexit, the current government is committed to removing European influence over UK institutions and public bodies. It is ironic that so many rail franchises in the UK are operated by companies owned by European governments.

Companies such as Arriva, Govia and Trenitalia are owned by the German, French and Italian governments respectively. Privatisation has allowed foreign governments to take millions of pounds out of the UK rail network – and from subsidy paid for by the taxpayer – to invest in their own railways.

Any ideal system should incorporate the strengths of a nationalised system while acknowledging the benefits privatisation has brought.

Great British Railways may be an answer to this, but we cannot know until it has been properly established, which may not occur for a while.

An alternative system would see a national rail operator run services throughout the country, with open-access enterprises running where passengers can make a choice between services.

Such a system, already seen in several European countries, is supported by the Labour Party – and it should be acceptable to most Conservative voters as well.

■ *Oscar Hilder researched railway privatisation for his A-level studies*

North East

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Northumberland salute
Railfuture North East welcomes the opening of the Northumberland line and pays tribute to the campaigners who made it happen.

S&D 200

Railfuture also welcomes plans to celebrate the 200 year anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington railway. Our worries that S&D 200 would be concentrated around Darlington and Shildon have been eased by assurances from organisers that events would occur along all 26 miles of the original S&D line. Its eastern “terminus” will be the Tees riverside in central Stockton. The town's current station, on the Durham Coast line, will welcome passengers during the three main days of the commemoration next year.

The three days of Friday 26, Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 September 2025 will feature a working replica of Locomotion travelling along the full 26 mile route.

There will be no repeat of the 1975 cavalcade of motive power. Instead, the 2025 festivities will be the start of a 20-year programme of celebration of the birth and development of rail as a mode of transport, under the title *A Culture and Steam Festival*.

The programme will spread over the whole country. Some of the 2025 material will also be used by the organisers of the 200th anniversary of the Liverpool and Manchester line's inauguration in 2030.

There will be displays in libraries, museums and other venues.

The official launch of S&D 200 will be on Thursday 19 September 2024.

The official S&D 200 website will launch on Thursday 24 October 2024.

A revised and corrected history of the S&D will be published on Saturday 8 March 2025.

World Heritage Site guide

Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership has launched a guide to visiting the Hadrian's Wall heritage sites by sustainable transport (usually rail). The guide was prompted by people living near the main visitor sites and was launched on



The New Exhibition Hall at Locomotion Museum, Shildon, Co Durham opened in May. Shildon will be at the forefront of S&D 200 celebrations to mark the transport revolution that made the world a better place. Our picture shows Judith McNicol, director of the National Railway Museum, launching the £8 million exhibition hall which now houses 47 rail vehicles. In the foreground are pupils from Shildon primary schools: St John's (red tops) and Timothy Hackworth (black tops). Railfuture's Phil Smart and Peter Wakefield were also there. Shildon was home to a railway works, which opened in 1833 and closed in 1984. Shildon and Darlington will be “must visit places” in 2025 as Railfuture and other campaigners celebrate the 200th anniversary of the world-changing Stockton to Darlington Railway.

Thursday 18 April 2024, International World Heritage Day. Support and finance for the guide came from CrossCountry Trains and TransPennine Express, as well as from the community rail network.

CRP marketing director Anne Ridley said: “Since the launch, we have been amazed to see where the online flip book version of this guide has been successfully opened – in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, China, various countries in Europe, Canada, the USA and Argentina.”

It is hoped this initiative will attract more visitors to the North East in general and to Hadrian's Wall in particular. The associated AD122 bus route links rail stations, towns and sites regularly, helping to provide realistic alternatives to car use in this area. The guide is available at <https://midd.me/Chmo>

Haltwhistle water tower

News comes of another enterprising development in

Thames Valley

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Chiltern's future fleet could be hybrid

New battery or hybrid trains could be part of the future for Chiltern Railways, their stakeholder manager Zach Bailey told Railfuture's Thames Valley AGM on 26 March. Chiltern's current fleet has a high average age of over 30 years (46 years for the loco-hauled mark 3s) and it is the only diesel-only operator into London. However, Chiltern's performance is among the best. About 15% of its train fleet uses vegetable oil which provides a 90% reduction in emissions. Chiltern's class 168 trains will undergo a refresh and Railfuture welcomed the decision to keep the same comfortable seats. He said the closure of Nuneham viaduct between Oxford and Didcot last year for a few weeks reflects the importance for Oxford of having two routes to London. Revenue had recovered to 84% of its pre-Covid level. Tuesdays to Thursdays are back to normal traffic levels while Saturdays are 110%. He reiterated Chiltern's interest in operating a new service to Cowley. He also expected Chiltern to be confirmed soon as the operator for East West Railway's Oxford-Milton Keynes services, which are expected to start in spring next year. Driver recruitment has started. Among matters discussed during questions were fares and ticketing and improvements at Oxford Parkway station, which will have to cope with crowds on match days if Oxford United football club succeeds in its ambition for a new stadium nearby.

Cinderella station given a welcome revamp



Railfuture Thames Valley is pleased to see the “Cinderella” station of Reading West now has a new building (pictured above). After long delays, the station building finally opened in March. Railfuture supported the planning application to Reading Council, although the site is constrained. It is not universally popular locally but Railfuture is hopeful that being staffed and gated will encourage use, reduce anti-social behaviour and be a more welcoming approach for rail users. It comes after the opening of a new station at Reading Green Park last year. Improvements are also under way at Tilehurst station, which is two miles west on the main line. Reading West's new building was opened by Reading's Councillor Tony Page, who said “Reading West has often been forgotten and neglected, with anti-social behaviour, and drug dealing. The master plan for improvements was drawn up with partners in 2015.”

Cancellations and overcrowding on CrossCountry

Railfuture Thames Valley's committee continues to be very concerned about the current poor level of service on CrossCountry, with far too many cancellations and delays with endemic overcrowding at busy times. In particular, the Newcastle-Reading service now being only four or five times a day, forces passengers on to already busy Manchester-Bournemouth trains. More people also have to change at Birmingham New Street. We welcome news of CrossCountry gaining another 12 Voyagers from Avanti. Railfuture welcomes the fact that the whole fleet will be refurbished but has urged CrossCountry to introduce these trains at the earliest opportunity and to reinstate the axed Newcastle-Reading services. CrossCountry risks losing passengers who are more interested in getting a seat than what colour the train is painted.

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Levenmouth reopens

By the time you read this, passenger trains will be stopping at Leven and Cameron Bridge after an absence of 55 years. The service is starting with two trains per hour to Edinburgh via Kirkcaldy, although once trains become available, one of the services will run via Dunfermline and the Fife Circle line.

Newburgh is still waiting

At the other end of Fife, progress appears to be stuck in the sidings. Although the completed official assessment for a station at Newburgh on the Ladybank-Perth line was given to Transport Scotland nearly a year ago, there has been no announcement of how the station project is to proceed.



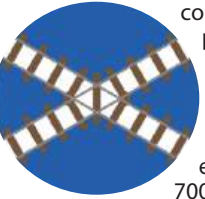
When MSP Willie Rennie approached cabinet secretary Fiona Hyslop she said the proposals were still being assessed, and that some further information from the regional transport authority SEStran was needed before she could respond to the findings of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guide (STAG) assessment. There is concern Transport Scotland is goldplating the project by talking of a cost of

£10 million for the station. A perfectly adequate modular station could be constructed for a third of that price. No track work is required.

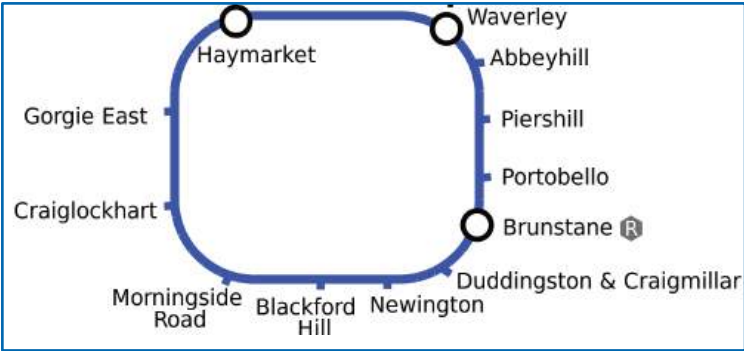
Options for St Andrews

By contrast, St Andrews needs new track, a new alignment – and a station. The St Andrews project is complex but its STAG assessment, carried out by Stantec, was submitted to Transport Scotland before the Easter deadline. The

heavy rail option is more expensive and requires more engineering, as well as being able to be brought only to the Petheram Bridge car park, given post-closure developments. Only heavy rail can give a seamless journey from St Andrews to Edinburgh (or Dundee), including the interchange for Edinburgh Airport. The light rail option could be constructed more quickly and cheaply with the service brought right into the former rail station site next to the bus station, but would require re-excavation of the bay platform at Leuchars, plus a way for light rail to gain access to it. Even so, it would still be a case of “all change at Leuchars” albeit with a level change and a connection time of only of a few minutes. Light rail could be timed to connect with main line trains in a way which the bus service never managed to do over the past 55 years. Light rail would probably not provide as great a modal shift or revenue, while heavy rail would enable the lucrative charter train market to include St Andrews. Recently, ScotRail



confirmed that passenger numbers for Leuchars in 2023-24 are the highest ever, exceeding 700,000 for the first time, the majority of whom will be travelling to and from St Andrews. Once the STAG is with Transport Scotland, the ball will be in its court to make the business case. However, the StARLink campaign will assist by providing initial findings on how much of the capital cost might be raised using land value uplift capture. This work, generously funded by Railfuture and Fife Council, is being carried out by E-Rail.



The Edinburgh South Suburban line which is used as a freight and diversionary line could be reopened to passenger trains – with some extra stations. It could interchange with the trams at Waverley and Haymarket
Map: David Arthur (Wikipedia)

Edinburgh South Sub

Meanwhile in Edinburgh, the possibility of reintroducing passenger services on the South Suburban line has been raised again, with the apparent support of transport spokesperson Councillor Scott Arthur. This line is still used for freight, but were passenger services to be restored, journey times within Edinburgh could be slashed.

More controversial is the proposed use of part of the Caledonian Railway alignment in Roseburn, currently part of the cyclepath network within the city, for a new tramline. As there does not appear to be room for both cycle path and tramline, the difficulty is where to relocate this section of the cyclepath, especially as the Scottish transport hierarchy prioritises active travel over public transport.

The route, known as the Sub, connected the city centre with Piershill, Portobello, Duddingston, Newington and Craiglockhart on a loop line. It was closed to stopping services in 1962, but maintained to passenger standard so it could be used for diversions.

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

Bonnybridge Railway Campaign
www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway
Friends of the West Highland Lines
www.westhighlandline.org.uk

St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink)
www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/
www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign

Friends of the Far North Line
www.fofnl.org.uk

Beattock Station Action Group
www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/
[facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup](https://www.facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup)

Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG)
www.capitalrail.org.uk/
Thornhill Station Action Group
[facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/](https://www.facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/)

Six out of 10 for Labour’s plan

Chair’s column by Chris Page

Since my column in *Railwatch* 179 outlined 10 actions for the next government to put rail on a sustainable footing, Labour has published its *Plan to fix Britain’s Railways*.

If rail services were as bad as their plan says, the business should be shut down, but fortunately they are not. Labour’s plan has adopted five of the actions I proposed, and half of two others.

The actions that are not in Labour’s plan are those which cost money (Treasury still rules OK) or are politically difficult for Labour:

■ There is plenty about waste, but no detail behind the figure of £2.2 billion and not much on how to save it. Nor is there any mention of the earlier claim of saving on schedule 4/8, because they will still be needed for open access and freight.

There is no mention of a **target trajectory for revenue support**, and no detail on how the bottom line will be managed. There will be “a workforce strategy to tackle longer-term issues proactively” and “an integrated industrial relations framework” but there is nothing about the necessary changes to working practices

■ There is no specific **freight growth target**. There is no mention of using fiscal levers such as road-user charging to promote modal shift

■ There is plenty about green but virtually no mention of electrification, and certainly no **rolling electrification programme**

■ There is no plan for **High Speed Two**

■ The only mention of an **investment pipeline** is for rolling stock, which ROSCOs pay for. There is nothing for rail network enhancement projects, which the government pays for. The Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline has not been updated for over four and a half years

Like the Conservatives, Labour plans to create Great British Railways as an arms-length body with responsibility for both infrastructure and passenger services. The only significant difference seems to be that passenger services will not be contracted out, although open access will remain.

The plan confuses objectives with strategy. It says that the Secretary of State will set a five-year strategy, when in fact the Secretary

of State should set the objectives. It should be GBR’s responsibility to create the strategy, which defines how the objectives will be met. The Secretary of State may be “passenger in chief” but how does that fit with the new Office of Rail and Road role of “passenger champion”?

GBR’s authority will be limited, as it will still “have to agree the most substantive decisions with the Secretary of State”, yet devolved leaders in Scotland, Wales, and in mayoral combined authorities will have a statutory role in the rail network . . . “enabling devolved leaders to develop ambitious plans for seamless, integrated transport networks” and “Great British Railways will be required to remain agile, making decisions at pace and based on local communities’ needs.” Can anyone explain how that will work?

Perhaps the biggest gap in the plan is the failure to see rail as part of the solution to three of the really key issues facing the UK: declining health, climate change and the cost of living. It is not enough to respond to these issues individually, by throwing money at the National Health Service, legislating to phase out fossil fuels, or changing the benefits system.

Recent research has shown a correlation between obesity and sick leave from work, and that people who commute by public transport are on average fitter than those who do not. Particulates from all road vehicles, including electric vehicles, create health problems for the young, old and people who are physically active such as cyclists. Health problems both isolate people from society and are a cost to the economy which increases the cost of living. Both of these can cause further mental health issues. However, better public transport promotes social inclusion and provides access to better job opportunities and therefore household income.

A holistic view of the issues is needed to recognise that a modal shift of passengers and freight to rail would have a positive impact on health, climate change, social inclusion and the economy. We need to bring about a culture change which values public transport and freight on rail. Achieving that requires a tax regime which incentivises it, much more attractive public transport services and an education programme so that people believe in it. Please make that point when talking to your election candidates, and bear it in mind when deciding how to vote.

Finally, draw your own conclusions from this: we have had a massive response to social media posts about the need for new train orders to avoid the loss of the Alstom train design and build capability at Derby (other train assemblers are available) and to a lesser extent about the LNER semi-flexible fares. On the other hand, we are told the most popular rail topic in MPs’ email from constituents is wifi on trains.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1911>



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Railfuture AGM: Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh, 13 July 2024

London & South East

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Annual branch meeting

Two contrasting presentations featured at our Railfuture regional branch’s annual open meeting in April, which was followed by the business of a formal AGM.

The prospects for rail reform were outlined by Andy Bagnall, chief executive of Rail Partners which represents eight passenger train operating owner groups and five freight train operating companies.

The prospects for a new garden town between Folkestone and Ashford by Westenhangar station were described by Stephen Gasche. The station would require substantial improvements for the Southeastern high speed Javelin services which call there, said Mr Gasche, who was public transport

lead for Otterpool Park, the consortium planning the new town.

Both presentations, and the AGM papers, are viewable on the branch web page.

Response to consultations

Recent months have seen Railfuture present evidence to England’s Economic Heartland for its connectivity study about the Luton-Bedford-Corby corridor.

We responded to Transport for London with our support for the proposed extension of the Docklands Light Railway from Gallions Reach via a new Beckton Riverside station and beneath the Thames to Thamesmead.

We also made representations to Wealden District Council in East Sussex on its draft local plan and to Transport for the South East for its

survey ahead of its planned transport strategy refresh.

London elections

Railfuture published its *Rail Manifesto for London Elections 2024* for the attention of candidates for Mayor of London and the 25 members of the London Assembly.

Railfuture out and about

Railfuture members were out and about again with campaign stalls in north Kent in May at the Faversham Festival of Transport and in East Sussex for the Uckfield and District Lions Club family fun day in June.

Railfuture members also attended stakeholder events organised by East Midlands Railway, Great Western Railway, Southeastern and Greater Anglia. We maintained contacts with sub-national transport bodies Transport for the

South East, England’s Economic Heartland and Transport East. East Sussex county council is updating its rail strategy and developing a freight strategy. Network Rail is working on studies for the Medway Valley and North Downs lines.

Five year celebration
Meridian Water station replaced Angel Road five years ago after a Railfuture-funded report showed how the station could improve connectivity in the Lea Valley.

Stay in touch
Railfuture London and South East publishes *inter-railse* online every month and *raise* every three months. Both can be viewed or downloaded from the Railfuture branch website page.
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campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Up! and away as Greater Anglia drives towards equality

More than 50 female members of train operator Greater Anglia's workforce were hosted at a special event to mark International Women's Day on Friday 8 March. The day consisted of four interactive sessions, including how to "break into leadership roles", as well as discussions on mental health, menopause and miscarriage. The attendees were all from a wide variety of roles across Greater Anglia and the non-operational staff had the chance to try the company's state-of-the-art train driving simulators to get a taste of what it was like to be a train driver. The speakers included Baljit Kaur on personal branding and leadership and Fiona Skinner from The Fertility Coaching Company. Greater Anglia's occupational health

nurse, Gabriella Antwi, led a session on women's health and menopause.

Leaders from within Greater Anglia were also on hand to talk to attendees about getting involved in other departments such as engineering, and to encourage mentoring, career development, and colleague-led network groups around disability, race, culture, and sexuality. A women's network group called Up!, aimed at being a support network within the company, was relaunched.

Katy Bucknell, Greater Anglia's human resources director, said: "We have a huge number of talented women at Greater Anglia who work at all levels within the company. It

was great to host the day for our colleagues. All our speakers gave inspiring stories and were very empowering."

At Greater Anglia, 30% of all women in the company are in management positions and latest staff polls from November 2023 show 78% of female respondents would recommend the company as a good place to work and that 75% are proud to work there.

After the event, one woman said: "Maybe it is as important for the men in the company to attend events to mark International Women's Day to help them realise their role in women achieving equality. But maybe they were too busy making the tea."

My Mummy is a Train Driver aims for a fairer rail future

A children's book, *My Mummy is a Train Driver*, follows the exciting journey of how to become a train driver. Told through the eyes of a child, the reader learns about what it takes to do the job safely, as well as the fun experiences encountered along the way.

Publisher Butterfly Books said: "It is important that children realise their potential – regardless of what gender they are or what background they come from – and that the opportunity is there for the taking if they apply themselves, work hard and want it enough. The world is their oyster."

"Through education, inspiration and entertainment, we can change future generations and destroy gender bias in workplaces. No child should ever be told they cannot be what they want to be."

The book was launched with help from West Midlands Railway.

An event at Wolverhampton saw school children and rail industry representatives gather for the launch.

WMR and sister company London Northwestern Railway joined with partners across the rail industry to co-fund the book – and one of the company's own drivers offered her insights on life in the driver's cab during its creation.

West Midlands-born authors Jason



Jason Bryan, left, train driver Michelle Nicholson and head teacher Sharifan Nasa, right, with a Graiseley pupil at the book launch in Wolverhampton

and Kerrine Bryan collaborated with the industry to highlight why careers in rail are open to all and how the railway is striving to better represent the communities that they serve.

At the launch were children from Graiseley Primary School in Wolverhampton.

They heard first-hand from women train drivers and had the chance to sit in the driver's seat of a train.

Jo MacPhail, HR director at WMR,

said: "It is important to highlight diversity and promote inclusion in the rail industry."

"I hope it will inspire young people to go on to become the next generation of drivers."

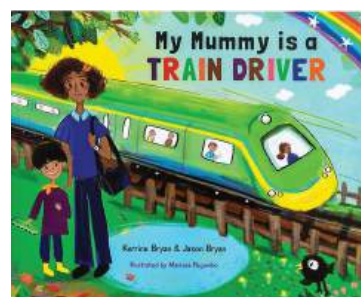
Jason Bryan, who gave a reading at the event, said: "Like many sectors, the rail industry can sometimes face misconceptions that some of the jobs are not suited for certain people."

"In reality the industry has done an awful lot to improve diversity and inclusion through various initiatives, and this book aims to inspire young children and anyone who reads it to consider a future career in rail."

Sharifan Nasa, head teacher of Graiseley Primary School, said: "It is so important for young children not only to have a love for reading but to understand that the job of a train driver is something every child can aspire to."

"The children loved every minute of their time on the station – many of them had never sat in a train before and I am sure this event will have a long-term benefit for our young people."

West Midlands train driver Carol Burns said: "I qualified as a train driver in 2002. Back then, there were only about five female drivers out of about 200 at our depot. After

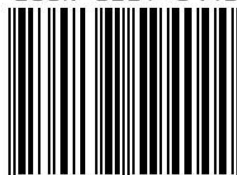


driving trains for a year, I became pregnant with my first daughter. There was a perception among some drivers, at the time, that my training had been a waste of money.

"They assumed I would leave to become a full-time parent. But I've had two daughters and I'm still here: in fact, my eldest has just started university – so not such a waste after all!"

"I am proud to be a role model to my girls. I have since become the lead Instructor for our depot."

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