

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Pictures: Northern

Volunteers boost pride in town station

A group of women have volunteered to take care of Accrington station in the Lancashire town they are proud to call home.

Around 20 women have adopted the station, which is operated by Northern and used by more than 465,000 people a year.

The initiative began when Community Rail Lancashire's Shahista Raja invited a small group to meet up and socialise at the station in 2021, after Covid 19 restrictions were eased.

They welcomed an opportunity to form an adoption group so they could meet on a regular basis and work together to improve the station.

"It is not something you would usually see a minority community get involved in," said Neilam Iqbal, treasurer of the group.

"But looking after the environment and looking after our community is something we have been taught to do as part of our culture, so when we saw this was open to us we jumped at the chance."

The women clean the platform every week, work on artwork projects, and look after the floral displays and station garden.

They have taken also taken groups of schoolchildren to visit their mosque.

"The station is a big part of Accrington as so many people use it, so we want to look after it and showcase our town," added Ms Iqbal.

"We want people to see this place and remember it, because there is so much to be proud of here.

"The ladies look forward to this every week. This is a nice space where they can be themselves, enjoy time with their friends and learn something new."

Ms Raja said: "I do not think there is another group like this one and I am willing to bet it is

the only station adoption group in the country made up of South Asian Muslim women. Every Tuesday morning you can see women in hijabs and high-vis on the platform. For me it is a really nice sight.

"A lot of these women went to school together but lost touch when they got married and got busy with other things. But now they have come back and reconnected. It has become a friendship group."

Northern operates more than 500 stations and over half of them have adoption groups. It is looking for volunteers for the other 250. More info: adopters@northernrailway.co.uk

Throughout Britain, volunteers are helping the railway to be more attractive and useful for both passengers and rail workers.

Bures volunteer army blossoms: Page 2



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Volunteer army adds value to the railway



The former cotton town of Accrington featured on page one, is 255 miles away from the village of Bures which straddles the Essex-Suffolk border, but volunteers are at work there too. A group have used their gardening skills to make Bures station blossom. Train operator Greater Anglia wants to build on the work of station adopters. In August, it launched its new customer and community improvement fund, which will dole out up to £50,000 to support groups carrying out local, community-focused rail improvements, including station improvements. Community rail partnerships are expected to benefit from the fund which totals £350,000. Bids have closed for work which has to be completed by September next year.

Picture: Greater Anglia

Good riddance to a con trick on rail campaigners

PRESIDENT’S COLUMN
By Christian Wolmar

Good riddance to the “Reversing Beeching” scheme. I am sure some Railfuture activists may disagree but its demise is good news.

Ultimately it was going to make it harder, rather than easier, to bring about reopenings. The whole concept was a typical PR initiative, like the Tories’ levelling up programme, whose intent was to gain short-term headlines rather than achieve real change.

The scheme – it never amounted to a “programme” – was announced in 2017 but little emerged until 2020 when Boris Johnson’s Tory government pledged £500 million towards reopenings. It was similar to Johnson’s plan when he was London mayor to make us all “Hop on a bus again” which led to the misconceived New Routemaster.

Reversing Beeching required bidders to submit detailed schemes for consideration. This was enormously expensive and time consuming, and well beyond the means of many campaigns. Only those with support from local or regional authorities were likely to get near success. The £500 million largely went to consultants charged with drawing up “business cases” and “passenger forecasts” for projects. It was a cynical exercise. Inevitably, there were far more

applications than could ever be funded. By the middle of last year, 44 schemes were deemed “successful” but Huw Merriman, the then rail minister, was quick to accept that there was not much money to go around. In evidence to the Commons transport select committee in January 2023, he almost admitted that it was more a crowd-pleasing exercise than an attempt to create any renewed railway mileage: “When you only have £500 million, you cannot deliver anything like the number of bids. Then we end up with very disappointed colleagues and disappointed communities who have put in an awful lot of work, because we require a business case to be put together, which costs money. Are we properly managing expectations?”

It was a good question to which the answer was clearly: No! Three years after the promise of money, two of the 44 schemes, the Northumberland and the Dartmoor lines, were the only ones in progress. Both had been given the go-ahead before the “Reversing Beeching” announcement. Half a

dozen station schemes, all long-established campaigns, were in progress. Otherwise there was nothing to show for the whole process. With costs of reopenings estimated to range from £9 million to £17 million per mile, it was all too obvious that the £500 million, spread around a huge number of projects, was not going to pay for any infrastructure. The Beeching axe fell on some 4,500 miles of railway and therefore the whole exercise was always more fantasy than reality. There have been some superb reopenings and there will be more to come, but there was never any chance that any more than a tiny percentage of the Beeching cuts could be restored. Therefore, Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ decision to scrap the whole idea was the right one. But that does leave a hole. The fact that this pitiful campaign attracted such massive

media attention demonstrates the popularity of railway reopening schemes. Railfuture can build on that popularity, but in a far more coherent way than the “Reversing Beeching” project. First, we need to be realistic. With devolution now

increasingly important, the key is to win over local and regional government to our cause. The success of the soon-to-be-opened Northumberland line campaign has been founded on relations with the local authorities.

Second, we need to choose how and when to put in the maximum effort. With a new government in place which is keen to push through devolution, and many new councillors and councils having been elected as recently as May, an autumn push by campaigners is essential. This is the time to win friends and influence people.

There has been alarm among some campaigners that Reeves’ statement means that particular schemes will now no longer go ahead. I think that is a misreading. Some schemes have been put on hold or warnings issued that they might not go ahead. Nothing has been scrapped. Money is tight but we knew that. We must try to tailor our demands to Labour’s missions about inclusivity and growth.

■ See page 20 for a Railwatch reader offer on my latest book The Liberation Line

■ My Calling All Stations is available on all main podcast platforms



Christian Wolmar

Inflation-linked fare rises – questions for your MP



By Neil Middleton

As sure as night follows day, an annual inflation-linked fare rise seems, unfortunately, a safe prediction. Yet another increase could easily price passengers off the railway, which virtually no one wants to see.

In 2024, the Welsh and UK governments raised regulated rail fares by around 4.9% in March for Wales and England and the Scottish Government applied an increase of 8.7% from 1 April.

Tradition is that the rail fare inflation increase benchmark is the previous July’s retail price index increase, which is published in mid-August. For July 2024, the RPI rate was 3.6%. Railfuture thinks that RPI is not appropriate for two reasons. It is no longer an official measure, and it includes housing costs.

The headline rate is CPIH, the consumer prices index which includes owner occupiers’ housing costs.

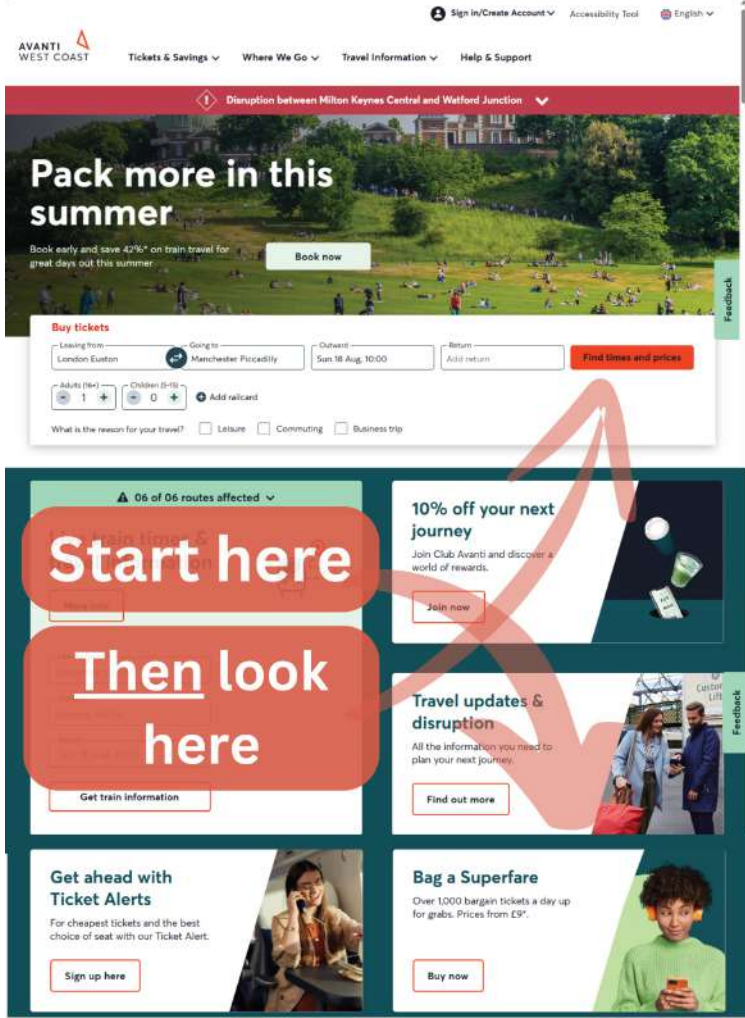
Housing costs are excluded from the related CPI measure, which is Railfuture’s preferred approach. These two rates were 3.1% (CPI) and 2.2% (CPIH).

In a democracy, we can expect MPs to offer the best opportunity to get a fairer system which would give rail passengers a lower rate of increase, or even no increase at all.

So Railfuture members should write to their own MP pointing out that rail fares are too high and that the system should be changed.

We hope and expect that this will encourage individual MPs to do their own lobbying and questioning on rail passengers’ behalf.

So, Railfuture suggests you choose just one or two of these questions



High rail ticket prices are a big barrier for many potential rail passengers but bargains are also available. This is train operator Avanti’s website invitation for people to travel over the summer

to ask your MP. We think you will get a more useful response if they are not confronted with a long shopping list of questions.

1 Are you working to get the rail fare rise linked to the most appropriate inflation measure – the consumer prices index?

2 Has the government remembered that a rail fare increase is a means to an end, not an end in itself? The goal is to

increase revenue, so taking account of likely changes in the number of passengers is essential. Increase fares too much and revenue could go down, not up.

3 Has the government considered action with the specific goal of increasing passengers (and thus revenue) without a price increase? Action should be local and could include things like more late night services to support the night time economy.

Finding the right ticket has never been harder

There has been a very unwanted trend in British railway ticket selling in the past year or so, writes Neil Middleton.

We have lost a simple and reliable way to find the best ticket for your journey.

The current round of rot set in with the launch of Avanti’s Superfare in March 2023. It means you need to go to the website of the operator providing the extra type of ticket to buy it. Even then you have to search carefully for it.

This is quite different to wanting to travel on a traditional ticket (Anytime, Off-Peak or Advance). These can be bought from almost anywhere, although shockingly the main exception is some train operators’ ticket vending machines.

As a reader of Railwatch, your interest in railways means you almost certainly know which website

Railfuture’s Passenger Group has just formed a Ticketing & Fares working group – if you are interested in joining, please email neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk. Neil comments: “Interest and curiosity is much more important than knowledge of the current fares system.”

to start at, but many members of the public will have little idea of the offers unless they have travelled before or are responding to advertising.

Even for shorter journeys, there can be confusion and uncertainty. From my local station, it can be cheaper – or more expensive – to use a bank contactless card. Relevant national rail and contactless fares are not listed in one place. Railfuture is considering issuing a press release

4 Fuel duty has not increased since 2011, which benefits car drivers and lorry companies, but rail fares have increased by 50% since then. Can you get a justification for this from the government, please?

5 Is the government going to continue to support the carbon intensive travel option by continuing with a low level of Air Passenger Duty for domestic flights where surface options (including the railway) are a viable alternative? Rates for APD in the UK were the same as for destinations in Europe, but a lower UK band came in on 1 April 2023. This led to a reduction from £13 to £7 (flights to and from the Scottish Highlands & Islands have always been exempt).

6 Will the government support more car clubs? Rail appears more attractive when car drivers see their real costs. There needs to be a shift to “pay as you go” for car drivers rather than up front costs such as vehicle excise duty and insurance.

7 Will electric vehicle drivers be asked to pay more to use the roads than the current trivial tax on their energy costs (VAT on electricity)?

8 Will the government continue with £2 bus fares in England? One benefit is to enable rail passengers to get to and from their railway stations at a reasonable price.

9 Wizz Air offered and sold out an All You Can Fly offer for €499 (around £425), with a €9.99 cost per flight – for flights with seat availability three days before. Can you ask that the railway tries something similar for less busy trains?

Railfuture chair Chris Page has said: “If we are to have an increase it must be kept to less than the published rate for the CPI inflation measure.”

■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture vice-chairman

and social media postings to help prospective rail passengers navigate the confusing messages from train operators.

Check out www.railfuture.org.uk/fares and www.railfuture.org.uk/Press-releases for news on our activities.

■ The Campaign for Better Transport is calling for a rail fare price freeze, at least until the cut to fuel duty is reversed along with the cut to domestic air passenger duty. CBT also wants current vehicle taxation to be replaced with a pay-as-you-drive scheme, targets introduced to increase use of public transport and active travel, and a radical reform of rail fares to make them simpler and more affordable. CBT called on the government to “move fast and fix things”.

Rachel's axe poised over rail projects

By Roger Blake
Railfuture's director for infrastructure and networks

Local elections in May witnessed several transfers of power in councils in England, although only in three which are local transport authorities – Hartlepool, Milton Keynes and Thurrock.

After the national transfer of power following the general election in July, Railfuture reacted with *All change for rail* – written jointly by chair Chris Page and communications director Neil Middleton.

A month later, Railfuture policy director Ian Brown CBE produced *Agenda for growth*. Ian was responding to the Labour government's programme announced by King Charles in parliament.

There was also a flurry of government announcements and publications, which Ian had digested and analysed as a guide to Railfuture's way forward.

All change for rail and *Agenda for growth* can be found on the Railfuture website via "News and Views".

Labour was expected to amplify its policies at its conference in Liverpool in September, followed by chancellor Rachel Reeves' crucial first budget on 30 October. The chancellor's multi-year spending review will follow next year.

It will gradually become clearer what it will mean for Railfuture if we want to continue to be an informed and independent influencer in favour of a bigger, better railway.

Railfuture expects to play to maintain a distinctive and consistent national, regional and local voice advocating the beneficial socioeconomic and environmental outcomes of investing in rail.

We expect to respond to policy initiatives quickly and will aim to identify where rail can play to its strengths, helping communities and businesses with improved transport to address congestion, car dependency and carbon.

That means that the revived ministry of housing, communities and local government will be of as much interest to us as the Department for Transport.

Railfuture needs to attract new members to grow, and the railway needs to attract new users to allow it to play its part in the fight against climate change.

Along with the *Restoring Your Railway* scheme, it is probably the end for the former government's rail network enhancements pipeline, thanks to transport secretary Louise Haigh preferring her review of individual projects. The *Restoring Your Railway* scheme



AT RISK: A freight train approaches Bedford on the Bedford-Bletchley line on its way from Grain, Kent, to Doncaster. The line should be incorporated into East West Rail but all rail projects are now in doubt

Picture: Bill Davies

- is dead, but Railfuture can confidently proclaim: Long live a Bigger Railway!
- Progress continues on many projects which will lead to a bigger railway:
- The Transpennine Route Upgrade is ongoing
 - Northumberland line, with the first three of six stations opening in December
 - Ashley Down station, Bristol MetroWest, probably opening in December
 - Mid-Cornwall Metro (Newquay-Par) being implemented in May
 - East West Rail (Oxford-Bletchley-Milton Keynes) probably in action in May
 - Winslow station, Buckinghamshire, on East West Rail, probably opening in May
 - Okehampton Interchange station as part of Devon Metro, probably opening in May
 - Cambridge South station expected to open in December next year
 - Beaulieu Park station, Chelmsford, expected to open in December next year
 - Charfield station, South Gloucestershire, expected to open in December 2027
- However, many rail projects are in doubt, including:
- Portishead-Bristol, although having a development consent order already could yet rescue it
 - Bedford-Cambridge segment of East West Rail
 - Oxford-Cowley
 - Tavistock-Plymouth
 - Wisbech-March, Cambridgeshire
 - Waterside Line, Hampshire

For various reasons, prospects for the following new or reopened stations are also in doubt:

- Ferryhill, County Durham
- Meir, Stoke-on-Trent
- White Rose and Thorpe Park, Leeds
- Haxby, York
- Waverley, South Yorkshire
- Liverpool Baltic
- Beeston Castle & Tarporley, Cheshire
- Aldridge, Walsall
- Kings Heath, Moseley and Pineapple Road, Birmingham
- St Anne's Park, Bristol
- Wellington, Somerset
- Langport/Somerton, Somerset
- Cullompton, Devon
- Edginswell, Torbay
- St Clears, Carmarthenshire
- Deeside, Flintshire
- Magor & Undy, Monmouthshire

Much depends on the source and extent of contractual commitment of any government funding.

Okehampton Interchange station and the Mid-Cornwall Metro are funded from the former department for levelling-up, not the DfT. It is possible that, like Portishead, they are too far committed to cancel without disproportionate financial and even judicial penalties.

No government department is spared from the chancellor's "Fixing the foundations: public spending audit 2024-25".

Rail transport for new homes

One of Railfuture's campaign policies is to ensure the provision of good rail transport when new

homes are built. To many experts providing good public transport for new homes and new towns is plain common sense because it integrates land use and transport.

The new government's emphasis on ambitious housing growth should provide fresh impetus.

The long-running campaign to reinstate Lewes-Uckfield gains traction when coupled with housing growth.

The new ministry of housing, communities and local government launched a consultation in July as a first step in revising the national planning policy framework.

In several areas, house building is expected to at least double, which will improve the case for investment in improved and extended local rail links.

To get pro-rail policies implemented, Railfuture should probably prepare to put more emphasis on:

- Rail links which will enable substantial private investment in industrial development, for example the Gravity site on the former ordnance site near Bridgwater, Somerset
- Substantial property development around existing or potential stations, such as Medway's Hoo Peninsula
- New towns around new rail stations or links, for example at Tempsford, Bedfordshire, where East West Rail is expected to interchange with the East Coast main line

We also need to remember that our campaign for a rolling programme of rail electrification is good on many levels, including making rail even more attractive and efficient than the dirty modes of road and air. Rail makes very little contribution to pollution and global warming, but UK transport as a whole, road and air mainly, is the elephant in the room for its near-40% share of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions.

Railfuture vice-president Roger Ford explains: If the height of the Shard building in London represents global carbon dioxide emissions, then UK rail diesel emissions are the height of three magazines stacked on the pavement outside.

An electrified railway is quite simply a better railway.

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight & Logistics Groups via our dedicated campaign web pages:

www.railfuture.org.uk/A-bigger-railway
www.railfuture.org.uk/Freight
Also on X (formerly Twitter):
[@RailfutureNetws](#)
[@RailfutureFret](#)

Pilning – the station that refuses to die

By Dick Bowman

From once-bustling junction and car ferry terminal to a single platform served by just two trains a week... Pilning's fortunes have declined greatly over the years.

The last station in England before the Severn Tunnel, its car ferry trains ceased after the Severn Road Bridge opened in 1966, while the closure to passengers of the line round to Severn Beach in 1968 robbed it of its junction status.

By the late 1980s it was down to one train each way daily, calling only in daylight hours because the station lighting had been declared unsafe, and even that was further reduced to one train each way a week (Saturdays only) in 2006. Trains rattled through all day and night, but by now most of Pilning's users had been driven away.

In the early 1990s campaigner Jonathan King tried to encourage usage by posting timetables around the village – BR's response was to threaten him with legal action.

2016 brought electrification of the South Wales main line – welcome news to most travellers, but a cause of dismay in Pilning. The station footbridge was too low to accommodate the overhead wires, so Network Rail were going to demolish it....without replacing it.

East Midlands

anthony.kay@railfuture.org.uk

Ivanhoe Line

Having lobbied candidates in constituencies along the Ivanhoe Line (Leicester to Burton-on-Trent) before the general election, the Campaign for the Reopening of the Ivanhoe line (CRIL) lost no time after the election in seeking help from new MPs to ensure that the reopening project would continue. This contact was put to good use after Chancellor Rachel Reeves' announcement that the previous government's *Restoring Your Railway* scheme would be cancelled. The new MP for North West Leicestershire, Amanda Hack, who had already declared that the Ivanhoe reopening project was her "number one priority", promised to write to the Treasury and to new Secretary of State for Transport Louise Haigh to restate the case for the reopening. CRIL also sprang into action at this point, with their spokesman Douglas McLay making the case for the continuation of the project on BBC Radio Leicester and East Midlands TV, and being quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as well as local newspapers.

Previously, CRIL's Bruce Wakley had been the guest speaker at the Railfuture East Midlands AGM in May. He explained the reasons for reopening the line, for example that Swadlincote is now England's



Modern trains and modern infrastructure – but the service! One of Pilning's two trains a week enters the station Picture: Olga Taylor

NR got this approved on the quiet by submitting it as a "Minor Modification", even though it meant cutting off access to the westbound platform. The station would still have "a service" so full consultation was deemed unnecessary – never mind that that service would only be in one direction!

The only concession was that it got a second train on Saturdays, so that people could still make return journeys by doubling back. Thus, to return from a trip to Bristol, Pilning passengers now have to whizz past their destination, go through the Severn Tunnel into Wales, change at Severn Tunnel Junction and go back

largest town without a railway station (outside conurbations), and then described the progress towards the recent submission of Network Rail's outline business case for the first phase of reopening, from Burton to Coalville. He also looked at the prospects for further phases, eventually including a connection to the main line at Leicester.

The Ivanhoe line reopening project was believed to be "on the verge" of being funded to the next stage when the election was called, and the case that was put forward by Network Rail and campaigners was considered very strong.

Midland main line electrification

The installation of the overhead line equipment is now complete from Kettering to Wigston Junction, south of Leicester, but further testing of equipment and trains will be required before the bimode trains enter service on the Midland main line. East Midland Railway's

again. This would have been the death knell for most stations....but not Pilning. A user group was swiftly formed to spread awareness of the station locally, encourage usage, and campaign for a better service and eventual reinstatement of the footbridge. Recorded usage shot up by a staggering 1040% between 2016 and the onset of Covid. People found ingenious ways to get to all sorts of places (and back!) despite the skeleton service, and the station was featured in a video by rail champion Geoff Marshall www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XO6hiikAJs

You might have thought GWR



new inter-city fleet of 33 five-carriage Aurora trains (pictured), capable of running on electricity and diesel, is being built by Hitachi Rail in County Durham and financed by Rock Rail East Midlands. The trains are expected to be in operation next year. EMR says it has employed a Derby-based firm to ensure that the seats are comfortable.

Railfuture is keen to ensure that electrification work will continue until the entire Midland route to Nottingham and Sheffield – and beyond – is electrified.

This must include all lines through Trent Junction, so that the Nottingham-Derby route is fully electrified.

Another issue of concern is the urgent need for four-tracking between Wigston and Syston junctions, where the line forms part of the Felixstowe-Nuneaton freight corridor as well as the Midland main line. The track work should obviously be done before electrification proceeds.

would have responded to this upsurge by agreeing to stop a couple more trains there to make it easier and more attractive to potential passengers, but all requests were refused on the basis that the existing service met the Department for Transport's requirements. So much for wanting to encourage people back to the railway post-Covid!

But Pilning Station Group is a determined bunch, and the campaign will continue. At least in the meantime the station remains open, and funding for major improvements may become available in future if development proposals for the adjacent area come to fruition.

Meanwhile, the campaign will continue, led by its indefatigable chair, Olga Taylor, because the station's minimal service makes using it almost impossible, like other stations around the country such as Polesworth, Ascott-Under-Wychwood, Denton and Reddish South. Maybe there should be a minimum service requirement for all stations unless there are genuine circumstances – say three trains each way daily, morning, midday and early evening?

www.pilningstation.uk
footbridge@pilningstation.uk

Airport trains facelift

East Midland Railway's Connect trains, which run from Corby to London every half an hour and serve Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport, are to be refurbished with tables and 2+2 seating to replace the cramped 3+2 commuter-style seats on the existing class 360 electric trains. The £27 million revamp should have taken place when the trains were transferred to EMR from London Liverpool Street commuter services, but was delayed by the Covid effect on decision makers at the Department for Transport. EMR says there will be more space for luggage on the Connect trains – which are also branded Luton Aiport Express – to cope with airline passengers at Luton Airport.

Derby area stations

Network Rail has produced a Derby area strategic stations advice report, which considers options to make rail travel more attractive from six of the smaller stations near Derby. The report echoes several of Railfuture's concerns, for example the need for stops at Belper on more of the services to and from Sheffield, improved frequencies at some of the stations, more Sunday services, and better integration between rail and bus services.

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



Railfuture board

Chris Page was re-elected chair of Railfuture at a board meeting on 27 July.

The board thanked Allison Cosgrove who has decided not to continue as vice-chair. Allison continues to lead the passenger group. Neil Middleton was elected vice-chair.

The board is carrying out a review of how to attract and retain more active members.

Five Fighting Fund awards were made but bids from Langport Transport Group and Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton CRP were deferred subject to requests for further information.

A Railfuture branches and groups day is planned to look at opportunities for rail development, following the Labour party conference in September and further government announcements. Looking ahead, we will hold our 2025 AGM in the north-east of England to celebrate Railway 200 and the opening of the Northumberland Line.

Lottery winners

June: W Morrison, G Smith, M Edgell, R Grainger, G Smith, J Ward

July: C Fox, G Smith, S Hyland, D Owen, G Smith, R Grainger

August: R Goring, B Buttigieg, J Bannister, C Fribbins, T Davies, S Boulding

Join the Lottery

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

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



Ann Hindley, right, receives her award from Wendy Thorne at Railfuture's AGM in Edinburgh in July

Member of the Year 2023

Railfuture's Member of the Year 2023 award was presented immediately following formal business of the AGM in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July 2024.

Our 2023 winner was Ann Hindley who has made a valued contribution to Railfuture for years. She has been a dogged campaigner for services on her local route of Scunthorpe to Doncaster and for improvements at Doncaster station.

Ann has represented the Lincolnshire area on Railfuture's passenger group for a number of years. She is an advocate of continually improving the passenger experience and has been investigating the availability of car parks at stations, especially in relation to disabled travellers. She has highlighted difficulties some people have in using parking ticket machines which do not take cash or those who experience difficulty using a smartphone.

Ann brings her personal experience of a woman travelling alone and the problems she has encountered, and has consistently spoken in favour of staffing stations, especially at night, taking these concerns to the highest level possible.

She has also used her contacts to help Railfuture attend events with a publicity stand. She has written articles for newsletters and *Railwatch*. She has hosted Zoom meetings and kept us in check, making a hugely valuable contribution to the organising of our last in-person national conference held (eventually) in Leeds in March 2023.

She was able to use her contacts again to help with advertising the conference and with printing materials. Her administration skills were tested to the limit as we battled to keep hold of the venue, catering and travel

arrangements, having to change the date of the conference more than once, owing to the pandemic but also the subsequent rail strikes called on our chosen dates.

These problems were then compounded by not one, but two tragic deaths of Railfuture colleagues who were helping to organise the conference. Ann stuck with it and never wavered, and on the day helped make sure that the conference ran as planned. We were extremely grateful for her perseverance and professionalism. She went the extra mile.

Ann was awarded an engraved glass paperweight and a voucher for afternoon tea for two.

Nominations are still very much welcomed for the 2024 award which will be presented at next year's AGM so if you know of anyone who deserves recognition for their hard work and their individual commitment to Railfuture, please submit a nomination in a statement of no more than 500 words to wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk

Previously known as Campaigner of the Year, the title was changed to Member of the Year to avoid some confusion with one of the RUG awards called Best Campaigner.

Railfuture wants to recognise the valued work of individual members, very often beaver away behind the scenes, not necessarily campaigning, perhaps working to help with the smooth running of events, both within and for the organisation, and to recognise that individual's commitment to Railfuture – someone who has gone the extra mile.

Former winners of the award are Ariadne Tampion, Dennis Fancett and Jane Ann Liston.

RUG awards 2024

By Roger Blake

Railfuture's AGM in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July was followed by the 10th Awards for Rail User Groups.

The awards are open to similar organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships, and their associated individuals. This year's awards were presented by local vice-president Paul McLennan MSP.

All seven nominations, across four of the six award categories available and from within four of our 14 branches – East Midlands, North East, Scotland, and West Midlands – received recognition.

Four gold awards were presented:

■ Derbyshire's Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group for Best Website

■ South East Northumberland Rail User Group for Best Newsletter

■ Scotland's Campaign for North East Rail for Best Campaign

■ Former Chair of the Campaign for Borders Rail, Simon Walton, for Best Campaigner.

A silver award was presented to Stourbridge Line User Group in the Best Newsletter category.

Two commendations were presented, to South East Northumberland Rail User Group and to Stourbridge Line User Group, for their websites.

The highly sought-after Judges' Special Award went to the Levenmouth Rail Campaign following the reinstatement of passenger services to Leven via Cameron Bridge in June.

Full and illustrated details of all the RUG Awards and Commendations from 2024, and all previous years since their inauguration in 2012, are in Railfuture's website, under "What's on".

www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards

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

How Levenmouth got its trains back

By Richard Lysons

I was kindly sent a copy of *How Levenmouth Got Its Trains Back*, a 118-page illustrated book, and wanted to share it with *Railwatch* readers who may live in other parts of the UK.

Rail campaigners know only too well how long it can take to "get trains back". This campaign, happily, is one of the most recent successful ones. The Levenmouth group's idea to commission rail author David Spaven to write this account makes the book both interesting and inspiring.

Many of you will have a copy of Spaven's book on another Scottish campaign, to reopen the Waverley line, which also had a happy ending.

Leven and Cameron Bridge lost their passenger stations 55 years ago in the 1960s, as part of what the author calls a "swathe of 1960s closures which saw thousands of towns and villages across Britain cut off from the rail network".

Nowadays, rail's crucial role in the regeneration of communities is unquestioned. Having a rail link does wonders for a community's employment and education opportunities, as well as attracting visitors to arrive without their cars.

The Levenmouth story is something of a blueprint on how to campaign successfully for a railway line to be reopened.

Chapter 3 – Reflections on the campaign has a vital first section, which deals with the secrets of Levenmouth Rail Campaign's success.

Here, the author liberally includes useful quotes from committee members, where they give fascinating and honest information on their strategy. Their tireless campaigning and lobbying is admirable. I particularly like their slogan: "more than just a railway" which I am tempted to "borrow" for a local campaign in which I am involved!

Treat yourself to a copy and put it on your inspiration shelf next to our own *Britain's Growing Railway*.

How Levenmouth Got Its Trains Back

By David Spaven (*Levenmouth Rail Campaign*)
Privately published. C/O CLEAR,
36 College St, Buckhaven KY8 1JY
or email: LMRC@mail.com

I have to start with a disclaimer when I review *The Tramcar Will Return*. The author – well known to me as Tony Young – is a friend and colleague. He served as both vice-



CELEBRATION TIME: Railfuture members who attended the AGM in Edinburgh in July took the opportunity to travel on the new Levenmouth line. From left to right: St Andrews campaigner and Railwatch contributor Jane Ann Liston with her Brompton bike, Railfuture director Neil Middleton, Glasgow Crossrail campaigner and South Lanarkshire Councillor Ralph Barker, Railfuture director Jerry Alderson, Capital Rail Action campaigner and former City of Edinburgh councillor Laurence Marshall, Lloyd Butler, Railwatch editor Ray King and Railfuture directors Allison Cosgrove and Roger Blake. In the foreground is veteran rail campaigner David Redgewell

chairman of STORM, the Rochdale area rail user group, and on the board of directors of TravelWatch North West for many years. Like many attendees of meetings and conferences of both those groups, I have benefited from his insider knowledge of and experience of light rail and the transport sector in general. I purchased a copy myself, not with any intention to write a review.

Tony Young has already published fascinating books

on the history of trams in Bolton, Bury and Rochdale, but his latest book will probably have the widest audience. This is an ingenious weaving together of the author's own life, education and career with the end – and new beginning – of trams. I already knew a little of Young's crucial role in the first phase of Metrolink, but did not know that his interest in trams has been life-long. He was born halfway through the Second World War and saw first-hand the end of the tram era. A Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship enabled him to study urban public transport in the USA and Canada.

The book reveals just how he managed – working closely with Manchester's Councillor Andrew Fender – to bring light rail to Greater Manchester just over 30 years ago. His unrivalled knowledge of tram systems came from

frequent visits to Europe and beyond, where the author clearly learned from those cities with successful light rail systems. Young is both admirably modest and honest about his crucial role in bringing light rail to Greater Manchester. He acknowledges this in the book's final chapter, but he generously name-checks his colleagues in the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive who helped make Metrolink happen. After leaving Metrolink, it is no surprise that Young became an international light rail consultant.

This excellent book benefits from the author's economical and informative style and a wonderful collection of photographs from throughout his life. Unlike many rail books, *The Tramcar Will Return* avoids jargon, acronyms and in-jokes. Young's passion for trams is also shown in his frustration that the likes of Bristol, Leeds and Liverpool do not at present have a light rail system.

If other British cities had had Tony Young working for them as a transport planner, there would most likely be light rail systems in many more of them, rather than the handful in Croydon, Edinburgh, Nottingham, Sheffield, the West Midlands, Tyne and Wear and, of course, Greater Manchester!

The Tramcar Will Return – The Autobiography Of A Tram Man
By Anthony Young (Austin Macauley Publishers 2024)
www.austinmacauley.com
Hardback, paperback and e-book

I have received several books courtesy of Amberley Publishing including:

Railway Enthusiasm In Twenty-First Century Britain is an unusual and enjoyable book in which the author traces his interest in railways since his childhood in the 1990s to the present day. The chapters of Joseph Rogers' book cover everything from heritage railways (where he has worked) and railway modelling to spotting and photography. This is one of the few books I have read that brings together many of the diverse aspects of the railways. There are some charming photographs of the young Joseph Rogers at various heritage railways in the 1990s. The author is not afraid of broaching the subject of inclusivity and how both the railways – and the hobby of studying them – can (and should) become more accessible. Rogers' book could help someone new to "railway enthusiasm" understand why so many people love trains. I suggest that readers consider purchasing this title as a Christmas present for their "unconverted" partners and family members!

Railway Enthusiasm In Twenty-First Century Britain
By Joseph Rogers
Amberley £15.99 ISBN 978-1-3981-1668-9

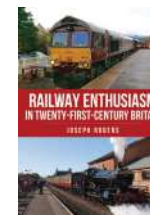
Doncaster is not a railway location that I know well. This South Yorkshire town has a prominent position on the East Coast main line, and no fewer than seven different passenger operators call at its station. John Jackson's photographs

are of the consistently high quality that we expect from books by this publisher. The book helps the reader to contextualise Doncaster's place in Yorkshire's

railways and there is a useful introduction and map, as well as informative captions to each photograph. The book's chapters methodically cover privatisation, passenger services and freight operators. As GB Rail is introduced, books such as this one will be an invaluable record for both campaigners and historians.

Trains Around Doncaster
By John Jackson
Amberley £15.99
ISBN 978-1-3981-17792

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



Northumberland line

Railwatch 180 carried a photograph of me on page 12 alongside an article which included the phrase “The Northumberland line is, in effect, a very cost-effective addition to the Newcastle Metro network”.

Because no author is given, and because the phrase in question appears next to my photo, the inference is that this comment came from me.

I would like to make it clear that I did not say this, and in fact throughout the history of our campaign we have been plagued by people incorrectly asserting or implying that the Northumberland line will be a Metro extension when it is not.

We strongly suspect that widespread incorrect reporting such as this slowed down our efforts to get the final sign-off across the line, because some councillors in the wider combined authority area whose support has been vital to get business cases through and regional expenditure approved became confused and needed further explanation and briefing, pushing decisions back from meeting to meeting.

Even today, such is the extent to which it has been misreported that the Northumberland line will be a Metro extension, some people are thinking Northumberland line trains will be calling at all the Metro stations between Northumberland Park and Newcastle, when in fact they will run by the more direct heavy rail route which is one of the key advantages of the project that we need potential customers to understand.

It is, however, true that fares for the Northumberland line are to be integrated into the Metro zonal tickets and passes. This is a most welcome development even though as of yet – just a month or so from opening – which stations will be in which zones has not been revealed.

We do need to go much further than this though and additionally integrate fares for local services on the parallel East Coast main line between Newcastle and Morpeth and, of course, our local buses.

So the Northumberland line is not part of the Metro, any more than London’s Overground lines are part of its underground network.

Integrated ticketing will exist, which is good, although sadly the key interchange station – Northumberland Park – has hit delays and the Northumberland line trains will not be stopping there initially.

In Europe, it is possible to buy integrated rail-fly tickets using onward rail connections from



Test train at Bedlington in August

Picture: Dennis Fancett

Northumberland line delayed until December

Hopes that the Northumberland line would open in the summer were dashed, but at least train operator Northern ran a class 158 test train along the whole 18-mile line in August, ahead of reopening later this year. Work continues on the £298 million reopening project, which has involved the Department for Transport, Network Rail, Northumberland County Council and Northern. The train was driven through to Ashington by Martin Rodger and Mark Laverick. Regular test trains followed throughout August operated by other drivers and conductors to ensure they all have an in-depth knowledge of the route and can safely run passenger services from December, serving Ashington, Newsham, Seaton Delaval, Manors and Newcastle. Stations at Bedlington, Blyth Bebside and Northumberland Park are under construction and are expected to open next year. Glen Sanderson, leader of Northumberland County Council, said: “It is absolutely fantastic to have reached this landmark moment on the Northumberland line.” Keep up to date with the Northumberland line via the campaigners’ website www.senrug.co.uk

rail-connected airports such as Charles de Gaulle in Paris or Schiphol in Amsterdam. But that does not make an aeroplane a train nor a train an aeroplane.

I fully accept that what kind of train reaches Ashington and who is operating it is largely irrelevant to passengers (apart, of course, from strike days) and we welcome closer integration and branding of our heavy rail and Metro services.

There is lots here for our new mayor to deliver. Meanwhile, let us be careful to be clear with our terminology.

Dennis Fancett, chair, South East Northumberland Rail User Group.
chair@senrug.co.uk
www.senrug.co.uk

to be vastly better than WSR’s crazy set up of just three carriages (later four) and a notoriously “thirsty” class 67 with a driving van trailer at the other end.

In addition, journeys took forever and ran late. Every time I used the service, catering was non-existent and seats were over-booked causing confrontation between people with the same reservations.

The WSR’s descent into administration owing – from memory – some £11 million should hopefully galvanise the new WSMR into trying to get it right. Its backers may be gambling with a very odd route but I wish them well.

Martin Garvey, Nottingham
garvey57@yahoo.com

Car + rail

Car parking is important to rail users in North Norfolk. By driving from my home in Cromer to stations at Diss, Stowmarket, Ely or Downham Market for a trip to London, I can leave London at 2230 and still get back to Cromer.

If I rely on trains to Cromer, I have to leave London at 2030.

An added problem is that for parking at most stations, Greater Anglia now require online payments or using smart phones which not everybody has or wants.

I have found that I can pay for non-rail car parks with Payzone by giving my registration number. It would be a great help if rail companies also used Payzone. Better still would be to pay at the station booking office – if it is open!

J Mason, Ashdown Court, Cromer
NR27 0AE

Political action

Of course, Railfuture is non party political, that goes without saying. We rail campaigners need to get MPs on side regardless of their label. Indeed the Conservative MP for the former constituency of Cleethorpes, Martin Vickers, has been a long time campaigner for direct trains to King’s Cross, something you say (*Railwatch* 180) will finally happen in December.

But does it mean that you cannot argue for or against nationalisation? I believe the answer is no, and that if you think our railways would be best served by bringing them back into public ownership then you should campaign for nationalisation.

Though it was a Labour Government that created British Rail in the 1940s, subsequent Tory administrations made no steps to privatise the industry for decades. Indeed the article by Oscar Hilder cites Margaret Thatcher as believing that the railways should remain under state control. It was John Major who was committed to

selling them off. Hilder goes on to argue that renationalisation is supported by 60% of all voters, and cuts across party lines. So if he is saying that the Tories could embrace such a policy on the grounds that it is popular, then why not Railfuture?

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Unsuitable trains

I was horrified to read in the Wessex section of *Railwatch* 180 that the Salisbury to Exeter User Group is involved in discussions about the idea of modifying a class 450 with batteries to work beyond the electrified section of the Waterloo to Salisbury and Exeter line.

The class 450 is completely unsuitable for the line from Basingstoke to Salisbury, which is rated at 90 mph and I doubt a battery-powered class 450 could maintain the timetable for the 36 miles between Basingstoke and Salisbury stopping at all four intermediate stations.

It would also be impossible for battery traction to be used beyond Salisbury with the switchback nature of the line and the climbs to Semley, Milborne Port, Crewkerne, and Honiton in the offing.

Also ... the class 450 accommodation is completely unsuitable for long distance cross-country workings.

I commute on class 450s and in winter, a station stop means cold air coming into the saloon. Similarly in summer, the hot air outside displaces the air-conditioned air inside and at times the smell from the toilets can be very unpleasant.

The class 158/159s used between Waterloo and Exeter – as well as the class 444s to Weymouth – provide excellent accommodation for long distance cross-country passengers which the class 450 does not.

The 158/159s provide enclosed saloons with the entrance doors in the vestibules, not in the saloon.

With the amount of attaching and detaching that happens currently at Salisbury, it is essential that the replacement trains are gangwayed throughout so passengers can move from crowded carriages to less crowded carriages. I experienced this a lot on the 1025 from Exeter to Waterloo when it was only three carriages and was often “rammed” from Templecombe to Salisbury where extra carriages were attached (the 1025 from Exeter is now six carriages but the 1125 from Exeter is still only three carriages). There is no doubt the

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

Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways

CrossCountry struggles to cope with ‘post-pandemic problems’



Train operator CrossCountry has introduced “temporary resource-led reductions to its timetable from August to November to address performance and reliability issues that have inconvenienced passengers with on-the-day cancellations”. As a result, no CrossCountry services will operate beyond Edinburgh to Aberdeen or Glasgow until November. CrossCountry blamed industrial action which had made it impossible to deal with a backlog of critical training days required by train drivers accumulated during the Covid pandemic. It said it would run some services with more carriages during the temporary timetable period and predicted that by November it would have more fully trained drivers. In the Oxford

area, commuters are angry. The Oxford Clarion reported that CrossCountry had withdrawn eight services each day on the Reading-Newcastle route via Oxford which means there are no trains in the evening peak between 1640 and 1812. CrossCountry’s performance has not gone down well with Labour’s new Transport Secretary Louise Haigh but her powers are limited by the fact that CrossCountry’s franchise does not run out until 2027, making it the last operator to be nationalised. Theoretically the operator could have its contract scrapped earlier if it fails to run “contracted services”. Ms Haigh has already told CrossCountry: “Your passengers have been suffering from a substandard service for too long”
Picture: CrossCountry

class 158/159 “super sprinters” are in need of replacement, but the class 450 is not the answer – even between Basingstoke and Salisbury.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com

Island trains not fit

The engineers just cannot get the Island line trains running right and I believe they are not fit for purpose. As of today, South Western Railway has only one set in service. The “new” trains are refurbished London Underground trains on which overseas computer experts came in to sort the software out.

However, the travelling public has lost confidence in the service since the withdrawal of the 1930s tube stock.

The powers that be do not seem to be interested, even though a lot of money has been spent on station refurbishment.

What was once a great service has been ruined and you cannot rely on the service any more, with cancellations, delays and signal

problems. These new trains fail to give ferry services a good departure time from Ryde Pier Head, leaving passengers unreasonable time to wait, and there is no connection for the Isle of Wight Steam Railway

Since the withdrawal of the old reliable underground stock, I have stopped using the service.

I understand that if the trains are not running, you can use your train ticket on the bus. I have to ask: What is the purpose of keeping the line open? What a big shame.

I am a long-standing member of Railfuture.

Bob Cowley
swanagerail353@gmail.com

CrossCountry gripe

Not only are CrossCountry trains packed out, usually with standing passengers (*Railwatch* 180), frequently there is no catering on the train and seat reservations do not always show. CrossCountry tickets are also very expensive.

We travel from Leeds to Bristol and there are no cheap advance tickets and the regular fare is much more than some comparable operators. For instance, tickets to London by LNER, about the same distance, can

be obtained for not much more than a third of the price. CrossCountry must be coining it!

Martin Wright
Chevin Edge, Leeds Road,
Pool in Wharfedale, Otley
LS21 3BR

CrossCountry hope

I could not agree more with previous correspondents about CrossCountry. It is ridiculous to have a three-coach train (it is four but one is first class) connecting so many large cities between Manchester and Bournemouth or Newcastle and Plymouth.

Trains are always overcrowded, with many passengers making local trips. If I want to go from Wolverhampton to Bournemouth or Exeter, I will always go via London. It is probably cheaper and so much more comfortable.

One of the reasons put forward for High Speed Two is full capacity on the West Coast main line. But how much of that traffic would go on CrossCountry routes, if they were better served?

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West of England upturn

The Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users Group, our affiliated group for the West of England line, reports that performance is steadily improving. Some of the credit for this can be



Tony Smale

attributed to the appointment of a dedicated manager for the line, Natalie Edwards, who has been tasked with bringing together operations, infrastructure and various stakeholders with a view to arresting the failures of recent years.

A particular complaint has been overcrowding on trains west of Salisbury, so an increase to six-car formations for most services has been well received. Another gripe is the lack of catering on journeys of three hours or more, and line users wish Natalie well as she searches for an innovative solution which makes financial sense.

The route between Basingstoke and Exeter is unelectrified and largely single track. SERUG has been actively engaged with rail managers in the various discussions, looking long term at what frequency improvements could be achieved with additional passing loops.

Rail managers are also considering options for a low-carbon replacement of the ageing fleet of diesel trains. One idea being considered is retro-fitting redundant class 450 "third-rail" electric units with batteries, although the distance west from Basingstoke may be too great to cover on battery power without top-up charging via electrified sections and during their layovers at Exeter.

Pier repairs

Yet again, part of Island line on the Isle of Wight is closed until May next year for further repairs to Ryde pier. The new 40-minute interval service that ran for three months in the summer over the full length of the line to Ryde Pier Head had been well-received, but now we are back to Island line trains running a half-hourly service between Shanklin and Ryde Esplanade, with a replacement minibus service along the pier. Following this closure, Railfuture has been promised that the pier will be good for 60 years, but with sea-level rise we are not convinced, especially as trains now have to stop running whenever there are exceptionally high tides or rough weather.

Reopening success

The first anniversary of the opening of Green Park station between Basingstoke and Reading was celebrated earlier this year with the news that around 160,000 passenger journeys were recorded, surpassing expectations.

The new station was shortlisted for an award in the small stations category at the National Rail Awards 2024 held in London.

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



Major improvements for Cardiff Valley lines: Platform extensions at Waungron Park and new electrification
Picture by Julian Langston

julian.langston
@railfuturewales.org.uk

Railfuture in the media

Railfuture Wales officers have twice been interviewed by the broadcast media. Bob Saxby told Jason Mohammad for his programme on Radio Wales about the problems passengers are facing. Bob pointed out that Avanti's service on the North Wales main line had suffered many cancellations this year, although reliability had improved recently. The two-car Transport for Wales service along the same line can get very crowded when the preceding five-car Avanti service has been cancelled. Bob pointed out how safe rail travel is and drew attention to Railfuture-backed proposals to reopen the line between Bangor and Caernarfon – Welsh government policy for the past 10 years.



Julian Langston



Picture: Julian Langston

Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury (above) was interviewed for the Sky News Breakfast Programme live from Cardiff Bay station about the forthcoming timetable changes on the Cardiff Valley lines, the biggest improvement for decades. Major infrastructure work, including partial electrification, redoubling of singled lines, and new and lengthened platforms, has been disruptive. The line to Treherbert was closed for nine months, but new rolling stock is appearing and the first electric trains should be running by now. Ultimately, there will be four trains an hour along the four major Valleys lines into Cardiff.

Railfuture welcome for new MPs

With 13 of Wales's 32 MPs new to the job, Railfuture in Wales is writing to the newcomers, pointing out that Railfuture members have a wealth of railway knowledge and can suggest practical solutions to problems. We have invited them to meet us individually.

GWR annual stakeholder conference

Railfuture was represented when more than 280 members of community rail partnerships, councils, industry and campaigners gathered in

Swindon's STEAM museum. Keynote speaker, Lord Hendy of Network Rail (now rail minister in the new Labour government), apologised for the recent infrastructure failures on the Paddington approaches and outlined organisational changes NR had made to recover from these and prevent recurrences. Regarding the structure of GWR, he said NR should become just the infrastructure department within Great British Railways rather than the guiding mind or a stand-alone body, as otherwise the focus will be on infrastructure instead of delivering customer demands. He also said efficient working means there should be fewer organisations involved and that the industry should be more regionally focussed.

Great Western Railway chief executive Mark Hopwood said all new drivers since 2016 are on seven-day-a-week contracts. As older drivers retire, seven-day working will become the norm, slowly replacing overtime working at weekends.

Project Churchward is GWR's plan for new trains to allow the fleet "to be standardised", minimise diesel operation and eliminate Sprinters. TFW's 26 class 175 (Coradias) could be used in the short term to replace the Castle HSTs and class 150s. GWR appreciates the need for spare trains so that failures do not trigger cancellations and is lobbying the Department for Transport for sufficient stock.

Old Oak Common closure plans

GWR's plans for when all lines into Paddington are closed for Old Oak Common station construction later this year were also on view at the conference. On 17 November and 27-29 December, there will be no services into Paddington. Further blockades are expected over the coming years. Two trains per hour, one from South Wales and one from the South West, will run to Euston. Other services will run to Reading (on 17 November) or Ealing Broadway (27-29 December). Trains from Cheltenham and Gloucester will terminate at Swindon. Railfuture is pleased that Euston is being used instead of Waterloo which would have taken an additional 45 minutes to reach. Euston will take just 15 minutes more. Continuing to run one train per hour from South Wales to a London terminus is also welcome.

Farewell to campaigner Lindon

Railfuture was shocked and saddened to learn of the recent death of rail activist Lindon Stone (right), who had only recently stood down from serving as a long-standing member of the Railfuture Wales committee. Our thoughts are with his family.



www.railfuturewales.org.uk
X @RailfutureWales

London's Cinderella suburban train service

By Graham Larkbey

Chiltern Railways does a lot of things very well, which makes its London suburban service all the more disappointing in contrast.

Apart from Wembley Stadium, typical daytime frequencies at stations between Marylebone and Gerrards Cross are hourly at best, with numerous irregularities and seemingly random gaps.

Bafflingly and confusingly, the offpeak service at both West and South Ruislip is hourly in one direction but two-hourly in the other. South Ruislip has no trains at all to London between 1447 and 1651, followed by three within the next hour.

After sustained campaigning by London Travelwatch, Sudbury Hill Harrow finally had its all-day offpeak service restored in 2004 for the first time in 40 years – but it still has no service after mid-evening, and nothing at all at weekends and on Bank Holidays.

Even the former Metropolitan route via Amersham is not immune, with its basic half-hourly service dropping down unexpectedly to hourly for part of the afternoon.

Worst off by far, however, are the long-suffering users – and would-be users – of Sudbury & Harrow Road station in North West London.

Despite its prominent town-centre location on a busy main road in a populous and developing suburb, all they get are four trains to London in the morning and four back in the evening, Mondays to Fridays only.

Moreover, this supposedly "rush-hours-only" service has a huge gap between the 0642 and the 0810, then nothing until 0912 – not much use for people going to work. And that's it – no trains for over six hours during the day, and nothing at all at weekends.

Such a pitiful service bears little or no relation to post-Covid travel



WISHING AND HOPING: Renu Kaul, chair of Sudbury Town Residents Association (centre) with association members at Sudbury & Harrow Road station. Though the occupants of the new flats in the background overlook the station, its minimal service renders it virtually useless to them
Picture: STRA

patterns or needs in 2024, and it has actually got worse since privatisation.

Local people are naturally deeply unhappy about this situation, and Sudbury Town Residents Association is in the forefront of the campaign for change.

Chiltern Railways, however, refuses to make even modest improvements to the service, replying that they are meeting the level required by the Department for Transport and that people have the Piccadilly line at Sudbury Town as an alternative.

But that route is circuitous and much slower, and is no use for

getting to destinations outside London such as High Wycombe, Bicester, Oxford and Birmingham, to which trains hurtle through Sudbury all day without stopping. Chiltern also says there is limited capacity on a two-track railway – but other operators with similar constraints manage to give all their stations an acceptable all-day service level.

Moreover, if Chiltern lengthened the short platforms at the Sudburys from 3.5 cars to four, enabling existing longer trains to call there, they could both improve their service and help themselves operationally by removing the need to clog up precious peak-time

capacity with the short trains they currently have to run in order to serve them. However, such enhancements depend on the will to make them happen, and there is a widespread belief that Chiltern has no interest in their suburban stations or their users, preferring instead to focus on the more lucrative longer-distance traffic to/from stations further out.

Local campaigners will be keeping up the pressure, and are hoping that the new government will start to change attitudes and policies to the benefit of all rail users – however far they are travelling or how much they are spending.

www.stra.org.uk

Labour told to double rail share in 10 years

Ambitious proposals to double rail's modal share were unveiled within weeks of Labour winning the general election in July.

The "greener, faster, cheaper" proposals arise from a review the party commissioned from former Siemens chief executive Jurgen Maier eight months ago.

A far-reaching green transport infrastructure plan is also recommended for the next 50 years, to get over the short-term thinking previously dictated by five-year spells of government.

The Transport Strategy for England report called for rail's modal share to be doubled within a decade and journeys by public transport, walking and cycling to be increased.

Specific projects mentioned in the review included the need to enhance the rail network between England and Scotland, increase capacity between Manchester and Birmingham

and improving connectivity between the east and west Midlands of England.

Transport secretary Louise Haigh said the review will help inform the new government's thinking.

She added: "Turbocharging delivery of transport projects will grow the economy in every corner of the country, and deliver the transport network that modern Britain needs."

Mr Maier was aided in the review by the Urban Transport Group and consultants Arup.

Projects must be delivered 25% faster than before and costs must be cut by 20% by devolving more projects to the regions, with the Treasury learning how to be open about harnessing the benefits of private investment, while taking account of passengers' and workforce views.

Mr Maier said: "The chop and change approach to transport policy has created raised costs, and

held back investment. We must set the UK on a new course."

Jason Prince of the Urban Transport Group said: "Good urban transport plays a vital part in creating a stronger, greener, and fairer economy. We look forward to working with government to realise our shared ambitions."

The review recommends that the British Infrastructure Council, set up by the then shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves in November last year, should report to Ms Haigh before the end of the year what needs to be done.

The independent Rail and Urban Transport Review was established in December 2023 by the Labour party while still in opposition.

■ Three weeks after winning the general election in July, prime minister Sir Keir Starmer appointed Mr Maier as chair of the new state-owned company GB Energy.

My commuter rail trips from Kensington to Washington DC AGM 2024 Edinburgh



By Trevor Jones
htjones.raildev@gmail.com

I visited my sister Olwen in Kensington, Maryland, an historic leafy outer suburb of Washington DC, in May this year. Olwen lives five minutes walk

from Kensington station which is said to be the second oldest original station building in the USA, proudly dated 1891 on its façade.

Kensington is the second stop out from Washington Union Station on the Brunswick line, part of the Maryland Area Rail Commuter system.

MARC is sponsored by the state of Maryland and trains on the Brunswick line take 17 to 20 minutes from Washington's Union station to Kensington, although 35 to 40 minutes is allowed for inbound trains, presumably including a recovery allowance.

But it has only a weekday commuter service of seven trains into town Monday to Friday from 0545 to 0842 and eight returns from Union station from 1530 to 1905, plus an extra train at 1330 on Fridays.

At other times, it is necessary to take a 20 to 30 minute bus ride to a Metro station or a 10 to 15 minute car ride to a slightly nearer Metro station.

Please note that although I have quoted 24 hour times, the Americans still stick to am and pm times for train timetables.

The standard single fare from Union station bought at a ticket machine with either cash or bank card is six dollars (£4.57).

The fare is the same as the off-peak Metro fare, and both have discounts for pensioners with an appropriate card.

On boarding, you have to check with the conductor where to sit because only one door will be opened at Kensington's short, low platform.

It is a double-track main line, bidirectionally signalled. Although right-hand running is the norm, on one trip the MARC train ran wrong-line for no obvious reason, requiring a safety halt before each station. I presumed this was to allow for passengers rushing across the track when taken by surprise.

Three of these largely local trains are extended for a two-hour journey to Martinsburg in West Virginia, which probably pays MARC for this section of the service.

Washington-Martinsburg is a 74 miles journey and in that 74 miles



Kensington station in Maryland dates back to 1891

Picture: Dr Nigel Logan

there are 13 intermediate stations, and a branch to Frederick with one more intermediate station. Martinsburg is also served by Amtrak as are two other stations. Other MARC trains terminate at Brunswick, and every train calls at most stations, with just one or two missed stops on some trains.

Capitol Limited

Also passing through Kensington is the daily overnight *Capitol Limited*, a Washington-Chicago Amtrak train which I found conveniently timed for a two-night daytime trip inland into the mountains up the Potomac River valley to Cumberland – 145 miles taking about 3.5 hours. There are also many long freight trains.

On the way into Union station on the Metro to catch the 1605 Capitol Limited, the Metro runs inside the main line tracks in a similar way to the London's Jubilee linerunning inside the Metropolitan line in London. I passed two freight trains going out of town and I am quite sure they were the same two trains (same wagons) as Amtrak looped

past by switching to the wrong track for a couple of signal blocks not long before reaching Cumberland, and which were presumably the cause of the half hour late arrival in Cumberland, where I learnt that the hotel by the station I stayed at also hosted Amtrak drivers (or “engineers” in American). The trains evidently changed drivers at Cumberland.

At Washington's Union station, Amtrak thinks it is an airline, with waiting areas and gates, calling passengers forward on to the platform only shortly before departure.

The five-coach double-deck train had a luggage van attached. The rear coach was for seated passengers to Chicago, the next for seated passengers to intermediate stops, then a café/dining car, followed by, I think, a couple of sleepers. All main seating was upstairs but toilets and some seats (primarily for disabled passengers) were downstairs. The conductor gave you a handwritten seat

number on the back of a torn-off portion of a card ticket in return for showing him your home-printed ticket with its QR code as you boarded. As the train was only half full, it was easy to change seats.

At Cumberland, Amtrak had to pull up three times at the very short single platform, once to change drivers, once for sleeping car passengers, and finally for the day coach passengers.

Cumberland station has a small waiting room, toilets, and office, and is opened up only twice a day, for an hour or so each time, around the scheduled times of the Amtrak trains each way.

The morning return departure was a convenient 0932 and the train was actually on time. I had been told it was two hours late a few days before, as freight trains take priority. On the day I travelled, the train lost 15 minutes by some intermediate stops, but was on time into Washington at 1305 giving me a good connection into the Friday 1330 MARC train to Kensington. For



The Capitol Limited which runs from Washington DC to Chicago

Picture: Amtrak



my day in Cumberland, I had booked a heritage railway trip on the Western Maryland Railroad higher into the mountains to the smaller town of Frostburg, a diesel-hauled 1.5 hours ride each way, allowing 1.5 hours at Frostburg. Departure was from Cumberland riverside station about 10 minutes walk from the Amtrak station,



historically a different railway company, at whose booking office I had to exchange my computer-printed ticket for a traditional card ticket with my coach and seat numbers handwritten on it.

“Climbing grades up to 2.8% on the 16-mile trek, the route follows the former Western Maryland Railroad right-of-way, then joins the old Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad”, according to the tourist information.

The line was built with double track but the second track has been replaced by a walking and cycling path, including through the one

tunnel. I noticed a cyclist catching up the train on the journey back down until he had to wait at a level crossing where the path changed sides.

I had time to explore historic Cumberland before the 1130 departure. I visited a riverside cabin preserved from the days of its use by George Washington in his early military days as an officer in the British Army fighting against the French.

I also used Amtrak on a daytrip with Olwen from Washington to Philadelphia, in a single-deck Amtrak regional train. Double-deck coaches would probably not fit the gauge on this line. Faster *Acela* trains have higher fares. As for Cumberland, our pre-printed tickets just specified the trains to use, but this time we were simply invited to choose our own seats. Presumably in crowded trains, which ours were not, you could spend a long time hunting around for a remaining spare seat.

But the ticket did also include a free ride for two stops from Philadelphia's main station along a four-track, mostly underground, regional railway into the city centre. You just showed the barrier staff your Amtrak ticket and they let you

through. The prices of these various return trips (with an over-65 discount on Amtrak), booked for me online by Olwen a week or two in advance were:

Amtrak return ticket to Philadelphia \$51.30 (£39)
Amtrak return ticket to Cumberland \$59.40 (£45)
Frostburg Flyer ticket \$58 (£44)
Total \$168.70 (£128)

Another day trip I had with Olwen was to historic waterside Alexandria near the end of the Metro, downstream south-west from Washington DC, and across the Potomac River.

We returned by ferry up the Potomac estuary, making quite a nice day out.

Alexandria is also the first stop on Amtrak trains going south from DC, with the Amtrak station alongside the Metro station, but at a lower level and with no obvious easier interchange than going out of one station and round under both railways via the road.

Foggy Bottom

During my visit to the USA, I used Washington's Silver line to visit “Foggy Bottom” station. It's not far from the White House.

The Railfuture AGM took place in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July.

Railfuture president Christian Wolmar addressed the AGM via Zoom. He said that after a government with a prime minister and a transport secretary who appeared hostile to rail and over-friendly to motorists, there was hope that Labour would be different.

Phil Smart said that the new government's appointment of Lord Hendy as rail minister was a vote of confidence in rail, adding: “He knows more about rail than the civil servants advising him.”

Finance director Jerry Alderson paid tribute to the volunteers who help Railfuture function, giving a special mention to David Harby, Lloyd Butler and Trevor Davies.

He said direct debits were beginning to work for Railfuture but the organisation made an operational loss every year so “we need donations and bequests”.

Nine days after being elected MP for Edinburgh South West, Dr Scott Arthur was our first guest speaker.

For two years he has been convener of the transport and environment committee of Edinburgh City Council and is proud of the city's fantastic public transport network, even though it does not have a substantial urban rail network, unlike Glasgow. He said there was complete agreement in the city that the South Suburban rail line should be reopened for passengers.

People want fewer cars everywhere in the city.

Both Edinburgh's publicly owned trams and buses operate without subsidy and Waverley is one of the busiest stations in the UK.

Public transport accounts for 40% of all trips and 45% of distance, and every cross section of society uses public transport, so there is no stigma attached to its use.

The second speaker was Dr George Hazel, a director of E-Rail which specialises in obtaining funding for public transport schemes through land value capture.

He said that when a rail station opens, property values go up within 15 kilometres but society needs to capture a share of that added value to fund further transport improvements.

Glasgow Crossrail was cited as a relatively modest project but which would have wide-ranging implications for increased value into Ayrshire and other areas.

Climate is right to reverse the cycle of decline

By Ralph Barker

The forerunner of the Glasgow and South Western Railway built its line to Ayr at the early date of 1840.

From Elderslie Junction, near Paisley, on that Ayr line a long branch was built between 1864 and 1869 to Greenock Princes Pier to gain access to the Clyde shipping services.

The line passed through stations at Linwood South, Bridge of Weir and Kilmacolm.

There was little local passenger traffic beyond Kilmacolm and this section was closed, reopened and closed again by 1983.

Local passenger services continued as far as Kilmacolm until 10 January 1983. A melancholy photo of the last train was published in *The Glasgow Herald*. Closure was the future for those local passenger services that had managed to survive Beeching.

A new chair of Strathclyde Region Transport, Malcolm Waugh, bemoaned that his first real task was to complete the closure of the Kilmacolm line.

He vowed this would be the last line to close and, unlike the normal run of politicians, effectively kept to his promise and started a series of passenger rail reopenings. Kilmacolm was not one of them.

The trackbed was sold to a major cycling



The train to Glasgow from Kilmacolm station in 1979

Picture: Peter Whatley

organisation for a nominal sum but rumour had it that a deal had been made to build over the quite extensive but centrally placed Bridge of Weir station site.

The cycle track would skirt round the outside of the site but the houses would block forever any chance of reopening the line.

However, the new Scottish parliament had introduced planning guidance in the shape of SPPG17 to prevent adverse development and the (original) Strathclyde Passenger Transport used this guidance to keep the route safe.

Those environmental ideals were lost with the re-establishment of the Scottish government, and housing developers have started nibbling away at the trackbed. Local campaigners and

the council has tried to protect the route but it seems that Scottish government overruled this protection in favour of house building, even though the recent coalition in government were introducing the NPF4 guidance to protect essential routes.

Presently, the new Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is relying on a “Metro” for a future transport system. We do not know if this Metro will be modern trains, trams, guided buses or even monorails but net zero and economic inclusion will never be achieved without a more comprehensive rail network and this surely must include the Kilmacolm route.

Perhaps there should be a government warning to house buyers that railway lines can reopen as well as close?

Both the Airdrie-Bathgate Line and Borders Railway involved demolitions of quite new houses. Have lessons been learned?

There are always the detractors. The Kilmacolm line was latterly associated with the Paisley Canal Line which was closed, then partly reopened (Malcolm Waugh!) but with a final section already badly built over.

The Kilmacolm line is completely independent of the Canal line which was first built in 1885. One anti-argument is that there is no capacity on existing lines. Railway operations in the rest of the world would laugh their heads off at that.

Level up rail to improve access

By Graham Collett

Railfuture Accessibility Champion



What is the issue with level boarding?

It sounds simple. Just make every train so that passengers can walk straight on or off. This is easier said than done. **Why?** Because platforms and train floors can vary in height. Boarding or alighting usually also involves crossing a gap between the platform and the train (the stepping distance or offset). In some cases this can be quite wide, especially if the station or platform is on a curve, as at York. This causes great difficulty for elderly passengers or anyone with a disability or with luggage or a pushchair. In some cases, it deters potential travellers from going by rail.

PTI – the platform to train interface

This term is used to describe the whole situation with train boarding or alighting, used by the Rail Safety and Standards Board which has done quite a lot of work on it. It

found that the risk to passengers at the PTI is equivalent to nearly 13 fatalities each year and 48% of the total passenger fatality risk on the mainline railway network.

<https://www.rssb.co.uk/about-rssb/key-industry-topics/platform-train-interface>

The RSSB gives a current “standard” platform height as 915mm above rail level and train floors are usually higher than this.

<https://www.rssb.co.uk/-/media/Project/RSSB/RssbWebsite/Documents/RegisteredStandards/2022/05/11/07/11/GIRT7020-Iss-2.pdf>

Progress?

To address the issue on a national basis would require significant work on platforms, be extremely expensive and take many years to complete. Raising or lowering platforms at some stations may require more significant work to ensure sufficient clearance for freight trains.

However, the new Stadler FLIRT trains now used in East Anglia, South Wales,, on Merseyrail, and being introduced on Newcastle Metro, have a sliding step and provide (in my opinion) the best solution available at present. They



THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD: Journalist Peter Lazenby heads home to Todmorden on the Wigan to Leeds train from Salford Central station in 2022, where the boarding is certainly not level

overcome the stepping distance, but platform heights can still be an issue. Merseyrail has done work on its stations to overcome this. It is

less of an issue at the stations served by Greater Anglia.

Unfortunately, many modern trains – and even those just coming into service – do not appear to have taken account of the PTI issue, despite pressure from Railfuture and rail user groups. We accept that because some trains have to operate services which call at stations with platforms of varying heights, it is not an easy design challenge and it may not be possible in all cases without work to alter platform heights.

New train orders – an opportunity not to be missed

Several operators are expected to seek new trains to replace older units in the next few years – notably LNER, Northern, TransPennine Express, SouthEastern, Chiltern and Great Western. All these operators are either already under government ownership or will become so in the next few years under the new government’s Public Ownership Bill.

It is essential that the specifications for their new trains include level boarding

‘Abject failure’ to cater for people with disabilities

Train driver Julian Vaughan, who is chair of the Bedfordshire Rail Access Network, believes that the industry has abjectly failed to deliver for people with disabilities.

He analysed evidence given to the House of Commons public accounts committee in April and concluded: “I was unimpressed by the evidence from all the witnesses to the committee and I have little confidence that they are committed to either an accessible rail network or a fully staffed railway.

“It is very easy to say that accessibility is a top priority, although they were even pretty equivocal about that, but it is actions, not words that disabled people need from those in the rail industry. We have all waited long enough.”

He had listened to Dame Bernadette Kelly, permanent secretary at the Department for Transport, Conrad Bailey, director general, rail strategy and service group at the DfT, Andrew Haines, chief executive of Network Rail and Anit Chandarana, interim director general of rail infrastructure at the DfT.

You can read more of Julian’s comments at <https://julianvaughan.blog/2024/04/30/actions-not-words-needed-on-rail-accessibility/>

Fellow Bedfordshire campaigner Ina Cook believes it is time to approach MPs to ask them whether they think that the railway really should be made fully accessible, which includes level access into the station, on to the platform and also level access on to the train. He says these issues have been ignored for too long and there is now little excuse because the technology exists to deal with platforms and trains of varying heights and widths. He said: “I would



Young people from North East Sight Matters, a Newcastle upon Tyne charity, enjoyed a day-out experience to York with TransPennine Express. The charity’s Penny Dane said: “Some of the sight-impaired young people mentioned how they felt more confident about train travel now they had experienced it. Younger children were just so excited to be on this outing.”

hope that the situation will change with the new Labour government, which should recognise the railway network is for everybody.”

Referring to the system of booking travel assistance, Ian said: “While I applaud the principle of making rail travel more accessible, I am dismayed that people with mobility issues still have to book assistance to travel.

“What happens if the traveller is late or unable to arrive at the time booked, say when a hospital appointment runs over or just forgot the time? Any other traveller would be able to travel as and when, so why should we have to have the pressure of getting to the station at a particular time?” In a shocking video, LNER revealed how

Yorkshire

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West Yorkshire

Railfuture Yorkshire officers living in West Yorkshire held a meeting in August with Mick Sasse, the rail lead for West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The main item on the agenda was the need for two trains an hour all day at the large commuter villages between Huddersfield and Stalybridge. Also discussed:

- The need for both Calder Valley routes (via Bradford Interchange and via Brighouse) between Leeds and Manchester to be electrified
- The interior specification of Northern’s expected new trains, especially the need for two toilets per unit and the need for end-of-unit corridor connections
- The station situation in Bradford
- The status of the four planned new stations in West Yorkshire.

The need for a follow-up meeting in October with the authority’s transport committee chair was agreed.

Access hopes at two stations

Railfuture has been called in to advise Arcadis, which is investigating the impact of proposed changes at Marsden and Slaithwaite aimed at improving accessibility. A meeting was held with Arcadis to consider the plans for Slaithwaite, and Railfuture Yorkshire’s Graham Collett, together with representatives of two disabled person’s groups, provided

detailed comments. The proposal to limit access to the station to the north side was challenged and the outcome is awaited. A separate meeting to consider Marsden is planned.

York station

Work continues on the York Central development, involving a new station entrance to the west side of York station. David Skaith, mayor of the new York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority, and his transport team are keen to expand the station to cope with increasing demand.

A meeting is being arranged with the mayor’s rail officer to put forward Railfuture’s priorities for York and North Yorkshire.

TransPennine boosts timetable

Railfuture welcomes news from TransPennine Express that it will restore a four-trains-per-hour service between Leeds and Manchester Victoria from December. TPE had temporarily reduced the timetable to three-trains-per-hour to provide a more robust timetable in the face of ongoing performance issues and a significant backlog in training.

The reinstated service will bring a welcome introduction of easy-to-remember clockface departures from both Leeds and Manchester Victoria.

The Hull–Liverpool service will for the first time see some services operated by class 802 Nova 1 electric bimode trains, while others will still be operated by diesel class



Bridlington’s Barrow Boy statue flanked by mayor Rick Arrand and artist Stephen Carvill Picture: Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership

Bridlington Barrow Boy unveiled

The Barrow Boy statue at Bridlington station, previewed in Railwatch 178 in December 2023, was unveiled in July by Mayor Rick Arrand. The statue was commissioned by the Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership, designed and created by local sculptor Stephen Carvill, and funded and supported by Yorkshire Coast Business Improvement District, the Community Rail Network, Bridlington Town Council, Northern Rail and the local community rail partnership.

In the 1950s and 60s barrow boys and girls waited on platforms to transport holidaymakers’ luggage to hotels and guesthouses.

185s. Manchester Victoria–Scarborough trains and the Manchester–York via Castleford service will increase in frequency from approximately two-hourly to hourly. The hourly stopping service on the Leeds–Huddersfield route will become a shared operation between Northern and TPE but TPE

states there will be a 12% increase in the number of seats provided per day.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch

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

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

Rail freight saves around 32,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually by replacing lorry movements

railwatch October 2024 15

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Yorkshire Dales breakthrough
Railfuture congratulates train operator Northern for introducing a brand-new all-year Saturday service linking Greater Manchester with Ribblesdale on the Settle-Carlisle line. Two Saturday trains operate from Rochdale, Manchester Victoria, Bolton and Blackburn, through the Ribble Valley to Clitheroe where normal services stop. The Yorkshire Dales Explorer goes beyond Clitheroe to Hellfield, Settle, Horton-in-Ribblesdale and Ribbleshead. The Explorer is aimed at ramblers visiting the Yorkshire Dales who lost their summer Sunday DalesRail service at the end of 2022.

The new Explorer has also allowed people from North Yorkshire and Lancashire to travel into Greater Manchester. The timings allow for a two-hour visit to Manchester. The service began in June and is being well patronised, with over 70 regularly on the morning train leaving Clitheroe for the Dales. The morning working into Manchester has been building patronage and had grown to over 50 in August travelling from Settle and Hellfield, with many passengers heading for Clitheroe to sample the town's restaurants, pubs and shops.

One passenger from Ribbleshead used the new service to travel to Manchester to catch a flight home to Australia.

Walkers from Manchester can have a day in the Dales, arriving at Ribbleshead at 1019, with a return at 1805. Dales travellers going the other way can have a four-hour afternoon out in Clitheroe.

There are also good connections for people from Manchester to travel further up the Settle-Carlisle line and get back home on the Explorer which leaves Ribbleshead at 1726.

Volunteers from the Settle-Carlisle Friends serve refreshments at the Ribbleshead station cafe.

Lancashire Rail Ramblers organise guided walks, with a well-organised programme of walks of varying length and difficulty from the various S&C stations.

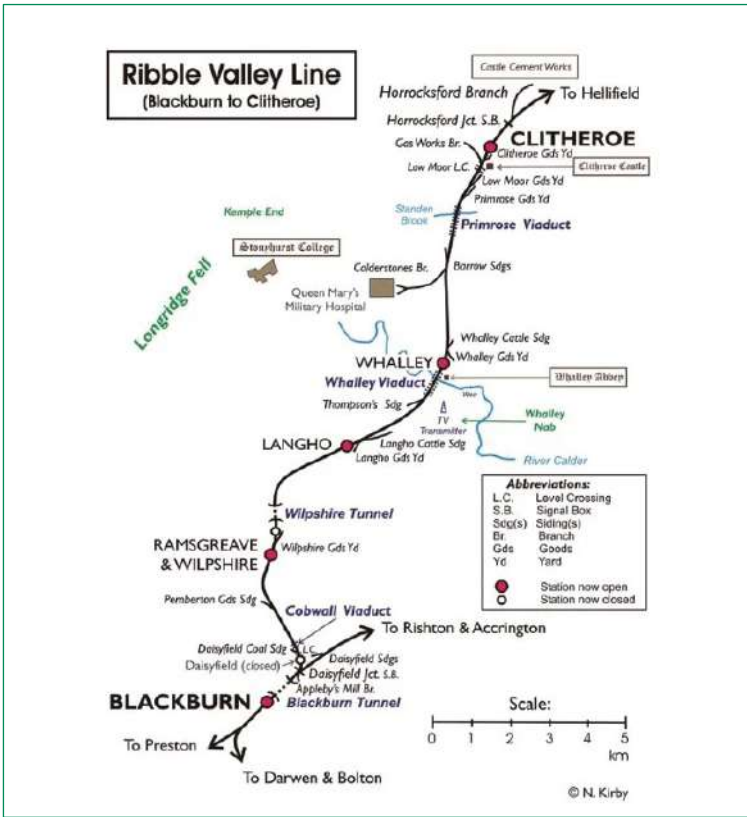
This year also sees the 30th anniversary of the reintroduction of a regular passenger service on the Ribble Valley Line between Clitheroe and Blackburn, with the service running through to Bolton and Manchester, and more recently Rochdale.

The Ribble Valley line lost its passenger service in September 1962 and became freight-only – block cement trains ran between Clitheroe Ribble Cement works and Gunnie yard, Glasgow. The 1989 reprieve of the Settle-Carlisle route spurred on Ribble Valley Rail, which was formed in 1986. With the co-operation of the then Regional Railways, British Rail and other



RIBBLEHEAD: Passengers from the new Yorkshire Dales Explorer

Picture: Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line official photographer



authorities, a basic midweek service was reintroduced on a trial basis in 1994. The service was given a seven-year target to gradually build passenger numbers, but such was its success that the target was reached in the first year!

Since then, steady enhancements have been made – an hourly service, the service provision lengthened both earlier and later, an hourly Sunday service added, platforms lengthened and longer trains. There is also increased freight traffic, and various steam and diesel-hauled heritage special trains both mid-week and on Saturdays.

A turn-back bay platform at Rochdale was built specially to allow the service to terminate there, to alleviate congestion at Manchester Victoria.

Peter Eastham, the honorary chairman of Ribble Valley Rail, said: “Thirty years on, Ribble Valley Rail, now the line’s user group, continues to honour a pledge it made in 1994, that if the service was reinstated and the four stations of Wilpshire (now RamsGreave & Wilpshire), Langho, Whalley and Clitheroe were rebuilt, volunteers would help maintain them on a regular basis.”

CrossCountry timetable cuts
Less than a year after the then transport secretary Mark Harper extended Arriva’s CrossCountry franchise for four years with the option for it to be extended again to 2031, the train operator has cut services between Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham New Street. For three months until November 2024, CrossCountry is introducing “a temporary reduction

to our timetable” because of driver shortages.

Rail station for Baltic Triangle
Public consultation on building a £100 million new station for Liverpool Baltic ended in August. Earlier, a virtual reality walkthrough was issued showing what the station will look like once built in 2027.

The Baltic Triangle has undergone huge redevelopment, becoming home to 350 creative and digital businesses, with over 1,000 flats built since 2012 and plans for at least 3,000 more.

Steve Rotheram, mayor of the Liverpool City Region, said: “It is important that people can enjoy a reliable, accessible, cheap and integrated public transport network that makes getting around an easy, untroubled experience.

“Our plans for Liverpool Baltic station demonstrate our ambitions for the future of our network.

“This station will be located in an area that is growing in popularity, and this holds massive potential in driving economic growth in and around the Baltic.

“Liverpool Baltic is the first of many new stations – part of my commitment to ‘Merseyrail for All’, connecting communities not currently connected by the rail network to harness growth and opportunities in our area.”

Extending and improving public transport is aimed at encouraging more people to get out of their cars, in line with the mayor’s target of reaching net zero by 2035.

Mayor Rotheram has also pledged to build three new stations at Daresbury in Halton, Woodchurch on Wirral and Carr Mill in St Helens.

Manchester-London service
Three days before the general election, rail operator London Northwestern Railway announced that it wanted to run new train services between Manchester, the West Midlands and London Euston, providing an alternative to Avanti West Coast.

It plans to extend its existing services between London Euston and Crewe to Manchester Victoria, and its current services between Stafford and Crewe to Manchester Airport.

It would create new direct links from Rugeley, Lichfield, Tamworth and Atherstone in the West Midlands to Manchester and Warrington, from 2026. It would use brand-new 10-coach class 730 electric trains, which are manufactured in the Midlands by Alstom.

The operator needs approval from the Office for Rail and Road.

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X @RailfutureNWest

Rail freight way to net zero climate win

By Ray King

Network Rail has cut track access charges to encourage more freight to go by rail.

Businesses which want to start using rail will be given free access for six months. It is in line with the Department for Transport’s official policy to encourage modal shift to rail. This is also in line with the UK government’s new freight growth target which calls for a 75% increase in the country’s rail freight industry by 2050 as part of the ambition to reach net zero by then.

“Haulage is very price-sensitive,” said Paul McMahon, Network Rail’s director for planning and regulation.

The offer is estimated to be worth around £1,000 per train. Network Rail is following the example of DP World which is paying customers to switch their containers from dirty roads to clean, green rail, via its rail freight depots at Southampton and Thames Gateway. Rail Freight Group director general Maggie Simpson said: “Many companies are looking to move more freight by rail.” She has called for 60 miles of



DB Cargo UK launched its campaign for modal shift from road to rail at the opening of its £7 million freight terminal in Cricklewood, London

electrification that could enable freight services to switch from diesel straight away.

There is a massive opportunity for freight throughout Britain but particularly on Scotland’s largely single track Far North line from Inverness to Wick and Thurso, considering that the roads are not suitable for lorries.

Lorries plague the A9 road north of Dornoch, especially between Berriedale and Latheron, as well as the A99 from Latheron to Wick, partly because rail desperately needs investment to cope with freight. Nevertheless, the 159-mile

journey of the Tesco train of containers from Mossend, near Glasgow, to Inverness has been a success and may be boosted to two trains a day.

However, some loads, including liquefied natural gas bound for Wick and Thurso, have to transfer to road at Inverness.

Most of the line from Inverness north is single track with only short sections of double track at some stations to allow trains to pass each other in either direction. Friends of the Far North Line have campaigned for years for the six-mile section of double track near

Lentran to be reinstated or, at least, to have a loop long enough for trains to pass without stopping.

South of Inverness, investment is also needed on the Highland main line. Some of the loops, including at Pitlochry, are too short for the 20-wagon Tesco train. There is also a 13-mile section of single track from Pitlochry to Dunkeld, following the removal of the Ballinluig loop 40 years ago.

Also needing investment are the Dundee to Aberdeen line and the Aberdeen to Inverness line.

Liberal Democrat MP Jamie Stone, who was re-elected in July as MP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, is an enthusiastic supporter of rail and the Far North line.

Railfuture will be encouraging the new UK Labour government to take much more action to use rail to help combat climate change.

The rail network benefits 100% of the population by reducing the prices that consumers pay and moving goods more cheaply, with greater fuel efficiency and less pollution.

West Midlands

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Climate change

A meeting was held in July between four Railfuture West Midlands committee members and Denise Wetton, central route director of Network Rail’s north west and central region. As this was our first meeting for years with a Network Rail senior manager, discussions hinged very much around strategy and financing relating to the area. We were impressed by Denise’s grasp of both strategy and detail. Of particular interest was the issue of climate change and its impact on the railways, given a recent embankment collapse near Wellington. Denise believes they have identified all embankments, cuttings and bridges at risk and a programme of consolidation is underway.

New trains win friends for rail

Class 730s are becoming ubiquitous on the Birmingham Cross-City line. Only a few 323s are still in use. Comments on the 196s are mainly very positive. Especially liked are the spacious feel and the full-width connections between carriages, although seat width is thought insufficient. There are still instances of three-car-only trains which cause overcrowding at peak times, particularly of Redditch-bound services.

CrossCountry cuts cause problems

CrossCountry Trains’ temporary reduced timetable until 10 November is causing problems for passengers at certain times and on certain routes. There are no direct trains to Aberdeen, Glasgow or Paignton, and only two per day direct from Reading to York. There are also a few gaps in the regular services, especially between 1615 and 1745 from Reading to



Denise Wetton

Birmingham. While any timetable reduction is most unwelcome, CrossCountry’s attempt to minimise unplanned cancellations is perhaps understandable. While Railfuture cannot support these service reductions, we have to accept that Covid restrictions and the protracted industrial dispute have made it difficult to train sufficient drivers for several years. It is to be hoped CrossCountry can resume normal service in November as promised.

Hospital blues after rail plan axed

There is widespread disappointment among the large Oswestry catchment area, local politicians and the 5,000-plus people who daily have to gain access the Orthopaedic Hospital at Gobowen, at the cancellation of the Gobowen-Oswestry *Restoring Your Railway* scheme. This project had been provisionally awarded “fully funded” status and was about to move to detailed engineering and business case stages. As for the Baschurch station reopening, the local action group is still determined to press ahead with this “no-brainer”.

Telford needs fast electric train service

Much new residential and commercial investment close to Telford Central station has strengthened the case for increased and faster rail services between Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Telford and Shrewsbury, and the need for electrification and raising of line speed to at least 90 mph. Meanwhile, West Midlands Trains services are suffering unacceptable levels of cancellations on its Birmingham-Shrewsbury and Birmingham-Hereford routes. Also suffering are Transport for Wales passengers on the Cardiff-Shrewsbury-Chester/Manchester and Birmingham-Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth/Holyhead routes. These latter are still suffering poor timekeeping, short-forming and gross overcrowding due mainly to the extreme unreliability of the new class 197s, with frequent mechanical and

software failures, leading to door operation problems, toilets locking themselves out of use, and delays while train crew phone technical support for advice.

Support for Shrewsbury-London link

There is continuing strong local support for the “new” Wrexham, Shropshire & Midlands Railway’s proposal, especially following the withdrawal of the last remaining once-a-day Avanti West Coast service through Shrewsbury-London (and return). It is essential that the Office of Rail and Road is persuaded of the merits of WSMR’s application to operate class 222s at 60 mph over Birmingham’s Sutton Park freight line.

New MPs with pro-rail credentials

One bright spot is that the newly elected MPs for Shrewsbury, Telford, and North Herefordshire are all far more pro-rail than their predecessors. Also welcome is the re-election of the sitting MP for North Shropshire

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

Lincolnshire

Free copies of *Railwatch* back numbers were handed out in August at the open-air Helpringham Feast where organisers offered Railfuture member Graham Lilley a large stand for free when he explained to them the dire straits of local transport – bad roads, a rail station closed since the 1960s and no bus service.

People who read back issues of *Railwatch* on the spot gasped in amazement at the cost figures mentioned for reopening a station or constructing a new one. Some asked Graham for copies of his publicity material to spread the word. His conclusion after the event: Thank you, Helpringham!

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

East Anglia

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Brandon Station restoration edges forward

Brandon is a small town of some 9,225 residents on the Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire borders. It has had a station since 1845, when the current buildings alongside the eastbound platform were erected. Trains between Cambridge, Ely and Norwich have called there ever since. Today, they do so at least every hour, eastbound to Norwich, westbound to Cambridge just 30 minutes away. Many start and finish their journeys at Stansted Airport. It is a very good service, provided by excellent bimode trains and the number of users has risen steadily as a result. Even the adjacent goods yard is still full of railway activity, as it hosts several train loads of aggregates for unloading, storage and distribution each week.

In 1978, Brandon became an unstaffed station, so its fine range of buildings on the eastbound platform began their slow descent to the pitiful state they are in today. The buildings were so decrepit that the train operator Greater Anglia decided to demolish them.

But local people cherish their historical (and often historic) buildings however dilapidated they have become. At the last minute a group of them got the building listed. Obviously, the train operator was annoyed and frustrated. Of course, no money was available to restore the listed building and the deterioration continued to the point GA had to take dramatic action to make it safe for users. The entire building was encased in a huge scaffolding cage and wrapped in scaffold planks and plastic sheeting.

With something now having to be done to revive the building for future generations of the local community, Railfuture encouraged all parties to forget past arguments and work together to obtain the necessary funding from as many places as possible.

We are pleased to report that parties came together on Friday 14 June when the Railway Heritage Trust organised a public meeting at Brandon's St Peter's church hall. Over 100 people attended, plus 15 others at the "top table" making presentations from Greater Anglia, the Railway Heritage Trust, SAVE Britain's Heritage, Historic Suffolk, West Suffolk District Council, Friends of Brandon Station, Breckland District Council and Brandon Town Council. Representatives from each organisation spoke to the meeting. The RHT representative revealed that the 1845 station building is indeed very significant architecturally as it was designed by



Brandon's historic station while in the care of British Railways in the 1960s Picture: D Norton
Inset: Decrepit and covered up with scaffolding

John Thomas, a very important sculptor. As well as stations, Mr Thomas produced many pieces of work scattered about the Houses of Parliament, the lions that guard the railway bridge over the Menai Straits and the significant Somerleyton Hall. Brandon station is thus a nationally important work of early railway architecture.

The upshot of the meeting was that the chair of Historic Suffolk agreed to form a new committee to produce a list of uses for any restored building and continue to find funding sources for the restoration, which GA puts at up to £4 million.

The committee will include representatives of Brandon Town Council, Greater Anglia, the Railway Heritage Trust, SAVE Britain's Heritage, West Suffolk District Council and Friends of Brandon station. To voice the interest of the users of Brandon station, Railfuture East Anglia wants to be represented too.

Having an end-use in mind for the building is important. Bearing in mind the location of Brandon in the midst of unique Breckland landscapes, forests, nearby neolithic flint mines at Grime Graves and bird reserves, something to do with tourism would probably be the best use. We would add that with the excellent train service to Cambridge and Stansted Airport, plus an excellently restored building, it can now be promoted as a good railhead for the huge areas of mid Norfolk through which the adjacent A1065 trunk road passes en route to Swaffham, Fakenham and their districts.

Campaign success for Stansted bus

Some good news surfaces from a long-running Railfuture East Anglia campaign. The rail industry will now provide an hourly direct rail replacement bus from Cambridge to Stansted Airport during the frequent line closures for the construction of Cambridge South station and resignalling. The existing rail replacement bus

has several two-hour gaps, replicating the cost-cutting gaps in CrossCountry's Birmingham-Stansted service, which are due to be reinstated to hourly in May next year. Greater Anglia fills these gaps with its Norwich-Stansted service but did not do this in a realistic way for the bus service.

Railfuture East Anglia approached Greater Anglia, CrossCountry, the Department for Transport, the Office of Rail and Road, Transport Focus and the local MP, initially receiving a consistent response that the service was "compliant with their contractual obligations."

However, this was clearly not in the interests of passengers, so continued pressure from Railfuture, which was able to rally support from Transport Focus, eventually led to a change of heart.

Greater Anglia agreed with CrossCountry that, from the engineering work possession in September, it will operate an hourly bus service from Cambridge to Stansted Airport at weekends – just what Railfuture had asked for. We look forward to future improvements to the service in 2025.

Pub crawl

Visiting a village pub by train can make the journey as enjoyable as the destination. Working with the Visit South Cambs website <https://visitsouthcambs.co.uk/>, the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership has developed a Rail and Ale Trail for stations across south Cambridgeshire. The guide features maps and descriptions of 16 great village pubs – all accessible within 35 minutes' walk from five rural stations in South Cambridgeshire: Foxton station for the White Horse, Shepreth station for the Plough and Green Man and the Royal Oak in Barrington, Meldreth station for the British Queen and the Dolphin, Black Horse in Melbourn, Shelford station for the Plough and Square & Compasses, Three Horseshoes and Rose in Stapleford, Whittlesford Parkway station for the Red Lion, Tickell Arms and Bees in the Wall and the John Barleycorn and Plough in Duxford. Most offer great food, and all have gardens or outdoor spaces to enjoy.

The booklet is available from all the pubs listed in the guide, and can be downloaded from the MSFCRP website, or viewed there as a flip book <https://meldrethsheprethfoxtonrail.org.uk/rail-and-ale-trail/>.

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Northern Devon hive of activity

Rail campaigner Tim Steer was invited to be a columnist for the *North Devon Gazette* in April. In his first article *From railway legacy to community advocacy*, he introduced himself as the latest in his family's long line of historical association with the local railways, leading into the ACE Rail campaign and its subsequent affiliation with Railfuture. Tim is also one of three directors of the Bideford Railway Heritage Centre based at the former Bideford station and also cares for the listed Instow signal box. He has contributed ten fortnightly articles in his first five months, with one title being *Social media an unsatisfactory platform to achieve change*. There has been a steady flow of other media coverage of rail campaigning in northern Devon associated with Railfuture in various other outlets such as *Devon Live* and the *North Devon Journal*.

Rail-Mindedness Index

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall published research, using the Office of Rail and Road station usage estimates to generate a *Rail-Mindedness Index* for Devon. The index still showed the North Devon (Tarka) line with relatively low station usage per capita of catchment area population, despite record-breaking journey volumes. There is likely to be substantial suppressed demand.

Rail campaigners on TV

BBC South West TV's *Spotlight* programme featured Railfuture-initiated Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance with interviews at the former Bideford station, at Barnstaple station with Tarka Rail Association vice-chair David Northey and ACE Rail campaign founder Tim Steer, and at Exeter St David's station. You can view the TV segments via *Railfuture in the news* on the Railfuture website.

Stakeholder conferences

Railfuture members from around the Great Western Railway network participated in the operator's community rail and stakeholder conference, held at STEAM in Swindon. Campaigners were delighted to see a map of the GWR network with a dotted line from Barnstaple to Bideford and another from Bere Alston to Tavistock (proposed line reinstatements).

Railfuture workshop

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance held a Railfuture-sponsored workshop in Bideford in July for nine stakeholder organisations, seeking ways to modernise and extend services between Exeter and northern Devon. The workshop included regional body Peninsula Transport and discussed how its strategic investment plan can incorporate



ACE Rail Campaign's Tim Steer with newly elected MP for North Devon Ian Roome who was able to inspect Railfuture's new publicity material at the five-day Barnstaple RailFest in August, held to mark the 170th anniversary of its first railway station, Barnstaple Junction

elements of the Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme.

Railwatch at anniversary

Copies of the latest *Railwatch* were taken to an exhibition in Ilfracombe as the town marked the 150th anniversary of the railway.

Backing for railway alliance

A unanimous committee vote backed Torridge District Council's earlier decision to join the Railfuture-initiated Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

Railfuture provides support

Railfuture's directors ratified earlier decisions that the Railfuture Fighting Fund should provide support for an initial land value capture study, an NDRDA convention next year and making progress towards compiling a strategic outline business case on reinstating rail services to Bideford.

Back to business

Work on reinstating rail services to Bideford should continue unaffected by the new government's cancellation of the *Restoring Your Railways* scheme. BBC South West were told that progress was being made on developing a business case.

Guest speaker Christian Wolmar

Railfuture president and *Railwatch* correspondent Christian Wolmar visited Appledore Book Festival in September in his capacity as a railway historian, author and journalist.



Climate focus for Connect Bude

Railfuture-affiliated Connect Bude has a much-improved website, which highlights the Bude Climate Festival and the Bude-Stratton Heritage Festival. The website also gives welcome prominence to Railfuture's Fighting Fund support for its survey to support the case for improvements to the very infrequent bus links with the hourly train services at Okehampton. It also includes a video of a journey from Okehampton to Bude – by drone!

Bideford rail champions

Railfuture Devon & Cornwall is saddened by the passing of two stalwart champions of bringing rail services back to their community, former Bideford town mayors Peter Christie and David Ratcliff.

New task for rail winner Andrea
Railfuture RUG Award-winning

Devon County Council elected Andrea Davis as new deputy leader in May. She retains her cabinet portfolio for climate change, environment and transport. She has also become chair of the Peninsula Rail Task Force and will play a key role in establishing the new county combined authority of Devon with Torbay. The new Authority will produce a new local transport plan, which is likely to include an updated version of Devon Metro framework and, Railfuture hopes, an aspiration for Bideford to rejoin the rail network.

Metro service boost in May

At least two rail development projects should not be impacted by the government's axing of the *Restoring Your Railways* scheme – the new Okehampton Interchange station and Mid-Cornwall Metro. Work on both has started. The first phase of the Mid-Cornwall Metro, a doubling to hourly of Par-Newquay services, will start in May.

Three rail projects at risk

Three rail development projects are at risk: reinstated Tavistock-Bere Alston-Plymouth services, a re-opened Culmpton station (between Exeter St David's and Tiverton Parkway), and a new Edginswell station (Torbay Gateway) on the Riviera line between Newton Abbot and Torre.

VLR hope for Heathfield

Heathfield Rail Link Association's chair – and Railfuture member – Michael Cooke took a stall to the town's annual summer fayre in July, where he was visited by former and current town mayors. He is also receiving support from Newton Abbot Town Council, and Stover Canal Trust, which is adjacent to the rail line.

The association wants the four-mile line from Newton Abbot to Heathfield, last used by freight seven years ago, to be reopened for passengers.

It is concentrating on retaining platform 9 at Newton Abbot in use. It also wants Network Rail to issue a licence for HRLA members to work on the platform at the former Teigngrace Halt.

A survey has been carried out to examine whether the line could be used for testing the very light rail vehicle being developed in association with Eversholt Rail. The Heathfield branch is one of 200 potential routes which the battery-powered very light rail vehicle could be used on.

25% growth on Tarka line

Railfuture published research in July showing that the first six months of 2024 had an astonishing 25% more journeys on the North Devon (Tarka) line than in the previous best-ever comparable period, which was pre-pandemic (2018). The research is based on GWR data.

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

Severnside

Musicians back rail for Bristol gig

Massive Attack, the trio who originated in Bristol and have starred around the world, performed an outdoor gig in Bristol on 25 August and, as part of their aims to make the event as low-carbon as possible, they offered a special deal for festival goers who travelled there by train.

Five special trains were arranged to get people home, with rail tickets including travel on electric shuttle buses between the venue and Temple Meads. Once at the event, rail travellers had privileged access to a special guest bar and VIP toilets. In addition, for each rail

ticket purchased, Massive Attack fans contributed to the creation of a new climate resilient woodland of oak trees near Taunton in England's south west.

Light rail network plan for Bristol

Professor Mark Barry, the mastermind behind Cardiff's transition from car-based commuting to trams and light rail, is to deliver a lecture at Bristol Royal Infirmary Main Lecture Hall on 8 October 2024 to promote a tram-based system for the Bristol area.

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Fans went by rail to see Massive Attack on stage at Bristol in August

Picture: MATT PUGH

Smash the railway and then rebuild it!

By Christian Wolmar

Given the wealth of books on railways and on military history, it would seem that there are not many stories that remain untold. Yet, by chance I stumbled upon one and it makes me feel that there must be plenty more out there.

The story in my new book, *The Liberation Line*, encompasses both these subjects, linking railways with wartime history. And it is a remarkable tale, made all the more so because somehow it has been ignored by previous writers.

The story starts in 1943 with the initial preparations for Operation Overlord, the Normandy landings which would become the largest-ever amphibious assault. The preparations involved not only the build-up of huge quantities of supplies in what was Fortress Britain, but also a huge softening up exercise of the German occupation of Continental Europe. And one of the key targets was to destroy the railways because of fears that they could be used to reinforce German positions near the landing sites and consequently result in the Allied forces being pushed back into the Channel. This was such a distinct possibility that the supreme commander of the allied forces, General Dwight D Eisenhower, carried on him a letter apologising for the failure of the invasion. Fortunately it never left his inside pocket.

The destruction of the railways was carried out by a two-pronged attack. First, starting as early as the middle of 1943, sabotage by members of the French Resistance, crucially including large numbers of railworkers many of whom were shot in reprisals, resulted in many derailments and fatal accidents. Then, as D-Day approached, this activity was stepped up with the despatch of large amounts of explosives to the French Resistance who undertook a wide range of attacks coordinated by messages conveyed by the BBC.

This wave of destruction was supplemented by what was known as the transportation plan, a project developed by a military adviser called Solly Zuckerman.

The plan was to destroy the railways through selective bombing of railway facilities throughout France and Belgium in the run up to D-Day. It was controversial as inevitably, given that railway yards, junctions and stations are mostly in towns and cities, there was considerable collateral damage – the deaths of



Rail workers were at the forefront of the Resistance despite posters from the pro-German Vichy regime depicting saboteurs as traitors

tens of thousands of civilians caught in the blasts. Nevertheless, pursuing this plan was seen by Eisenhower and by US president Franklin Roosevelt as crucial to ensure the invading troops met as little resistance as possible.

By D-Day, the French railway had been reduced to a series of disparate lines, greatly hampering German efforts to reinforce the area around the Normandy beaches where the landing was taking place. The downside of this destruction was that those very same railways were needed by the allies to support the invading troops.

And that is the story I tell in my book. Some 40,000 men, three quarters of whom were American, were sent over the Channel to repair and then operate the railways. Most of them had railway experience, but they were enlisted as soldiers and were a vital part of the allied forces.

Within two weeks of D-Day, lines were being repaired and a basic train service initiated. Men risked their lives on reconnaissance forays close to enemy lines and were strafed and bombed,

sometimes by our own forces in error, for their pains. At the heart of my book, there is one of the great engineering achievements of the war. General George Patton, a maverick but brilliant military leader, had been given responsibility for the US Third Army, which was tasked with sweeping through France as quickly as possible once it had been established at the beginning of August 1944. Breaking out of the initial lodgement – the land taken in the first few weeks of the invasion – he reached Le Mans, 120 miles south west of Paris, which he wanted to reach by the end of the month.

However, he had outrun his supply lines and he announced he needed 31 trains full of ammunition and POL (petrol, oil, lubricants) to get to Le Mans as quickly as possible. But the main line was blocked by a couple of bridges brought down in Allied attacks. Instead, a little used rural line running through the forests of southern Normandy had to be rapidly brought into use. Patton set a deadline of 72 hours and said: “Use one man per foot if necessary.”

There were innumerable obstacles as embankments had been destroyed, bridges collapsed, with stations and yards flattened. Yet, with 10,000 men called up to carry out the task, the little line was reopened within the deadline and trains started trundling down the tracks, reaching Le Mans much to the surprise of the stationmaster who had not been told the trains were coming.

The journey was perilous, running close to German lines and there was no signalling system, with men holding up boards and even torches controlling the trains. Yet the precious



Canadian troops relaxing at Caen station where the important railway facilities were wrecked in the month-long battle for the city

cargo reached Le Mans. Paris was liberated a couple of weeks later. The story includes a man being shot while repairing the track and his colleagues killing the sniper with their bayonets, a Mata Hari type spy trying to elicit information from drivers of freight trains. Also featured is the rebuilding of railway bridges over rivers such as the Seine and the Rhine being delayed by Luftwaffe aerial attacks.

The biggest mystery is why no one has thought to tell this story previously. Hopefully, many more aspects of this tale will now come to light. These unsung heroes deserve it.

■ **Railwatch readers can benefit from a special offer of a signed copy of the book for just £20 post free. Email christian.wolmar@gmail.com and put Railwatch offer in the header.**

North East

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Farewell Peter, 93

Former *Railwatch* correspondent Peter Kenyon has died at the age of 93. He “retired” from reporting for Railfuture North East seven years ago after originally joining the then Railway Development Society in response to an advert in the *Guardian* newspaper. He was keen to join the campaign to rejuvenate the railway system after being involved for years in the Historical Association. Throughout his life, he maintained his interest in the Isle of Man Steam



Peter Kenyon

and Manx Electric Railways, together with the unique Douglas Bay Horse Tramway. Peter died in Chepstow in June, after a year in a care home.

Northumberland line

There has been more delay to the final touches to the infrastructure at various points along this line, so the realistic opening date is now December. The proposed timetable was included in “Real Time Trains” from June. A half-hourly service is planned.

Community rail initiative

Haltwhistle station and its buildings offer novel experiences. The former water tower is a cafe and events space. One waiting room features an exhibition of Haltwhistle’s history and heritage. Other former station buildings are now office/studio units. A second waiting room has information about Hadrian’s Wall and other tourist information.

Along the line, several stations now boast “friends” groups. Efforts are made to involve local schools. At Bardon Mill, the nearest station to Vindolanda’s extensive Roman site, Northern Rail has supported the rail partnership in providing “welcome” boards painted by local primary school children.

The partnership supplies timetable leaflets to shops near stations, to make up for the lack of official pamphlets.

Election challenges

Coastliners had to forgo their booked meeting with the Mayor of Tees Valley in June because of the general election, but were able instead to talk to a representative of Tees Valley

Combined Authority who had an encouragingly wide knowledge of transport matters, rail in particular. He was refreshingly responsive to ideas for immediate improvements to Teesside’s passenger rail services, especially along the Durham Coast line. A CrossCountry train service planner was also sympathetic but said competition for slots on the East Coast main line north of York was an impediment to returning to an hourly Newcastle-Reading service. Railfuture campaigners dispute this. CrossCountry is also having to cope with a continuing backlog of crew training, following the pandemic. Newcastle-Reading timetable cuts introduced in August should be over by November.

Railfuture North East is ready to do battle over the Labour government’s cancellation of the Restoring Your Railway programme. The restored station at Ferryhill, for instance, has always been linked with introduction of the through service directly to Teesside. Network Rail had given written consent to Northern’s proposal for 10 “Northern Connect” trains per day from Middlesbrough and Stockton to Durham and Newcastle via Ferryhill. Railfuture will continue to make the case for this and other improvements to local services on and off the ECML.

Community rail awards

The prestigious national Community Rail Awards event is to be held in



Newcastle upon Tyne in March next year as part of the Stockton & Darlington 200 anniversary celebrations.

Saltburn line on Sundays

Railfuture members have long been dissatisfied with the shortage of Sunday trains on what is, especially in summer holiday months, a potentially very busy line. When the normal weekday frequency is half-hourly, passengers expect similar frequencies on Sundays, at least east of Eaglescliffe, through Thornaby and Middlesbrough, to Redcar and Saltburn. However, TransPennine has extended its Middlesbrough expresses to Redcar and Saltburn every hour.

We know that electrification programmes along the TransPennine route prevent much being done to improve this as yet, but Railfuture urges both operators to see if a more even sequence of trains can be introduced on Sundays by adjusting timings.

www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch

X @RailfutureNEast

Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways

Thames Valley

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Positive responses to Railfuture lobbying

Railfuture Thames Valley is re-casting its lobbying towards the large intake of new MPs, following the general election and the formation of a new government. We want to ensure rail remains high on the political agenda. Promising contacts have been made with some of the MPs. Railfuture was delighted when Councillor Liz Leffman told BBC Radio 4 that rail improvements and new stations were important when considering housing targets. She highlighted the importance of the Oxford-Hereford North Cotswold line. Railfuture Thames Valley chairman Richard Stow has since contacted Ms Leffman to ascertain what progress is being made on reopening the Cowley branch and opening a new station at Wantage/Grove.

Old Oak Common blockade may discourage rail passengers

Railfuture Thames Valley was represented at Great Western Railway’s stakeholder conference in Swindon. We are concerned by news of planned blockades at Old Oak Common for the construction of the new HS2 station platforms on the GWR main line, four miles from London Paddington. Most trains to London will terminate at Reading or Ealing Broadway. Only a limited number of trains will be diverted to terminate at Euston. This will discourage rail use, at least for the period of the blockade, and it is debatable how much use the future fast-line platforms, as opposed to Elizabeth line platforms, will see.

Thanks to public transport champion Tony Page

Railfuture Thames Valley salutes former Reading Borough Councillor Tony Page, who stood down this year after serving on the council for 50 years, during which time he did much to promote public transport. He chaired the impressive Reading Buses and most recently opened the new Reading West station building.

Hollywood ready to come close to Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes is in the north-east corner of our area, but committee member Alan Francis keeps us in touch and lobbies for East West Rail. He advises that Hollywood-based *Universal* is proposing a huge theme park at Kempston Hardwick, to be served by a relocated station on EWR and the proposed Wixams station on the Midland main line. The *Universal* proposal would help Alan in his campaign to get the Bedford-Bletchley rail service extended to Milton Keynes Central.

Commercial bid to revive Heathrow western access railway

Railfuture Thames Valley has been approached by Thames Valley chamber of commerce seeking support for its initiative to revive the western rail access to Heathrow project, “paused” during the pandemic. The chamber is confident the necessary private finance can be raised to create a branch off the Great Western main line at Langley running mostly in tunnel to Terminal 5, with four trains an hour from Reading. In principle, Railfuture Thames Valley supports the idea. Of course, there are also proposals for southern rail access to Heathrow.

Community rail team aims to make rail more inclusive

Railfuture Thames Valley Branch was represented by committee member Vic Angell at an Oxfordshire community rail partnership event at Didcot Parkway during Community Rail Week. The partnership goals include making rail useful to more diverse and less-advantaged communities, providing local information to passengers, promoting sustainable and active travel and improving the local environment. The partnership has recently published maps of Banbury and Didcot, arranged getaway trips for youths from deprived areas and supported local health initiatives.

www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch
X @RailfutureTV



OXFORDSHIRE CRP: From left: Executive director Hannah McDonnell, CRP members Gary Shipp, Paul Webster and Alayne McDonald, with Pete Brunskill of the county council Picture: OXCRP



Attacks on the railway network were a key priority of Allied bombing in the run up to D-Day

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Toilet charges at stations

Railfuture Scotland members have objected to toilet charges imposed at large stations managed by ScotRail. Glasgow Queen Street and Aberdeen were singled out as having large user numbers and charges for toilets. ScotRail said that incidents of vandalism of unstaffed toilets at stations were significantly higher than when charges were in place. The revenue from the toilets also generated income which would otherwise come from passengers.

However, Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central, both owned by Network Rail, do not charge for toilets, and neither do the ScotRail-owned Dundee and Edinburgh Haymarket. If these stations can offer free access to the “necessary offices”, surely Queen Street and Aberdeen should follow suit.

CrossCountry cutbacks

Proposals to reduce CrossCountry services further north of the Border have alarmed members, following a reduction in stops at Dunbar and at stations in Fife. A meeting with CrossCountry has been arranged. This could mean the end of the Dundee-Penzance and Aberdeen-Plymouth services, which date back to pre-privatised British Rail.

A previous first minister proposed that all trains from England should terminate at Edinburgh Waverley, but this idea was rejected. Forcing passengers to change trains would result in many passengers milling around Waverley Station concourse.

Levenmouth leads to lift-off

An unwelcome consequence of the reopening of the line to Leven was revealed following the national Railfuture AGM in Edinburgh, when a party of members travelled on the new line, courtesy of ScotRail. On the way back, though, south west England member David Redgewell found himself stuck in his wheelchair at the foot of a flight of stairs at Kirkcaldy, unable to change platforms to catch his train back to Dundee, due to the lifts being switched off, the Help Point broken

Madge Elliot dies aged 95

The redoubtable Borders campaigner Madge Elliot MBE has died aged 95. Her funeral was an uncompromising Hawick event, with no concessions made to non-Teries. (Teries is the name for natives of Hawick, from their motto “Teribus ye teri odin”. I believe that roughly translated it means: Down with Galashiels) There were blue and yellow flowers, the colours of the Common Riding, a tribute delivered by Ian Landles in his wonderful Borders Scots and the song in praise of The Fairest Spot o’ A – Hawick. The slides on show included a Railwatch cover of Madge, plus another picture showing her with John Cameron and the Union of South Africa steam locomotive. It took Madge nearly 50 years – from campaigning to prevent the closure of the Waverley line to riding on the first train to



Railwatch October 2015

Galashiels and Tweedbank. Back in 1969, she challenged Beeching’s closure plan Surely the new Borders line will soon be extended to her home town?

and no staff in the station. Eventually, ScotRail taxied him up to Dundee but it was an unpleasant experience for Mr Redgewell. ScotRail admitted that the lifts were switched off for safety reasons, due to anti-social behaviour once the staff had gone home at 1930. In the light of this incident, ScotRail has reviewed its practice and agreed to leave the lifts switched on while trains stop. Hitherto, few required to change platforms at Kirkcaldy. However, reopening the Levenmouth branch line has effectively turned it into a junction, hence the need for passengers travelling to and from the north to change to complete their journeys.

St Andrews waits for progress

There has still been no response from Transport Scotland to the detailed options appraisal part of the St Andrews Transport Study which submitted before Easter, despite an

apparent assurance that this would be forthcoming by 12 weeks afterwards. The promised reply detailing the next steps is somewhat overdue. In the meantime St Andrews has suffered yet another major golf event, the AIG Women’s Open, with associated mayhem inflicted upon the road network. Parking was restricted and service buses banned from using the Leuchars station interchange bus stop, reserving it for the exclusive use of GolfLink buses transporting spectators to the Old Course. However, in the meantime Fife Council has published its local transport strategy, which includes an assurance that “Fife Council will work with partners to enhance existing rail routes and support new rail links and stations” and that it will support partners to deliver the St Andrews Transport Study, which proposes reopening the St Andrews Rail Link. Consultants E-Rail have

completed its investigation into the potential for raising some of the capital cost of the project using Land Value Uplift Capture, a study generously funded by Railfuture, Fife Council, St Andrews Common Good Fund and StARLink. Maybe this will encourage Transport Scotland to break their silence.

Newburgh’s better buses riddle

Although Transport Scotland had said that bus options would not solve the problems identified in the detailed options appraisal, better bus services linking Newburgh with Cupar and St Andrews have miraculously materialised. Surely this could not be a sop to try to avoid building a railway station?

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Bonnybridge Railway Campaign
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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
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Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG)
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Thornhill Station Action Group
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consultation for its local transport plan

- Network Rail’s draft strategic advice for the North Downs line
- Network Rail’s new studies for the East Sussex Coast and MarshLink and strategic station plans for Tonbridge, Maidstone West and Maidstone Barracks
- The Department for Transport’s pre-election request for our organisation’s headline priorities.

Over 55s offer their wisdom
After contributing to the transport strategy survey by Transport for the South East, we discovered that most

of the respondents were aged over 55.

Awayday in pub garden
In August Railfuture London and South East committee held an awayday in a pub garden at Eridge, identifying some practical steps to attract more active members.

Stay in touch

Railfuture London and South East publishes *inter-railse* online every month and *railse* every three months. Both can be viewed or downloaded from the Railfuture branch website page.

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Rail is key to agenda for growth

Chair’s column

By Chris Page

The new government is rapidly approaching the end of its honeymoon period, with warnings of a painful budget to come in October. The new transport secretary Louise Haigh has hit the ground running, recognising that transport is a key enabler for growth, net zero, opportunity, safety and health and promising to “focus relentlessly” on improving performance on the railways and introducing “much-needed rail reform”.

Railfuture identified 11 actions that the transport secretary and rail minister must take in their first 100 days of office – which end close to the budget. The King’s Speech included a commitment to a Railways Bill which “will put our rail system back on track to deliver for passengers”. Have they forgotten freight? It is reported that HM Treasury has agreed to end the separation of cost and revenue management from April 2025. A settlement with ASLEF has been negotiated, with a pay rise over three years almost the same as the fare rise over the same period although, in an indication that the honeymoon period is ending, ASLEF announced (and later called off) strikes on LNER over working agreements. A shadow Great British Railways has been launched. Actions still required include appointing a GBR Chair and Chief Executive Officer designate, setting strategic objectives for GBR including modal shift targets, defining the powers of GBR in a white paper and deciding what powers will be devolved to regional authorities such as Transport for Greater Manchester, reinstating safeguarding for HS2 phase 2, and setting the 2025 fares increase to be no greater than the consumer prices index. The Department for Transport should then let the shadow GBR get on with managing the railway without intervention.

‘There is no money’
Passenger numbers have almost recovered to pre-pandemic levels overall, although operators that are dependent on commuters are not so lucky. Revenue is still significantly down, so we can expect continuing pressure on operators to reduce costs, which is likely to mean continuing constraints on train frequency to match demand. We should look and campaign for ways to improve the passenger experience at minimal cost to stimulate demand.

It seems that the memo from Ms Haigh about improving public transport to deliver for passengers did not get through to LNER, which has extended its semi-flexible advance ticket trial to more stations. This initiative, which is for the convenience of the operator not the passenger, limits passenger choice while increasing complexity. Compare it with the Great Western Railway *Long Weekender* ticket, which extends off-peak fully flexible travel fares from Friday to Monday, using the capacity left by people who only travel to

work on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday – a win for both the operator and the passenger. We need more initiatives like this to increase traffic and revenue so that train frequencies can be restored.

As well as finding a £22 billion black hole in government finances, chancellor of the exchequer Rachel Reeves announced in her statement the cancellation of the *Restoring Your Railway* scheme, saving £85 million. Projects such as Portishead are under DfT review again, despite a development consent order having been approved. However, the chancellor’s statement also included the line: “So we will use the spending review to prioritise specific areas of capital investment that leverage in billions more in private investment.” This signals a shift in priorities for rail expansion, from connecting isolated communities to drawing in private investment to drive economic growth. Deputy prime minister

Angela Rayner announced that updated mandatory housing targets will be set for local authorities. Her statement included the line: “The update will make clear the requirement for councils to consider the proximity of new homes to existing transport infrastructure.” There is clearly a preference for new housing to be around existing stations. If such developments are substantial, they will bring new traffic and revenue to the existing railway without additional cost, so we should search out and advocate these development sites in preference to sites without a rail connection.

New scientific, industrial and distribution sites should equally be developed where rail connections are possible.

The government’s policy statement on new towns (of at least 10,000 homes), which states that they must be well-connected, opens the door for land value capture to help fund new stations or rail links.

The National Infrastructure Commission has recommended that the government commits long term capital funding of (coincidentally) £22 billion for major transport projects in cities from 2028 to 2045, to remove constraints which prevent the cities achieving their economic potential. The rail and urban transport review, commissioned by Labour before the election and led by Juergen Maier, has published its recommendations to accelerate the huge benefits that rail and urban transport infrastructure unlock, doubling rail’s modal share in a decade. An early indicator would be progress on light rail systems in West Yorkshire and Bristol, which Railfuture supports.

We will campaign on issues we can influence. *The truth is that there is always money*, but our campaigning must align with government priorities to unlock it.

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Capacity, choice and connectivity

Our *bridge the gap* campaign stall, for a new rail link to serve housing growth between Uckfield and Lewes, made its third appearance at Lewes Societies Fair in August. The three Cs of housing growth – congestion, car dependency and carbon – can partly be addressed by the three Cs of sustainable public transport growth – capacity, choice and connectivity. Railfuture contributed to the public consultation for Medway Council’s pre-draft Local Plan 2041 and Kent County Council’s draft Local

Transport Plan-5. Railfuture is working with Kent, Southeast and Hampshire community rail partnerships to attract more people to the railway.

The power of influence

Railfuture maintains its influence with a steady stream of submissions to official organisations:

- The Office of Rail and Road on its investigation of Network Rail’s Wales and Western Region’s performance, advocating any fine to go to a passenger benefit fund, not to the Treasury
- Central Bedfordshire’s preliminary

Battle to rescue Portishead's railway



Portishead's new Labour MP Sadik Al-Hassan (in red tie) at Bristol Temple Meads with campaigners, including David Redgewell in the wheelchair, calling for the rail reopening project to go ahead despite the cancellation of the Restoring Your Railway scheme Picture: Bruce Williamson

By Dave Chillistone

Portishead Railway Group

In the April 2019 issue of *Railwatch*, there was a Portishead Railway Group article entitled *Why are we still waiting for Portishead railway?*

The project involves reinstating a passenger rail link between Portishead, Pill and Bristol, using the existing freight line through the Avon Gorge, and the derelict section from Portbury Junction to Portishead. It is very widely accepted to be a “no brainer” reopening.

The answer to the *Railwatch* question at the time of publication was that a nearly £32 million shortfall in the funding jigsaw could be filled only by central government.

Shortly after the appearance of the *Railwatch* article, central government agreed to provide the “missing” £31.9 million.

This allowed North Somerset Council to submit an application for a development consent order to the Planning Inspectorate.

Fast forward three and a half years and the order was granted, costs had increased and an inflation-based funding shortfall was to be closed by central government.

As a result of all of the required funding being in place, central government commissioned

Network Rail to carry out the detailed design phase of the Governance for Railway Investment Projects system (GRIP).

A £6 million contract was let by Network Rail to VolkerFitzpatrick. All was looking good. Work continued apace and the detailed design was finalised in April this year. The final business case was also ready for submission. Meanwhile, on the strength of central government's earlier commitment, North Somerset Council and the West of England Combined Authority had continued to fund the external project team. The project is nearly two-thirds funded by local government money.

The project is now “under review”. Why? The previous government called a general election and the new government has scrapped the *Restoring Your Railway* fund and placed the project on the review list. It is important to bear in mind that the project had reached stage five of the Governance for Railway Investment Projects system.

Let us look closely at what is required financially of central government. Some £31.9 million was being funded from control period six which expired in April this year.

Most of this would have funded Network Rail's detailed design and its contract with VolkerFitzpatrick.

An additional £15.6 million of central government funding was to have been provided by the *Restoring Your Railway* fund.

The *RYR* fund is now abolished, but the Department for Transport's funding commitment on which the council and the combined authority based their decision to continue still remains.

That is it, except for the ongoing inflationary risk, which the DfT had previously agreed to cover too.

The remaining call on central government funding is said to range from £48 million to £65 million. £48 million just about seems plausible, but Portishead Railway Group cannot substantiate £65 million. Even if £65 million is correct, that is all the current government has to find.

Local government's funding contribution is around £105 million, of which about £32 million has already been irrecoverably spent.

However, whatever the economics of the situation appear odd to say the least.

On 29 July 2024, Gideon Amos, the Liberal democrat MP for Taunton and Wellington, asked the following question in the House of Commons: “On the restoring your railways programme, will the cancellation of projects also apply to those, such as

Wellington station, which have already begun funding and have had GRIP—governance for railway investment projects—stage 4 approval?”

Hansard reports that chancellor of the exchequer Rachel Reeves replied: “I assure him that projects that have already started, such as the station he mentions, will go ahead.”

How odd it seems that the Wellington station project received such a clear assurance from the chancellor, yet the Portishead Railway, which achieved GRIP4 in 2017 and has been formally funded since before that time, is waiting for a DfT and Treasury review.

And before anyone jumps to thoughts of partisan politics, the chancellor is Labour, as are Sadik Al-Hassan, the MP for North Somerset, Karin Smyth, MP for South Bristol and Darren Jones, MP for North Bristol.

www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org

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