

railwatch

Published by RAILFUTURE

Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

No 182

£3

December 2024

INSIDE RAILWATCH

Christian Wolmar's rural ride

Try the train, teachers told

Electric East West Rail

Britain's 'worst' rail line

Berlin with Ian Brown

Wheelchair view

Crossrail for Cardiff

Budget boost but fares unfair

Port upgrade for rail freight: Page 2

Railwatch contents

- 2 Christian Wolmar's rural ride
- 3 Engineering works
- Teachers told to try the train
- 4 Electric East West Rail
- 5 Dave Wetzal, Fares Fair champion
- East Midlands
- 6 Railfuture's Tamworth manifesto
- Railway lands funding formula
- You can help run Railfuture
- 7 Book reviews
- Ireland plans for a rail future
- 8-9 Your views
- 10 Wessex
- Cymru/Wales
- 11 'Worst' railway in country
- Fare Britannia bid by Greenpeace
- 12-13 Berlin Innotrans with Ian Brown
- 14 Metro may help Wales bounce back
- Yorkshire
- 15 Wheelchair view of train travel
- Euston's big problems
- 16 North West
- New station for Liverpool Baltic
- 17 New rail freight links
- West Midlands
- 18 East Anglia
- Sevenside
- 19 Devon and Cornwall
- 20 Cardiff tram-train tracks for Crossrail
- 21 North East
- Thames Valley
- 22 Alba/Scotland
- London & South East
- 23 Chair's column: Chris Page
- 24 Budget needs electric boost

My rural ride around Britain's flawed rail network

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
By Christian Wolmar

In the past few weeks, my speaking engagements have taken me to various interesting rail-connected places, mostly for the first time. It has been a fascinating experience, highlighting the good, the bad and the possible.

Let us start with the good. I was invited, thanks to Railfuture director Roger Blake, to speak at the Appledore Book Festival in September. I confess I had to look up Appledore, as I thought it was up north (that was in fact Appleby) and discovered that it was some 10 miles from Barnstaple in north Devon. I was told that it could be reached by a lovely cycle path along an old railway track from Barnstaple and consequently squeezed my fortunately quite light road bike into one of the horrendous compartments which are provided on Great Western's new Hitachi trains.

As an aside, only a country as dismissive of cycling as the UK could possibly have allowed the purchase of trains that require cyclists to hang up the front wheel of a bike on a hook some six feet high in order to carry them on the journey. Very few people, especially those with heavy bikes, can possibly fulfil this task, and yet it now seems we are stuck with this insane idea until the second half of the century, given rolling stock's life expectancy. I digress. The bike

ride was indeed fab, but the key point was that the Barnstaple branch line from Exeter is heavily used and clearly a key part of the local infrastructure.

On my return journey at 10.00 in the morning, there were about 70 people waiting for the hourly train. While GWR and the local Devon council are both very supportive of the service and would like to provide a half hourly service, this would be possible only after considerable infrastructure investment. But it would be a great boon. I am afraid that my attempts to get a train to another remote station, Barton-on-Humber, were rather less successful. On the journey to Barton, there was chaos because of an incident on a train, a broken down service and a track circuit failure, which meant I had to phone the host of my meeting to meet me at Scunthorpe, as otherwise I would have been late. For the return on the following day, a Saturday, all services had been cancelled from Barton because the train was needed elsewhere by operator East Midlands Trains and I had to resort to the bus replacement service, which was actually very efficient. It was just as



Christian Wolmar

well I did not have my bike with me.

Barton is one of the few places on the rail network that require three trains to reach from London, run by three different operators which have made little effort to create efficient connections. This historic anomaly is the result of the fact that the station can be reached only from the east, as a connection to Scunthorpe proposed in the 19th century was never built. A two-hourly service which is frequently cancelled serves little purpose for the 11,000 residents of the town. They can access better connected parts of the network, either by hopping across the Humber bridge to Hessle or Hull, or by taking a bus or driving to Barnetby, nine miles south. As currently set up, only the hardest train enthusiast is likely to use the rail service and even I failed.

Then there is the possible. I was invited to speak at the Campaign for Borders Rail AGM, which also featured David Shirres, the editor of *Rail Engineer*, the new Carlisle MP Julie Minns and long-time railwayman Steve Bradley, who is campaigning for reopening lines in

the west of Ireland on both sides of the border. The Scottish campaign is, of course, seeking to continue the success of the 2015 reopening of the Borders railway to Tweedbank by completing the line through to Carlisle, an ambitious but feasible task given the need for regeneration.

The key point is that the circumstances on every part of the railway network are different. That applies to campaigning too. What works and is appropriate in one place may not be in another. Flexibility and, at times, compromise are key, especially given the difficult situation of this new government. Our first task, perhaps, is persuading ministers that what may seem like a lost cause or a waste of money may be a very worthwhile project. That, as I have argued in *RAIL* magazine, requires a completely new way of assessing transport schemes, moving away from the discredited business cases dependent on spurious benefit-cost ratio assessments.

■ **Railwatch readers can buy a signed copy of my latest book *The Liberation Line* (featured in *Railwatch* 181) for a special price of £20 post free. Email christian.wolmar@gmail.com and put *Railwatch* offer in the header**
■ **Christian's *Calling All Stations* is available on all main podcast platforms**

Net zero boxes galore for rail freight

Our page one picture is an aerial view of Solent Rail Terminal in Southampton, where a multi-million pound upgrade has boosted container traffic. In the first six months since the upgrade, the operator of the newly expanded 18-acre site reported that more than 55,000 containers (known as boxes) had been handled.

The upgrade project was driven by the aim to encourage cargo off the road and on to rail, improving local air quality. Mark Hooper, director of containers and rail at Solent Stevedores, which operates the terminal, said: "The updated Solent Rail Terminal has been a key milestone in responding to the government's target to reach net zero by 2050. Not only are we meeting

current demand for moving cargo by rail but we have the capacity to accommodate future increase in demand. We are really pleased with the high levels of performance we are seeing from the Solent Rail Terminal."

Meanwhile on the Thames estuary, London Gateway has a £1 billion investment programme. Owners Dubai Ports World have given the green light to add a dedicated rail freight terminal to serve two new ship berths capable of handling 400 metre-long ships, which can carry around 10,000 containers. The expansion of Thames Gateway is a challenge to Britain's biggest container port at Felixstowe, owned by Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing's Hutchison Ports.



Aerial view of rail freight sidings at London Gateway container terminal at Corringham, Essex

Picture: DP WORLD

Engineering works notice – as easy as one, two, three?

By Neil Middleton



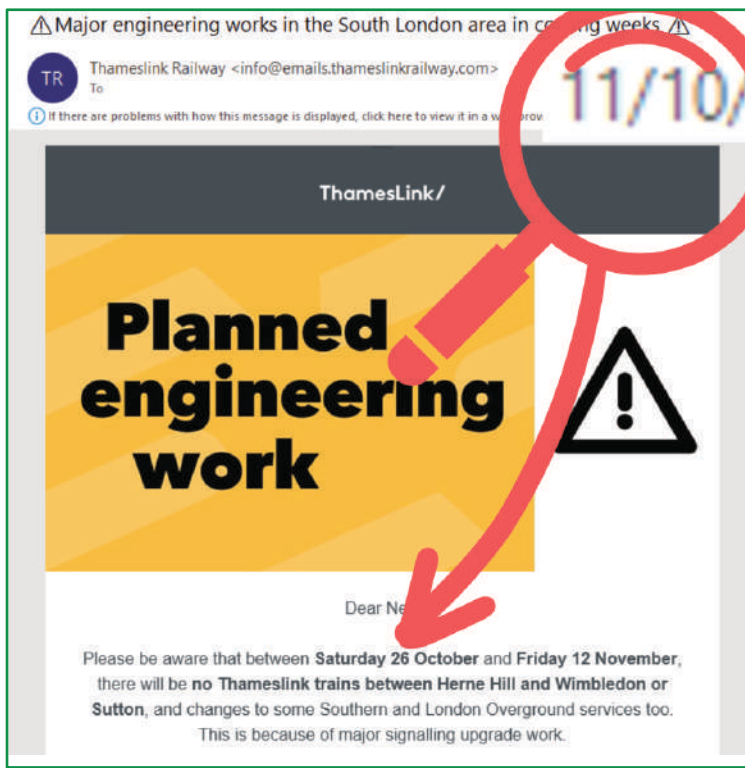
I thought that for a change I would write about something other than fares and tickets. So here is an article on notices for engineering works. The advance notices and the linked line blockades are a necessary part of running a railway.

Whether one longer blockade or many shorter ones, and the seeming inability or lack of desire to use alternative routes when available, are both concerns and topics for campaigning.

But this article starts from a given – that line X will be blocked for Y days and that services will not be re-routed.

My big concern is that the rail industry does not give enough notice for longer line blocks. These blocks are usually decided upon many months, often years, in advance, and local stakeholders including Railfuture and rail user groups will often become aware of them quite early on in the process, probably through the ongoing dialogue with local train operating companies.

However, the publicity for passengers will often start only two or three months in advance. I think this is particularly problematic where passengers are using the train to commute – for work, for



Thameslink notice of engineering work in October and November 2024

education, and indeed any other reason. A long blockade is likely to impact journeys for many days, and the "avoidance" options, such as taking annual leave, or, if possible, arranging to work at home, will often have long lead times, as employers often work on a "first come, first served" basis.

For all of us, having to make alternative arrangements is a nuisance, but having to spend a lot of extra time on a commute for

many days is doubly unwanted. So, what might we do about it? It seems to me that the will to publicise blockades starts when all the answers are available in detail. But I think passengers – particularly regulars – would prefer an approximation much earlier such as:

"We are planning a Christmas blockade on the south end of the Midland main line involving works near Radlett and St Pancras and we anticipate it will be between 21 and

29 December. Arrangements are subject to change and the detail will be published around the end of September."

Advance warnings such as that are an enormous help for people to plan their lives.

My article is headed "as easy as one, two, three?", and that is because I think improvements might start by focusing on blockades that last three or more consecutive days.

These do not naturally fit into the rhythm of a typical working week. The first step should be to publicise these as a complement to the existing engineering calendars.

I would then like to see a full calendar of "no service" days that is maintained and looks at least 12 months into the future.

Yes, there would be an expressed limitation that this is subject to change. Indeed, with a lens that looks 12 months ahead, it may even be sensible to warn that there are likely to be more changes nearer the time.

So, I have two requests to Railfuture members who read this article. Please send me any thoughts you may have on engineering works publicity timeframes:

neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

Please also seize any opportunities that present themselves to have a dialogue with the rail industry. Ask managers to give their passengers earlier publicity for longer blockades.

■ *Neil Middleton is Railfuture vice-chair*

Teachers told to try the train



also be an additional learning experience for students who do not use public transport to get to school." Northern launched a sale for group bookings, offering up to 75% off the standard ticket price. The sale in October offered special prices for travel until 31 December 2024.

Mr Powles added: "The discounts we offer to group bookings are significant – and teachers could organise many more days out for their students if they give up the

coach and try us instead."

In the panel, right, Northern compared the cost of popular school trips across its network and says teachers could save money if they switched from road to rail.

The quotes in the table are based on 25 passengers total (20 children, 5 adults) travelling midweek, return journey. Coach travel company may vary per quote.

For more information about group travel, visit: northernrailway.co.uk/

Route	Region	Coach Price	Cost by Train	Saving
Doncaster to Meadowhall	South Yorkshire	£750.00	£118.50	£631.50
Heworth to Newcastle	Tyne & Wear	£500.00	£84.00	£416.00
Hull to Beverley	East Yorkshire	£335.00	£130.50	£204.50
Kendal to Windermere	Cumbria	£301.00	£102.00	£199.00
Knaresborough to Harrogate	North Yorkshire	£340.00	£60.00	£280.00
Knutsford to Chester	Cheshire	£667.00	£153.00	£514.00
Littleborough to Todmorden	West Yorkshire	£250.00	£76.50	£173.50
Newton-le-Willows to Liverpool	Merseyside	£420.00	£93.00	£327.00
Preston to Blackpool	Lancashire	£400.00	£139.50	£260.50
Saltire to Bradford	West Yorkshire	£450.00	£58.50	£391.50
Stockport to Manchester	Greater Manchester	£403.00	£85.00	£317.50
Sunderland to Newcastle	Tyne & Wear	£590.00	£88.50	£501.50

Electric boost for East West Rail

Diesel test trains were running on East West Rail between Oxford and Milton Keynes nine days before chancellor Rachel Reeves announced on 30 October that the full Oxford-Cambridge EWR would go ahead.

Both the test trains and the announcement were huge milestones in the East West Rail project.

In 2022, the then transport secretary Grant Shapps stunned rail campaigners by saying that the Bedford-Cambridge section of EWR should be scrapped “to save £3 to £5 million straight away” on an overall £6 billion project

The mood has now completely changed with Oxford-Milton Keynes services expected to start next year and the rest of the project given a vote of approval.

Transport secretary Louise Haigh visited the project at Bletchley on 14 November and spoke about its tremendous potential.

The chancellor had said work on the next phase of EWR, between Milton Keynes and Bedford, would be accelerated so that services could start by 2030.

Within days of the chancellor’s statement, it was announced that there would be measures to deal with one of EWR’s major drawbacks – that it is not being built for electric trains. The original plan was for an electric EWR but it was “descope” to save money. EWR



BLETCHLEY: The new high level station, which saw the first East West Railway class 168 test trains running from Oxford (and London) to Milton Keynes in October. GWR also ran some class 800 trains from London Paddington to Milton Keynes via Oxford and Bicester
Picture: John Elvin

now has plans for “discontinuous electrification” meaning that trains carrying batteries would be charged up at sections of overhead line along the route.

EWB said: “Overhead lines would only need to be installed along some sections of the route, which would reduce disruption to existing structures and potentially reduce visual impacts in more sensitive locations on the new railway between Bedford and Cambridge. This option would also cost less than full electrification.”

However, this cheapskate option would require a special hybrid EWR

train fleet. Railfuture believes full electrification of EWR is essential as it would allow it to be used for freight and diversions.

A 10-week non-statutory consultation is now under way into the section between Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge.

The consultation, from 14 November to 24 January, will consider electrification, what new stations will be needed and what needs to be done about the many level crossings between Bletchley and Bedford.

Details of the consultation meetings, including at Bedford,

Bletchley and Cambridge, can be found at

<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/community-hub/events>
A virtual consultation room is also available at: www.pinpointcloud.co.uk/eastwestrail/

The government has moved to safeguard the proposed Bedford-Cambridge route and five days after the budget, it was announced that 1,000 new homes would be built beside EWR at the former brickyards site at Stewartby, Bedfordshire.

The EWR route from Bedford to Cambridge was set out in 2023 and, in Bedford, provoked opposition because some houses are expected to be demolished. Councillor Nicola Gribble told BBC Three Counties Radio that the route will “smash through Bedford”.

Although EWR is now on course, many other rail projects are still in doubt with a government review of Restoring Your Railway projects.

Portishead

Railfuture-affiliated group Portishead Railway Group is hoping that MetroWest (phase one) Bristol-Portishead railway reopening will be given the go-ahead after reviews by chancellor Rachel Reeves and transport secretary Louise Haigh.

The full business case may be submitted soon and more news is expected within months.

In his maiden speech on 4 November, Labour’s North Somerset MP Sadik Al-Hassan said: “No maiden speech on North Somerset would be complete without a mention of the Portishead railway line. For nearly 25 years now, the campaign to reopen the line has raged fiercely in my constituency, and I want to reassure my constituents that I intend to fight tooth and nail to see that project across the line after decades of false starts.”

Dave Wetzel, champion of public transport

By Ray King

Dave Wetzel, who improved the lives of millions of people in London with his 1980s public transport revolution, has died, aged 82.

He implemented the Greater London Council’s Fares Fair initiative and promoted rail as the essential backbone of London’s public transport.

The number of people using public transport leapt with Fares Fair, but the Conservative government was bitterly opposed and tried to cripple it. At the time of Fares Fair, the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher warned British Rail that for every £1 they accepted from GLC, she would deduct £1 from BR’s grant.

Dave, a former bus driver, was chair of the GLC transport committee at a critical time between 1981 and 1986, and later was vice-chair of Transport for London from 2000 to 2008.

He introduced the congestion charge and the Oyster card, and argued that a tax on land values could provide £1 billion finance for London’s Crossrail – later renamed the Elizabeth line.

He was also crucial in setting up the Docklands Light Railway and the London Overground. Dave’s land-values funding idea has since gained cross-party support and is used to help provide funding for rail reopening and rail expansion



1986: Dave Wetzel (right) wields a giant pair of scissors to unveil improvements at Rectory Road station in Hackney. The station is now on the highly successful Overground network

schemes. In the 1970s, he was involved in campaigning to block government plans to blast an urban motorway from Archway Road through north London. He supported STAMP (Stop the Archway Motorway Plan), led by George Stern, which achieved a rare victory over the road-obsessed governments which, even in 2024, have not yet abandoned the fantasy of road

building as a way to reduce traffic congestion. The original Thameslink scheme opened in 1988, after a Railfuture campaign, and was a spectacular success. Much of the credit for implementing Thameslink must go to Dave.

The GLC funded a feasibility study and British Rail recognised that through running was more efficient than terminating trains at St Pancras, the former Holborn Viaduct station and Blackfriars.

Dave was a good friend of Railfuture and was guest speaker at the Ely rail users conference in 2007. He said he would like to see a compatible Oyster-style card for use all over the world, not just in England.

He said: “I can use American Express all over the world. Why not Oyster? It makes me very angry. We have the key to solving this problem. Why don’t we just put the key in the lock and turn it?”

Bank cards are now used all round the world by public transport users and perhaps we should remember to give Dave much of the credit.

At the conclusion of one conference address, he was presented with a bottle of wine. He responded: “I can’t accept any gifts without putting it on a register so I am going to leave it here for the last person leaving the room.”

East Midlands



Rail travel in many parts of Britain was disrupted in October by floods. This picture by Chris Sims of the flooded Welland Valley and the Harringworth Viaduct in Northamptonshire is a powerful illustration of the effect that the floods had

committee has approved the £22 million scheme to transform the city’s railway station. This will hugely improve street-level facilities and the public realm but does not tackle the need for improvements at track level.

Hinckley rail freight interchange
Railfuture’s Peter Small has written to Sir Peter Soulsby, chair of Transport for the East Midlands, pointing out that if the plan for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange is approved, this would be a possible source of funding for the much-needed connection between the Coventry and Leicester lines at Nuneaton. Without such a connection, there would be no convenient access to the interchange from the south. The decision on approval for the interchange has been deferred to March, with the Secretary of State having issued a “Minded to Refuse” letter pending further information from developer Tritax Symmetry.

Community rail conference
Railfuture was represented at East Midlands Railway’s station adopters’ conference in Nottingham in October. This event was used for the launch of a new publicity leaflet, produced jointly by Railfuture’s Lincolnshire and East Midlands branches. The leaflet outlines the rail developments needed in the region, such as passenger services on existing freight lines and new routes, more regular services on poorly served lines, and improved freight facilities, all indicated on a map of the region. These generated considerable interest among the conference delegates.

Railfuture joint branches meeting
Members from Railfuture East Midlands branch joined colleagues from Lincolnshire and Yorkshire at a meeting hosted by Yorkshire in Sheffield on 12 October. The main speaker was Tim Bellenger, transport strategy and policy lead officer from the new East Midlands

Combined County Authority. He outlined the position of the new authority in transport planning and delivery in both the cities of Nottingham and Derby and the surrounding county areas. It was interesting that EMCCA mayor Claire Ward asks her team to look further than just the transport needs within the combined authority area. East Midlands Branch will aim to work with the new authority in the years ahead. The meeting also included workshop sessions looking at topics of interest to all three branches, including the Midland main line and rolling stock allocation policy. Prior to the meeting, Chris Morgan of the Yorkshire branch and the Hope Valley Railway Users’ Group gave a guided tour of the much enhanced Dore & Totley station. This has had the double track reinstated on the previously singled section through the station, with a new platform for Manchester-bound trains and a new footbridge with lifts for access. We are grateful to colleagues in Yorkshire for their hospitality in hosting the meeting.

MP backs Matlock line reopening
Campaigner Stephen Chaytow reported plenty of support in Cromford and Matlock after organising a public meeting in Matlock in October as part of the Campaign for the Peak Line efforts to reopen the former Midland main line from Matlock to Buxton. Derbyshire Dales MP John Whitby attended and is firmly in support of reopening the line which would bring “significant benefits”.



SWT train drivers who featured in the recruitment video at London Waterloo station Picture: SWT

SWR aims to recruit more women train drivers

Train operator South Western Railway is launching a campaign to recruit more women drivers.

It showed a video in September starring its existing staff of women drivers explaining the benefits and opportunities. SWR was hoping to fill vacancies at Farnham, Fratton, Waterloo and Weymouth depots.

At present, only 8% of SWR’s train drivers are women. Some opportunities are available to those without any previous rail experience. Driver Yasel said the career offered the flexibility to plan family occasions, holidays

and childcare. Sally, one of 11 women train drivers at Wimbledon, was the first person to drive one of SWR’s new Arterio trains in service and has recently become a driver instructor. Fraser Dawson of SWR said: “We are committed to fostering a more diverse and inclusive organisation. By opening doors to more women, we gain a wider talent pool, fresh perspectives and experience to help shape the industry for the future.”

The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tduyhoCxjQ>



Tamworth manifesto

Railfuture is drawing up plans to boost membership after the branches and users meeting in Tamworth in October. Among ideas considered by the meeting were:

- Trying to get more rail user groups involved
- Providing free copies of *Railwatch* to some user groups and railway societies
- Setting up Railfuture online discussion groups
- Asking Railfuture members how they rate Railfuture's current activities
- Asking Railfuture members what the campaign priorities should be
- Offering MPs advice on how to achieve rail improvements in their constituencies
- Campaigning more strongly for lower rail fares
- Providing advice to new members on how to campaign
- Looking at whether lower price membership could be offered to online-only members

Lottery winners

September: T Davies (2), A Colquhoun, A McFie, D Adams, J Bissett
October: S Hyland, D Scott, R White, D Fleming, G Smith (2)
November numbers will not be drawn until the end of the month.

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!



Development Opportunities at New Railway Stations

Evidence clearly shows that where new stations are built, development will occur, not necessarily straight away but planning pressure and sustainability will prompt land use to change.

This happened at Worcestershire Parkway although the zoning did not plan for it.

The emerging South Worcestershire Joint Local Plan has proposed an allocation of 5,000 new homes to be delivered up to 2040, with a further 5,000 homes in the next plan.



WORCESTERSHIRE PARKWAY STATION: Part of E-Rail's presentation to Railfuture's meeting in Tamworth

Stations boost land values

New railways and new stations have long been known to boost the value of land and property nearby.

Most Railfuture members know that, and could argue the case for a bigger, better railway.

However, hard-nosed investors and politicians often need the cash benefits spelled out to them before they commit to investment.

That is where E-Rail comes in, with its team specialising in transport planning and strategy as well as property.

E-Rail has already been influential in getting investment into the Northumberland line which is expected to reopen imminently. The Leamside line from Ferryhill to Washington could follow if negotiations with land owners prove successful.

Tony Cahill from E-Rail outlined the approach when he addressed Railfuture's branches and users meeting at Tamworth, Staffordshire, in October. He said Leeds University undertook research to show how land values increase, with London's Jubilee line extension from Green

Park to Canary Wharf being a prime example. The experience had helped to ensure that property developers made some contributions to the cost of the highly successful Crossrail project (now renamed the Elizabeth line).

Although land values increased over a wider area, E-Rail concentrated on the land within one kilometre of British stations. In the Netherlands, the benefits were obvious within three kilometres because of the greater use of cycles to travel to stations.

The increase in land values thanks to railways is not a new phenomenon. Parts of suburban London were nicknamed Metroland because of the expansion of the Metropolitan Railway from the 1880s onwards.

Attempts to raise money from developers have previously involved community infrastructure levies and section 106 grants but they were widely seen as inadequate, given the vast profits being made by some developers.

Now, E-Rail aims to raise 50% of the

cost of the rail project by capturing the increase in the value of land.

But agreements with land owners mean that there is a delay in money being provided until the project is up and running. In the meantime, independent transport funds can be set up for each project.

Although Worcestershire Parkway station did not benefit from E-Rail calculations, it has proved to be crucial for property developers. As many as 10,000 new homes may be built near the station.

There can be challenges in negotiating with several levels of local authority but the emergence of combined authorities has helped the process to gain investment for rail projects.

E-Rail acknowledges that Railfuture has often taken the lead in bringing authorities together to improve rail services.

One of the early inspirations for the E-Rail approach to funding was a Railfuture Lincolnshire initiative calling for development corridors to be agreed alongside existing rail lines.

understanding among the directors (and those that support it) that includes volunteer recruitment and management, finance and accountancy, corporate governance, data protection, legal, information technology (especially websites, databases) and marketing including exploiting social media.

The board meets three times a year (in 2024 this was in London, Birmingham and York) and directors normally attend the AGM. We also visit branches and attend groups such as the passenger group to make sure we get out and about to meet members.

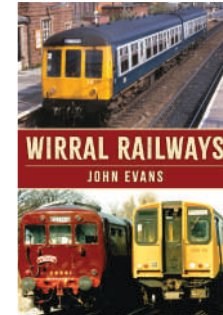
If you are interested, the next step is to have a chat with chair Chris Page, vice-chair Neil Middleton or indeed any board member you know. The email addresses you need are chris.page@railfuture.org.uk and neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk. A key date is 1 February, when board nominations close.

ELECTRIC TRAINS FOR SMITHY BRIDGE? NOT YET

By Richard Lysons

I have received a steady supply of books from Amberley Publishing so I am going to give some short thumbnail reviews. Thanks as ever to this publisher and its helpful publicity officer, Philip Dean. If other publishers would like their books reviewed in *Railwatch*, please contact the editor in the first instance.

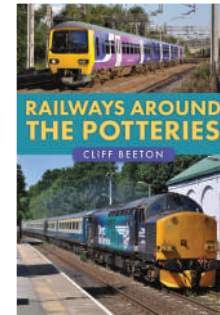
Wirral Railways
By John Evans
ISBN 978-1-3981-1972-7
£15.99



I have been using railways on the Wirral for half a century. Growing up in Chester, I used to change trains at Rock Ferry to access the electric train for Liverpool. Nowadays there is, of course, a direct Merseyrail service between the two cities. John Evans' book is helpfully divided into sections for the various routes on this north west peninsula. There is a colour map of the Wirral and its railway lines. I wish that more railway books included maps. Evans' photographs are of a very high standard and have interesting and pithy captions about the rolling stock, stations and lines. This book will make you want to travel on the highly rated Merseyrail system and explore these routes. A day ticket is great value and will take you not only to West Kirby and New Brighton but also as far as Chester and, across the Mersey, even to Southport.

Railways Around The Potteries
By Cliff Beeton
ISBN 978-1-3981-2183-6
£15.99

In contrast to the Wirral Lines book, Cliff Beeton's book seems firmly aimed at students of rolling stock and their train operating companies. His introduction has frustratingly brief references to such (fairly) recently closed stations as Etruria and Wedgwood, and I would have liked more comment by Beeton



on the effects of these closures. Both the aforementioned stations have popular and important museums nearby. If only their visitors could arrive by train!

Beeton's photographs of the changes in the area over the past 40 years are of excellent quality, but I was a little overwhelmed by the sheer number of different liveries, and classes of diesel and electric trains.

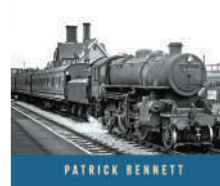
No Stopping in the North of Britain
By Patrick Bennett
ISBN 978-1-3981-1513-2
£15.99

No Stopping in the South of Britain
By Patrick Bennett
ISBN 978-1-3981-1511-8
£15.99

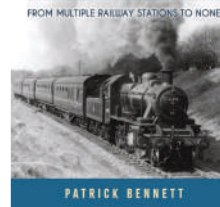
These two companion volumes both have the ominous subtitle: *From multiple railway stations to none*. Bennett's books focus on the railway mania

of the 19th century when many small settlements ended up with more than one station, constructed by rival railway companies. For example, the area around the Lancashire town of Leigh once had no fewer than six stations! Now Leigh is one of the largest towns without a rail or tram service, but it has a guided busway

NO STOPPING IN THE NORTH OF BRITAIN
FROM MULTIPLE RAILWAY STATIONS TO NONE



NO STOPPING IN THE SOUTH OF BRITAIN
FROM MULTIPLE RAILWAY STATIONS TO NONE



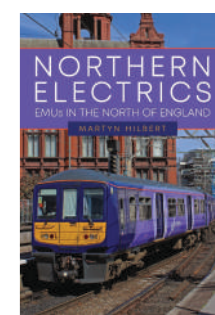
along the old Tyldesley line. Obviously, many of these lost stations were linked to heavy industry.

The two books make fascinating reading and feature a pleasing mixture of black and white and colour photographs and, happily for this writer, some maps. Ironically, there are now plans in Greater Manchester to build new stations at Cheadle and Golborne, both of which had their own station in the past.

Bennett's books are a timely reminder of the duplication that occurred in the pre-grouping era and I heartily recommend both of them.

Northern Electrics – EMUs in the North of England
By Martyn Hilbert
ISBN 978-1-3981-1915-4
£15.99

At one of my first Railfuture branch meetings over a decade ago, I facetiously asked the chair what was an electric train. Living on the eastern fringes of Greater Manchester on the Calder Valley Line, I am rarely able to travel on an electric train for local and regional journeys. Things are slowly improving.



I enviously watch the progress of the Transpennine Route Upgrade on the Huddersfield line between Manchester and Leeds. I already own a couple of Martyn Hilbert's books, *Network North West* and *Network Greater Manchester*, so I think *Northern Electrics* is a worthy successor.

Hilbert's photographs are not only always of the highest quality, but they also often show viaducts, stations and local landmarks. His informative and succinct captions to the photographs make his books exceptional.

I hope that both Martyn Hilbert and me are around for the complete electrification of the Calder Valley line.

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

Railways are crucial to our future, says distinguished engineer

Award-winning railway engineer Gareth Dennis published a book in November with a promising look at the future of the railways.

Three months earlier, the Politico website reported that Mr Dennis, who won the Young Rail Professional Distinguished Service Award for 2024, was sacked from his job "for speaking to the media about safety concerns at London's Euston station".

In the book, Mr Dennis argues that, despite being created by capital and empire for extraction and exploitation, railways are key to the fight for a better world. Mr Dennis covers the Virgin Hyperloop's



Gareth Dennis was guest speaker at the Campaign for Borders Rail AGM in Carlisle in 2021, calling for the line through Hawick to Carlisle to be reopened

abandoned test track in the Nevada desert to the overcrowded stations of the north of England, exploring how railways can shape our future.

Publisher Repeater Books describes Mr Dennis as a Scottish railway engineer, writer and lecturer who lives in York and campaigns for sustainable transport.

Mr Dennis has appeared on TV, radio, podcasts and in print, making the case for long-term transport decision making, including investment in High Speed 2.

He has written for the *Independent*, *New Internationalist*, *Progressive Review* and regularly for *RAIL* magazine. He describes himself as a proud RMT member.

■ *How the Railways Will Fix the Future: Rediscovering the Essential Brilliance of the Iron Road*
By Gareth Dennis £7.99 – £10.99
Repeaterbooks.com



Just asking

In 1948, the debut of British Railways, freight produced 75% of BR revenue. It is now 10% of rail industry revenue. In 1948, lorries were restricted to 20 mph and at the time of the Beeching report their weight was limited to 24 tons. Lorries can now travel legally at 60 mph on motorways and their legal weight limit is 44 tonnes.

This year, on Britain's supposed route to net zero, Royal Mail abandoned its last minuscule use of mail trains. Twenty years ago, the GPO automatic underground railway from Paddington to Mount Pleasant was also abandoned, with the result that there are now many more lorries and vans on the surface.

Inter-city road coaches, burning far more fuel than if inter-city passengers travelled by train, have won more of the market by undercutting train fares.

Budget airlines meanwhile also charge less than trains for many journeys across Europe.

Why is this allowed to happen?

Wesley Paxton, Annerley Road, Annan DG12 6HE
wlpaxton17@gmail.com

Common sense

I agree with what Chris Page has said in Railfuture chair's column in *Railwatch* that "Rail is the key to an agenda for growth".

I also believe the railways should be re-nationalised. Under an established nationalised body, the railways will serve the country and get us out of the continual "bindweed" that we find ourselves in, post-pandemic.

Roads are struggling, just as they were before the pandemic, and the railways should be given their piece of the cherry pie.

If a nationalised body does come for the railways, it seems complete sense to create a body where the railways and buses could be teamed up to provide one seamless journey from departure point to arrival.

Many of the illnesses exacerbated by Covid are aggravated by pollution from cars and lorries. A greater use of bus and train would alleviate that.

To get the economy moving again and productivity improving, you have to have a reliable means of moving goods and people around in the safest and most environmentally friendly way.

Ben Walsh, Cambridge

What future for rail?

Do Railfuture members consider that the rail industry all too often appears to be incapable of fighting its own corner? Does this



half-hourly frequency and every train should be at least three carriages long. This would require increased capacity for both the rail network and the rolling stock fleet. It could be a significant first step to enhancing the rail service, bearing in mind that electrification takes longer.

Increased leisure travel – often seen as a potential growth market for rail in the future – will mean more trips at the weekend. If rail is to secure a greater market share, particularly on Sundays, then it must first solve the problem of staffing levels. Staff shortages are often used as an excuse – or reason – for cancellations. This creates a barrier to growth that impacts on the confidence of passengers who want to travel on Sundays.

The operational Sunday of the future needs to span 0800-2200 generally. All talk of increased Sunday leisure travel seems a little premature without a resolution of staffing arrangements. Passengers want to maximise their enjoyment of Sunday travel by exploring their chosen destination and all its attractions. A curtailed visit caused by the railway's operational and timetable constraints is unacceptable.

Rather than back-to-back television advertisements from the rail companies, passengers would much prefer more frequent trains.

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

Tap In Tap Out alert

I read the article on "finding the right ticket has never been harder" with interest. South Western Railway recently introduced Tap-In – Tap-Out at a number of stations including Egham (although it was suspended because of the cyber attack on Transport for London).

A rush-hour single from Egham to Reading is £13.30

If, however, you Tap-In at Egham and Tap-Out at Reading, using the same train, the cost is £38-80.

The Tap-In – Tap-Out software seems not to know there is a direct train service from Egham to Reading, and it routes you via London!

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com

Choo choo bus!

I travelled from London to Cardiff Cathays in October when there was a bus replacement service from Cardiff Central because of engineering work.

My trip back to Cardiff Central was an object lesson in how NOT to provide a bus replacement service – a poorly marked bus stopping point and no staff anywhere to help people. The first one sailed straight

past me despite my hailing it. The second one displayed a destination display reading "Choo choo - I'm a train". Oh dear...

We eventually got back to Central through gridlocked traffic thanks to a very determined driver.

Graham Larkbey, Carr Road, Walthamstow, London E17 5ER
graham.larkbey@googlemail.com

Missing bus

Travelling from Cambridge to Ravensglass in Cumbria on 18 September, I arrived at Millom, expecting the final booked 15-mile leg to be on a rail replacement bus at 2052.

No bus, and just one concerned other passenger – a man from Ukraine with little English. No help was available from anyone at the unmanned station, with the conductor on the returning train cheerfully asserting as he left that "the bus will be along". It did not appear, so we had to solve the problem ourselves, which involved the helpful manager of a nearby petrol station locating a kind local taxi driver in the middle of his dinner. However, if he had not got an English-speaking companion, what would the poor Ukrainian have done?

A complaint to Northern Rail achieved a fulsome apology ("driver unavailability") and reimbursement of the £25 un-receipted taxi fare for which Northern deserves thanks. However, Northern advised: "For future reference, we are available on 0800 200 6060 where an agent can arrange alternative travel for you."

Perhaps such numbers could be made generally available by the rail operators?

Richard Wakeford, Cambridge
rew5@cam.ac.uk

Ticket to annoyance

I was amazed to learn from *Railwatch* that East Midlands Railway is giving lessons on how to buy digital tickets. Will I soon have to go on a one-day course to learn how to buy a ticket? I bet they do not teach you how to get the cheapest ones.

Will the train operators also provide passengers with a complimentary smartphone to carry out such transactions?

EMR says that with digital tickets "customers need not worry about losing their tickets". In 64 years of almost daily regular rail travel around the world, I have never lost a ticket.

In 20 years of mobile phone use, however, I have had two stolen.

I agree with David Butterworth in his article that "every obstacle is presented to make a journey plan more complex than it need be". What happened to the simple, clear

Station team and shunting horse ready for action 132 years ago



CREDITON: Rail staff at the Devon station in 1892, along with their shunting horse

I am the project manager for a new heritage archive focusing on Devon's branch lines. The project is being funded by a GWR grant, and is an initiative from The Folklore Library & Archive, whose work you can see at www.folklorelibrary.com

Our aim is to save "hidden" heritage in all its various forms surrounding Devon's branch lines, including oral histories. We are trying to connect with as many people as possible, who are prepared to sit down with us for an hour or so and share their rail-related memories, which will be recorded to form part of this unique archive.

One of the project's main goals is to collect oral history – sitting down and chatting to people about their memories of Devon's railways, and capturing those memories before they are lost forever. We are also able to accept donations of artefacts, and can assist with digitising personal archives of photos, video, slides and cine film.

The archive has already received some intriguing and unique items from contributors including personal archives, a school project and a number of fascinating personal interviews, in which many wonderful anecdotes have been shared.

timetables giving all trains and all station stops? Now, all you get is a departure time and arrival time on a screen. Are we deemed too dumb to understand a printed timetable and/or is the operator determined to save every penny – to make more profit for its shareholders?

Peter Odell, Kimberley 8300 South Africa

Minimum service

I agree with Dick Bowman (*Railwatch* 181) that there should be a minimum service requirement for all stations, "say three trains each way daily". The situation at Pilning, south Gloucestershire, is similar to

Everyone's interactions with the railway are unique. A train driver will see it very differently from a passenger, campaigner or volunteer. Gathering people's stories from a wide variety of viewpoints will help us to create as full a picture as possible of Devon's branch lines, and we are very grateful to GWR for helping us preserve these vital and fascinating links to our past.

The Railway Heritage Project is funded by GWR until February 2025, after which the resulting archive will be made available to researchers, historians and rail enthusiasts.

If you can contribute to the archive with your own memories of Devon's railways, please contact me at folklorelibrary@gmail.com

One of the archive submissions we have received shows rail staff at CREDITON station in 1892, along with their shunting horse.

Tracey Norman,
Project Manager – Devon Railway Heritage Project,
On behalf of The Folklore Library and Archive
Registered Charity Number 1203418

sole train a day gives you a maximum of two hours in Grimsby, or one and a half hours in Cleethorpes, while it is impossible to have a day out to Brigg by rail if you live in North East Lincolnshire. Yet we are supposed to be encouraging people to give up their cars, and take to the tracks!

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

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

tony.smale
@railfuture.org.uk

Unhappy

The wish to see passenger services return to pre-Covid levels has been a continual theme in Railfuture Wessex discussions with our three main operators: CrossCountry, Great Western Railway and South Western Railway. In many respects, we see service levels sliding backwards, negatively impacting measures of customer satisfaction.

A disturbing trend on SWR has been the increasing use of four-car class 450 units on Waterloo-Weymouth services. It is now common to see a 450 unit coupled with a class 444 to make a nine-car set (instead of 10) but passengers have experienced a solo four-car unit on the service. The 450s with their 3+2 seating were designed for inner suburban services, so their appearance on long distance services to the coast at Portsmouth or Weymouth is unwelcome. We suspect some of the 444s are being redeployed elsewhere to cover for late introduction of SWR's new Arterio trains.

Lack of space

SWR initiated a programme of refurbishment for the 444s in 2017. At that time, the aim was to cram in extra seats to avoid excessive numbers of people standing at peak times. Post-pandemic, that strategy seems unwise, given that regular commuting has collapsed and leisure travel is driving growth.

The 444s are notorious for their lack of luggage space. Waves of passengers for Southampton Airport or the cruise terminal end up blocking gangways with their large cases. First class accommodation is just as cramped as standard and not worth the premium fare. At the very least, SWR should remove a pair of seats per coach and fit a luggage stack in its place. With gangways clear, they might even consider the re-introduction of refreshment trolleys!

Decarbonisation

Class 450 units with retro-fitted batteries are being considered for use on the Waterloo-Exeter line, which is non-electrified west of Basingstoke. There would have to be a complete interior refurbishment, including comfortable 2+2 seating, for these trains to be acceptable. There also need to be some electrified sections at the country end of the route to provide traction while topping up the batteries, but for this to happen the embargo on further third-rail DC electrification would need to be lifted.

Railfuture has long argued for more infill third-rail electrification while recognising that there are safety issues to be addressed. Therefore we are pleased that



Network Rail is fitting bold electrocution hazard signs. A multi-pronged approach to the safety issue will be key to unlocking further third-rail electrification and the eventual elimination of diesel traction.

And a final thought. The route to Exeter is aligned east-west so is well-endowed with south-facing embankments. These would be ideal for installing long stretches of solar panels generating the power needed for electric trains of the future.

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

julian.langston
@railfuturewales.org.uk

Meeting with MP

Railfuture Wales members John Hanahoe and Richard Wilcock met Becky Gittins, the new Labour MP for Clwyd East, to brief her about Railfuture campaigning. Topics raised included electrification of the North Wales main line, connection of Wrexham-Bidston services into the Merseyrail network, performance issues with Transport for Wales and Avanti, and what we can expect from Labour on the future structure of the rail network. Railfuture questioned how North Wales could gain from the truncated HS2 scheme, following its cancellation by the previous UK government. Problems at Crewe and Chester stations were also raised. Ms Gittins agreed that many services are overcrowded, often on two-car class 197 trains. We appreciate Ms Gittins giving up an hour from her busy schedule to take time to listen to us.

Issues with conductors

Railfuture was among rail user groups represented at a presentation on the performance of conductors by Tony Deluca, TfW's senior conductor manager for North Wales. This arose from a concern raised by the Wrexham Bidston Rail Users Association on conductors' use of the doors on the class 230 which delayed services. Patchy inspection of tickets was raised and TfW responded that it was planning to make a major priority of improving revenue collection.

New WhatsApp group

Railfuture has set up a new WhatsApp group so that members in Wales can discuss rail matters online. This will help the committee to see what issues are of concern to members. All Railfuture members in Wales who have registered their email addresses should recently have received an email detailing how to join the group.

Metro and More

In October, Railfuture was invited to "Metro and More", a seminar organised by FOR Cardiff, the city's business improvement district. The topic was how the South Wales Metro network of rail, tram-train, and buses can improve the city's business environment. Mark Barry, professor of practice in connectivity at Cardiff University, gave a passionate presentation on how the Metro can connect more people to more places, enable development and regeneration, and lower carbon dioxide by getting more people out of their cars. Integrated ticketing is equally important but "more difficult than building the metro".

A key part of the metro will be Cardiff Crossrail (see *Railwatch* page 20). Railfuture

has supported proposals for Crossrail's core section in a recent consultation by TfW.

Writing to the transport secretary

Railfuture has written to Transport secretary Louise Haigh in support of a message Professor Barry sent to her, calling for an upgrade to Cardiff West junction (just west of Cardiff Central station). Currently capacity on the City line is limited to two trains per hour. Professor Barry is urging that a "tactical intervention", costing up to £30 million, should be included when Network Rail renews the junction in about three years time, releasing more capacity at this pinch point.

Capacity at Cardiff Central

Railfuture attended the Great Western Railway Wales transport forum in October to learn the operator's plans for the future. GWR is working with Network Rail and TfW to increase train capacity at Cardiff Central. Initial proposals are expected shortly from a parallel study to improve passenger capacity at the station, particularly on large event days at the nearby Millennium Stadium.

Additional rail capacity will be needed if a new stopping service is introduced linking Cardiff Central to Cheltenham and Bristol, calling at six proposed stations along the South Wales main line. These stations are not yet funded. As part of this, research is under way into raising speeds on the relief lines between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction.

Both the Extended Long Weekender Ticket, which allows travel on Fridays and Mondays at peak times with off peak fares, and the recent extension of alternate Paddington-Swansea trains to Carmarthen are seen as successes and will be continued.

Further west, construction is well advanced at Llanelli station on a new footbridge with lifts, as part of the Access for All programme.

Mixed picture from TfW

Railfuture is pleased that a new accessible footbridge and lifts are being installed at Newtown. A similar bridge and lifts are also needed at Craven Arms, the connecting station between the Marches and Heart of Wales lines.

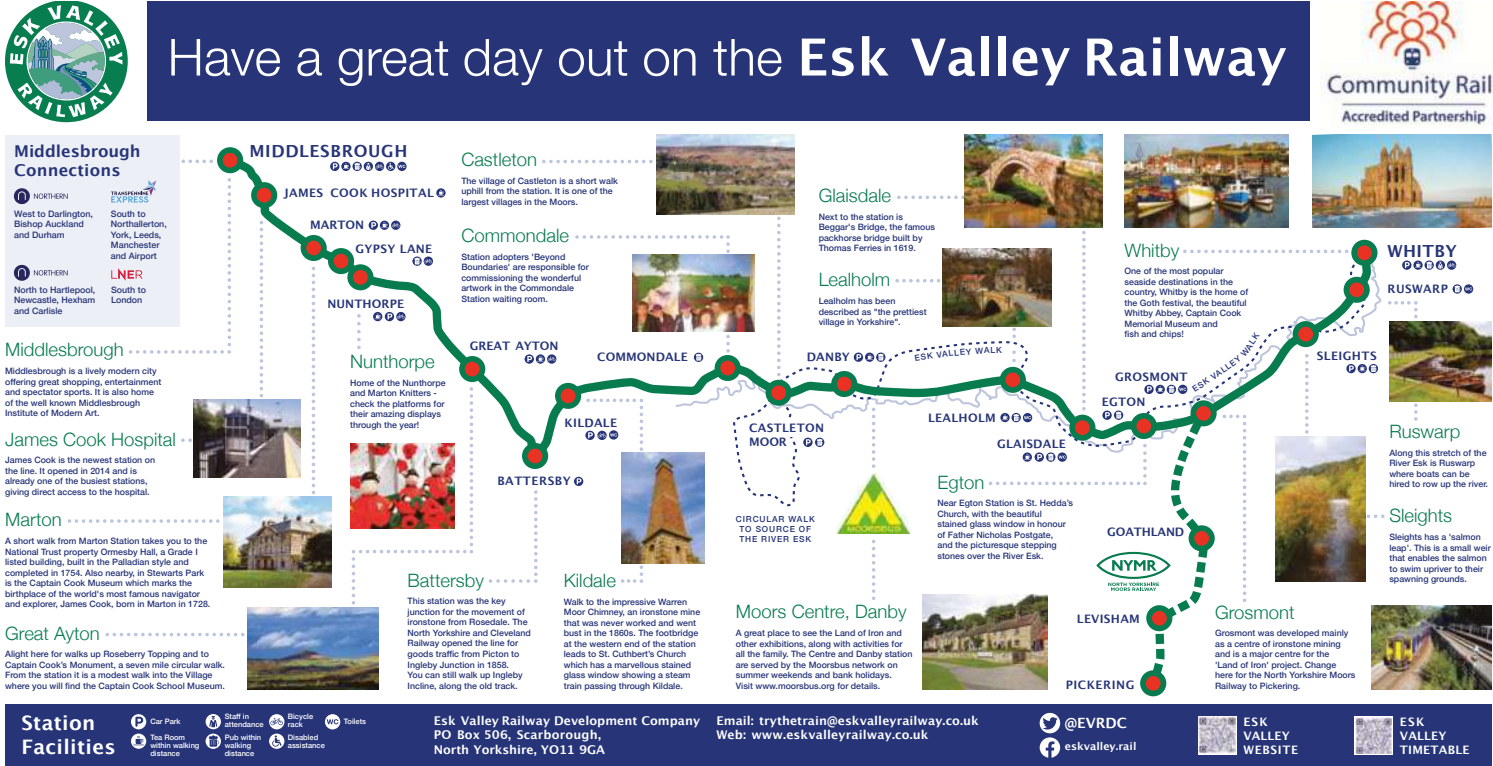
More journeys in Wales

TfW proudly announced that it had outperformed other UK operators, with 1.6 million more journeys between April and June compared with the same period last year. Passenger satisfaction and punctuality had also improved. Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury told BBC Wales Today that, while TfW had undoubtedly improved, it had started from a poor base, in the bottom half of the league table for rail operators on customer satisfaction. TfW still has a lot to do.

Cardiff-Edinburgh direct train

Railfuture welcomes the first ever direct train service from Cardiff to Edinburgh, introduced by CrossCountry on 15 December. The 400-plus mile trip serves 22 stations in Wales, England and Scotland. Separate Voyagers depart from Cardiff and Penzance, joining at Birmingham New Street to travel on to Edinburgh.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
X @RailfutureWales



New start needed for 'worst railway line in country'

The Esk Valley train service in England's north-east has been rated the "worst in the country".

Despite this, passenger numbers are up by 49% – more than the national average – even though funding to improve the line has been delayed for eight years.

Now campaigners are calling for an explanation of what has gone wrong and when things are going to improve.

The Whitby to Middlesbrough train service is rated "worst in the country" by a report published in October by transport consultants Stantec.

There are only five services a day along the line but they carry significantly more passengers than many other lines across the country with much better services.

Ridership is still growing. Latest official figures show that use of Great Ayton station grew by 23% in the last year, emphasising the increasing role of the line as part of the Tees Valley rail network.

Whitby remains by far the busiest station on the line.

A major mistake

A New Beginning, the report from Stantec, says that the decision to slash the service by half just before rail privatisation as an economy measure was a major mistake.

Greenpeace launches Fare Britannia campaign for monthly rail pass

Greenpeace has launched a campaign for a £49 a month *Fare Britannia* rail pass, giving unlimited travel on most trains.

The climate pass plan has been drawn up for Greenpeace by lobby group Greengauge21. Greengauge says the pass could be issued within three years, coordinated by Great British Railways, and could be marketed to young people first. It may not be valid on inter-city services and may involve a "top-up" fare in London. Greengauge says the climate pass could be trialled in

northern England and the Midlands as well as Scotland and south-west England.

The *Fare Britannia* report says the aim would be to cut carbon emissions from cars: "Without a different approach to ticketing – cheaper, simpler and more integrated access modes – the current damaging unsustainable status quo will continue."



The first climate card was launched in Austria in 2021, with Germany following suit with its Deutschland ticket. There are similar products in Hungary, France and Portugal.

"Since 2010, fuel duty has been cut by 34% in real terms costing the Treasury around £100 billion in lost revenue," said Professor David Begg in the report. "This has made rail travel much less competitive compared to its main competitor, the car. The pro-car

Major concern

In an introduction to the report, Community Rail Partnership chairman Alan Williams said: "It is a major concern that this funding remains unspent with still no apparent agreement between North Yorkshire Council and Network Rail."

Mr Williams calls for early implementation of the already funded "quick wins" identified in the report which communities are so keen to see progressed.

The train is the local bus

The report notes that for many of the Esk Valley villages, where there is no other public transport, the train also acts as the local bus, and recommends development and use of new request stop technology to speed up services while maintaining calls at less-used stations.

In the longer term, the proposed construction of a new curve at Battersby should be explored further, avoiding the need for all trains to reverse there, thus reducing overall journey times by up to 10 minutes.

Seeking support

The community rail partnership is now seeking support for early action from both North Yorkshire Mayor David Skaith and new Scarborough and Whitby MP Alison Hume, who have both called for better public transport links to the coast.

stance taken by the previous government has come at a cost in terms of fewer trips by public transport, more traffic and congestion on the roads and increased carbon dioxide.

"The new government needs to be fully aware of the consequences of continuing to reduce fuel duty in real terms which is why it is imperative that innovative measures should be considered."

www.greenpeace.org.uk/resources/fare-britannia-climate-ticket-report/

By rail to Berlin for a glimpse into tomorrow's railway

By Ian Brown

British Rail, particularly in its later years leading up to privatisation in 1996, was recognised for being well managed and cost effective for both passengers and freight. BR wanted to invest to create a truly modern electric railway, but lacked the political backing to provide the investment needed.

Whether Great British Railways gets the resources to be successful is still an open question but, come what may, we look set to transition from BR to GBR – albeit with a 30-year privatisation gap between the two. We cannot now know what a 2024 BR might have been, compared with the present system of private operational franchises and a separate infrastructure company – Network Rail.

It is clear that Network Rail is already a public sector organisation. Forget the nonsense about whose balance sheet it is on.

As a long-standing National Rail Awards judge on maintenance and infrastructure, I have seen Network Rail evolve from the disastrous Railtrack era to deliver projects – and the safest railway in Europe – in spite of the fragmentation of the industry.

However, government has failed to provide strategic leadership or proper continuous support for capital investment schemes such as electrification.

The franchise system, loved by the Department for Transport and consultants, lasted longer than Railtrack, but the dream of transferring revenue risk to the private sector died with Covid.

The last government embarked on the Great British Railways project but lost the plot with railways generally. HS2 has become an embarrassment on a world scale.

With a new government, it would be naive to think that things would change overnight. Actually they have got worse. Closing down the Restoring your Railways scheme, delays on new freight interchange approvals, and the closure of Royal Mail's rail operations suggest that rail's role in providing sustainable transport for passengers and freight still counts for nothing. It is a mad world when filling potholes remains the political priority!

The DfT issued a picture (right) of Transport Secretary Louise Haigh with a new pothole detector in Blackpool.



Great British Railways

The Labour Party's manifesto pledge to nationalise our railways has absorbed the Great British Railways concept. In reality, there is still a lot of work to do, particularly in the area of devolution of railway operations to our cities.

How many will live to see positive results from the changes?

The Passenger Rail Services (Public Ownership) Bill is proceeding slowly through the Lords at the moment.

In a carefully prepared statement, Ms Haigh said: "For too long our railways have been run in the interests of everybody but the passenger."

Her public relations approach is to blame problems on fragmentation and insist that public ownership will reduce waste and transform the railway. It would be nice to think that having seen it and said it, everything is now pretty much sorted. Maybe.

Setting up GBR should help to bring us a vertically integrated rail system, with public sector concessions replacing franchises. Will it deliver an updated HS2 plan, electrification and modern signalling? Maybe.

The real keys to success are the right management and properly equipped, motivated staff. BR had these but lacked government funding. GBR must be properly funded and build on what Network Rail has already achieved.

Two 60-year celebrations in 2024

October 2024 saw two remarkable events to celebrate. The BR double arrow symbol was born 60 years ago, an inspired representation of the modern railway. It has lasted, unlike the myriad railway brands which pass quietly into the night.

The other celebration is for high speed rail. On 1 October 1964, Japan launched the shinkansen "bullet train" between Tokyo and Osaka. It led to revolution around the world. China is building new domestic railways faster than Britain's railway mania in the 1840s, as well as throughout the Far East and in Africa.

Brainwashed to lack ambition?

An incomplete high speed line from Old Oak Common to Birmingham and an HS1 connection not even joined to HS2 is little to show for 60 years. Walking with luggage from St Pancras International to Euston will remain a feature of UK international high speed rail travel.

Reporting on a speech by Conservative transport spokesmen Lord Daniel Moylan, a *Yorkshire Post* headline said: "Senior Tory suggests the North doesn't have enough



CITY TRANSPORT: A classic Dutch Railways train from Amsterdam arrives in Berlin alongside a local S-Bahn train
INSET: Flixtrain, with its own modern electric locomotives and repainted smart-looking ex-DB coaches

people to warrant rail investment."

Berlin Innotrans 2024. Is the grass greener on the other side?

If we are talking high speed railway infrastructure, yes – the European grass is definitely greener.

I visited Innotrans in September, along with about 177,000 other people with an interest in railway development. Innotrans is the world's largest rail trade fair, held every two years. Interestingly, high speed was not the main focus, although Egyptian Railways is investing in 41 new Siemens Valero high speed trains while also buying 94 four-car Desiro regional trains. Its new high speed lines will be the backbone of a high capacity integrated rail system. Similarly, the



Lithuanian government announced that Rail Baltica, an international standard gauge line from Poland to Estonia, will also now have seven domestic stops.

A new emphasis

This time, the declared emphasis at Innotrans was on sustainability and digitalisation, with the aim of increasing modal shift by making rail a cost-effective, attractive option.

Traditional main line and light rail concepts are giving way to varied rail options, including tram-trains and new vehicles for low density applications, once the preserve of cars and buses.

All regional passenger trains on show were electric, either direct feed from existing electrified systems or powered by hydrogen

and/or lithium batteries with automatic charging. Hybrid electric traction has quickly become the norm.

Cities clamour for light rail

Just about every city in the world has a developing light rail system or wants one. We are told Leeds is the largest city in Europe without a viable light rail or metro system. The recent light rail conference in Leeds revealed that the city region is now determined to get one, after endless studies.

Light rail is also developing its range, with hydrogen/battery propulsion on show.

Freight trains across borders

The focus for passenger trains was hybrid operation – to take advantage of existing electric lines.

Pictures: Ian Brown

Freight too is concentrating on how to deliver over the last mile, where electrification does not necessarily exist.

International operation is becoming essential. European railways grew up with their own electrification and signalling systems. Tailor-made solutions have been developed to allow international operation on some routes, but open-access operators and national railways need go-anywhere capability. The European Train Control System is spreading, avoiding the need to cram multi-signalling systems into a locomotive with limited space.

The need for open access in Europe has promoted a series of electric locomotives with multi-system capability, including Alstom's TRAXX and Siemens' Taurus and Vectron locomotives.

This evolutionary approach is meeting customer needs by improving the cost and quality of freight train operations. There were also five examples of smaller shunting and local port trip work locomotives. All five examples were bimodes or battery/hydrogen powered. Perhaps the best example on show of a multi-system locomotive was the Newag EU 200 Griffin locomotive on show for Polish Railways. There is a map on its body (right) showing the six countries where it can operate – Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Austria and Hungary.

What about the UK?

The UK's train building industry, despite investment from Alstom, Hitachi and CAF, will be on life support when current orders are complete. There is no national rail procurement strategy. Alstom at Derby was temporarily bailed out by Transport for London buying 10 more Elizabeth line trains. The one bright light is Siemens' major train assembly facility at Goole to build new trains for the Underground's Piccadilly line. There were no new British-made main line or light rail trains at Innotrans 2024, unlike two years ago when Stadler launched new trains being built in South Wales.

Government strategy and support for our rail industry may be lacking, but the UK rail supply side is vigorous, with rail consultancy, interiors, catering, passenger information and IT systems.

Class 99 is a star performer

UK railfreight is a different matter. It is a sector that knows where the competition is and how to meet the challenge of service quality and cost. The transfer of Royal Mail to 100% long distance road convoys is

just such an example of what is wrong. The rail product is as sustainable as it gets, with 100 mph electric trains. The problem is price. Network Rail is aware of this issue, and needs to find a regulated way of making rail competitive on price, especially for the parcels sector but also for intermodal. Where is the Regulator?

Almost all intermodal traffic in the UK travels on electric lines. Yet, amazingly, none of our ports is on the 25kV AC electrified network. The talk has traditionally been about last-mile capability for freight trains into terminals. Now the need is recognised for main line bimode capability, with decent performance in both electric and diesel mode on the main line.

The first toe in the water was the 10 Vossloh/Stadler class 88 locomotives introduced by DRS just under 10 years ago, to be seen regularly delivering Tesco goods to Scotland from Daventry. A star attraction at Innotrans was the introduction of 30 class 99 locomotives for operation in Britain, owned by Beacon Rail and built by Stadler Rail Valencia for GB Railfreight. They are slower than the 100 mph class 88 but geared for the UK's 75 mph intermodal running speed. They are more powerful in both electric (8,000hp) and diesel (2,150hp) modes, making them equivalent to a British Rail type 4 diesel.

If ever there was a game changer for freight operation in Britain this is it. If we had a government that would regulate rail access charges to meet road competition and one with a positive attitude to rail freight terminal openings, we could have a rail freight revolution. The new government should seize this opportunity and inject some leadership into making this happen.

How did it look in the real world?

Outside Innotrans in Berlin, I took the opportunity to see how the railway looked in day-to-day operation, having read many reports from members that Deutsche Bahn has had a challenging time, with strikes and recent poor punctuality.

The platforms at Berlin Hauptbahnhof were packed with people. Both conventional and ICE high speed trains were busy. Weekend ICE trains were being delayed by so many passengers boarding with luggage.

The German government is keen to see people use trains. It continued to fund the Deutschland Ticket for 2024, which gives passengers unlimited travel on all public transport in the country for €49 a month, which works out at €1.63 a



FABULOUS: A star attraction at Innotrans was the class 99 locomotive for Britain, built by Stadler Rail Valencia for GB Railfreight

day. It is not valid on ICE and EC trains but the take-up is massive. No wonder young people are buying the Deutschland Ticket rather than cars the minute they are 18.

High capacity conventional trains are back in fashion, far nicer, faster, safer and now cheaper than coach travel, which has taken advantage of rail's woes to grow fast in both Germany and the UK.

Flixbus has expanded across Europe and now in the UK, offering easy-to-book reliable coach travel. Flixbus is also now an established open-access rail operator in Germany, with sustainable green trains marketed as Flixtrain.

The whole rail industry has experienced a change of emphasis from high speed to high capacity travel at sensible prices.

Another change is the growth of open-access freight. Leasing locomotives for freight is now the norm for road haulage firms and port operators.

Also in evidence is the growth of international rail travel, crossing borders just as Flixbuses do.

Seen in Berlin was the recently introduced Berlin-Amsterdam service, using coaches leased from Deutsche Bahn. The comfortable, classic, high-capacity train has won many friends. The journey takes six hours, not desperately fast but more than acceptable for passengers with experience of the queues at Berlin Brandenburg airport.

During Innotrans, a new 10-hour Berlin-Paris train service has been announced for the 1,000 kilometre journey, using an ICE train set. Starting in December, it is not particularly fast when compared to air, even with the airport queues. It is better than the existing rail offering, however, which involves two or even three connections, allegedly regularly missed. The new Berlin-Paris service is in addition to the sleeper train which takes 13 hours.

Change is happening, opening up rail travel to more people. Is the grass greener? You be the judge!

■ Ian Brown is Railfuture policy director

Metro may help Wales recover from Covid

By Peter Kingsbury
The Covid 19 pandemic had a greater impact on rail passenger numbers in the United Kingdom than any other single event since the Second World War.

Fortunately, the majority of passengers who used rail have returned since the depths of the lockdowns in 2020.

However, there are significant variations across Britain, and I have looked at how the recovery from the pandemic in Wales compares to the rest of the country.

Office of Rail and Road data for passenger journeys has been examined for the most recent full year (April 2023 to March 2024) together with the peak year for rail travel since 1945, which was 2018-19, the year before the start of the pandemic lockdowns.

The data for selected train operating companies is shown above right. The train operators have been chosen to illustrate the varying fortunes of Wales, Scotland and a selection of rail operations in England.

It can be seen that the fall in passenger numbers on Transport for Wales services is slightly larger than that for all Great Britain (21.8% compared to 18.2%). ScotRail has lost a slightly smaller proportion of passengers than the GB average. A large majority of the operators were still below their pre-Covid figures in 2023-24, with the two

Number of passenger journeys in millions							
Year	Wales	ScotRail	LNER	EMR	Avanti	SWR	All GB
2018-19	33.5	97.8	22.3	26.7	39.5	216	1,701
2023-24	26.2	81.1	24.2	28.9	32.8	153	1,392
% change	-21.8	-17.1	8.5	8.2	-17.0	-29.2	-18.2
Source Office of Rail and Road							
Note: the GB figures exclude passengers on the Elizabeth line, which fully opened in 2022 and attracted many former London Underground passengers.							

exceptions (ignoring open access companies) being LNER and East Midlands Railway, both of which were around 8% higher. Their recoveries compare well with the other long distance operator connecting London with the Midlands and North of England, Avanti West Coast.

Unsurprisingly, the operators whose traffic is dominated by commuters and journeys to work have experienced the greatest losses. I have included the figures for one of these, South Western Railway. However, the number of people carried by such operators is still far higher than the long distance and “regionally” based companies. With regard to Wales, a look at station usage statistics shows that it is Cardiff Valleys routes which have seen the greatest loss of passengers since 2019. This network, now

referred to as the South Wales Metro, is undergoing significant investment – and disruption.

Service frequencies greatly improved in June 2024 and will increase further. New trains are being introduced. The decline in usage reflects the greater role that this network plays in commuting, particularly into Cardiff, compared to the rest of Wales.

The Metro project is expected to be completed in 2025-26 when the proposed service starts with new trains throughout. With faster, more frequent and comfortable trains, it will be interesting to see how much passenger use recovers. Commuting is unlikely to return to pre-Covid levels, but will the vastly improved service result in more use for leisure? Let us hope so.

Yorkshire

davidpennierail21@gmail.com

Combined forces

Support for the campaign to reopen the Skipton to Colne line from officers of the new North Yorkshire and York Combined Mayoral Authority was one positive result from a useful meeting of Railfuture Yorkshire representatives with the authority’s regional transport planner David Hern and rail strategy officer Graham North in October. The Railfuture team included Nina Smith, Graham Collett and Colin Speakman. Other topics discussed were section 106 cash for the Whitby line, Haxby station, a second platform for Malton station, a railway-run bus between Malton, Pickering, and Whitby, the poor services at Northallerton and Thirsk from December, the need for increased capacity on the eastern approach to Leeds, an hourly Leeds-Goole service and the new Gascoigne Wood freight siding.

Haxby station hold-up

Construction of the new station at Haxby, which should have opened in 2026, has been delayed by a government review of all the former *Restoring Your Railway* projects.

Slaithwaite and Marsden access

Railfuture’s Graham Collett, David Hagerty and Mark Ashmore met accessibility advisors Arcadis to discuss the plans for the upgrading of Slaithwaite and Marsden stations as part of the Transpennine Upgrade.

York station upgrade delayed

Plans to reconstruct the “York Station Gateway” are delayed until Queen Street bridge can be removed, scheduled for November. Railfuture Yorkshire has warned that more capacity will be needed for buses and passengers.

Hope for Penistone line

Following the uncertainty over the £48 million levelling up funding allocated by the previous government to support major improvements, the Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users’ Association has asked MPs to verify the status of the funding. Northern Rail has installed pod toilets at Penistone, Wombwell and Elsecar, to which passengers can gain access by scanning the QR code on their train ticket. Northern has pledged that three-car trains will operate on all services on the line from December.

Railfuture allies get together

Railfuture Yorkshire hosted an inaugural joint meeting with the East Midlands and Lincolnshire branches in Sheffield in October. Tim Bellenger of the new East Midlands Combined County Authority and Alex Forrest of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority gave presentations, followed by workshop sessions. Priorities identified included the full electrification of the Midland main line to South Kirby junction (to enable through electric services from St Pancras and Leicester to Leeds). Attention was also given to tackling Sheffield station capacity

problems, improved Nottingham-Leeds and Lincoln-Leeds services, the need for through services between Leicester, Derby and Manchester, reopening the Barrow Hill freight route to passenger trains and the general shortage of rolling stock. The meeting also agreed to set up a Sheffield City Region group for commuter and leisure services in the area, which goes as far as Retford, Nottinghamshire, and Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

It was agreed that further joint meetings of the three Railfuture branches should be held annually, hosted in rotation.

Derek Jennings

Railfuture Yorkshire and North West branches are sad to report the death from cancer at the age of 89 of Derek Jennings, who for the past 20 years has been a leading member of the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, which campaigns to reopen the 12-mile Skipton-Colne line.

Derek, who lived in Barrowford, Lancashire, was a founding member of the SELRAP campaign in 2001. He had been a passionate and respected member of SELRAP’s executive committee ever since.

SELRAP’s media officer Jane Wood said that, as chair for many years, Derek steered the executive through many tough challenges, always with a very positive attitude.

SELRAP founder and first chair Steve Broadbent described Derek as: “A dear friend and the nicest man you could ever meet.”



Derek Jennings, who was always ready to campaign for SELRAP whatever the weather

Derek built up the individual membership of the campaign to approximately 500 members.

He was committed to campaigning to improve all local railways for the benefit of the local communities, and he also belonged to the East Lancashire Line Association. He was a volunteer at both Brierfield and Nelson stations on the East Lancashire line.

■ Pendle & Clitheroe Labour MP Jonathan Hinder used his maiden speech in Parliament to call for the restoration of the Skipton-Colne line. In October, he met SELRAP campaigners Chris Oakley and Peter Bryson to inspect the trackbed near Colne.

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

A wheelchair user’s view of accessibility

By Terry Holt
I am a wheelchair user holding the Railfuture East Midlands portfolio for accessibility and I am also a member of the accessibility panel for East Midlands Railway.

In *Railwatch* 181 (October 2024), there was an appeal for level access to be the standard throughout the rail network, but this really requires quick, affordable solutions with the current trains, which will be in service for a long time.

This is reasonably easy where only one type of train is in use and special access points can be provided at stations.

This works on the Thameslink lines through London, where some stations have “Harrington humps” on platforms to provide level access with the train doors.

This, however, is not feasible where different types of trains call at the same station. Some stations are served by local units but are also used by regional and inter-city trains.

The wider definition of disability also needs to be addressed, not just for wheelchair users, but also to include passengers with temporary mobility issues, and elderly people who are often unable to negotiate higher steps. There are also parents or carers with children in prams, push chairs and buggies. To cope with these different types of train, stations are usually equipped with



ITALY: A manual lift as used at an Italian railway station

portable ramps which station staff fix to the doorway when the train stops.

I have found the current use of ramps on the rail network to be less than satisfactory for the following reasons:

Most small powered wheelchairs should have a maximum incline of one in ten and should be used only in forward operation when alighting.

However, I have found that, in many cases, the incline is twice this at one in five. This makes the passenger in the wheelchair feel very unsafe, and it is also very challenging for station

staff trying to provide assistance. Using a ramp on narrow platforms or where there are other restrictions because of maintenance work can make them awkward or even unusable.

Station staff giving assistance can find manual wheelchairs very difficult on these occasions, particularly with heavier passengers.

Nor are ramps suitable for passengers who can walk but have mobility issues.

I would like to advocate a safer, cheaper and less disruptive solution by using manual lifts, widely used in continental Europe.

I believe these lifts offer flexibility, are very safe and do not incur any construction costs. Manual lifts can be used for everyone who has mobility issues and are very quick to use.

The lift platform height can be pre-set to an appropriate level in anticipation of its next use to save time.

Just a word of warning: It is probably best to rely on *manually* operated lifts.

There are battery options but when I required assistance at Avignon, France, it was found to have a flat battery. Very embarrassing for all concerned – including SNCF.

■ Terry Holt is vice-chair of Railfuture East Midlands



BIG STEP: A wheelchair lift as used on Russian Railways

Russian Railways, which operates trains with very high steps, set up a working group in 2021 to devise ways to improve access.

More than 200,000 people were using Russian Railways’ mobility assistance centre every year.

There was also a mobile phone app to help wheelchair users at major stations, and video screens providing interactive help in sign language.

There will be many more disabled people requiring easier access as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war.

Euston under fire as court backs access campaigner

By John Pring
Disability News Service

A judge has ordered Network Rail to compensate an access campaigner who was abandoned in a waiting area after booking assistance at London Euston station.

Doug Paulley, a leading campaigner on disability rights and accessible transport, won his case against Network Rail – and compensation of £1,325 – after taking a case for disability discrimination to the county court in September.

He and others have been raising concerns about Euston for years, with other disabled passengers branding it “the worst station for assistance in the country”, and an “absolute disgrace”. Leeds County Court heard that Mr Paulley had

booked assistance to help him with his luggage, finding his seat and boarding the sleeper service from Euston to Fort William in Scotland.

Assistance staff failed to collect him from the first-class lounge, where he had said when booking assistance that he would be waiting, and where disabled passengers staying in accessible rooms on the sleeper service are allowed to wait.

As a result, he had to make his own way through the crowded station and managed to board with support from the train operator Caledonian Sleeper with just a few



Doug Paulley Picture: Disability Horizons

minutes to spare. Network Rail eventually admitted during the court hearing that – contrary to what it had claimed in its defence – disabled people who have booked assistance do not have to report to the Euston assisted travel lounge.

Network Rail also eventually admitted that phone calls from the first-class lounge were made to the

assistance staff at Euston, and that it had breached its duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act.

The court found that Network Rail had discriminated against



New rules for mobility scooters on EMR

Foldable mobility scooters can be carried as luggage without a permit on East Midlands Trains. But passengers who want to use normal mobility scooters need a 24-month permit which they can apply for online, by phone, email, or by post through EMR’s customer service centre. They can also obtain a temporary permit at Sheffield, Derby, Leicester, Nottingham or Lincoln stations. The scooter must have sealed batteries. Both three-wheeled and four-wheeled scooters are permitted but they have to comply with size rules, have a maximum speed of 4mph and a freewheel facility in case of power failure. Picture: EMR

arthur.thomson@railfuture.org.uk

Manchester Victoria London link

Open access operators Lumo and Virgin have already announced plans to run trains from Rochdale via Manchester Victoria to London. Now the existing operator London North Western has said it will run from Manchester Victoria to London Euston via Earlestown and Warrington Bank Quay, by extending its existing class 730 London-Crewe service. With two five-coach units coupled together, the train would have 926 seats, with a Manchester-London journey time of three hours 10 minutes. If the Office of Rail and Road agrees, the service will start in summer 2026.

Meanwhile Rochdale MP Paul Waugh has backed Lumo's plan for Rochdale-London trains by 2027, believing it offers an alternative to Avanti's services from Piccadilly without needing to cross the city between Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly. Consultants Arup suggest the Rochdale direct route could provide £345 million of economic benefits.

Northern car park charges

Earlier this year, Railfuture supported rail user groups in the North West in objecting to plans by Northern to introduce car park charges at rural and suburban stations. The key objection was that it would deter people and tempt them to make their whole journey by car. The stations affected are: Hathersage, Adlington (Cheshire), Chinley, Cuddington, Delamere, Disley, New Mills Newtown, Padgate, Whaley Bridge, Mouldsworth, Bamber Bridge, Colne, Croston, Layton and Burnley Central.

Northern said the charges were partly to discourage non-rail users from parking all day and went ahead, except at Chinley, Croston and Delamere, where charging has been delayed.

Lakes line summer survey

The Lakes Line Rail User Group's June survey with help from the community rail partnership has revealed some interesting information. Most visitors are walkers or cyclists. By asking for passengers' partial postcode, the group worked out the proportion of local and visitor numbers. Overall numbers were up on last year's survey. It is estimated that the Lakes Line brought almost £200,000 of business to the hospitality sector over the two day period surveyed.

Usage of Kendal, Burneside and Staveley stations has declined, probably because of mistrust of the service following several years of sudden cancellations.

£4.4 million for Salford Central Salford Central will benefit from a £4.4 million share of a more than £1 billion investment in Greater Manchester's public transport – the



Image: Liverpool City Region

£100m for cool new station at Liverpool Baltic

One of the few rail projects that received a clear go-ahead in chancellor Rachel Reeves' budget was Liverpool's new Baltic station. This computer generated image shows what the station – with its BR double arrow logo – will look like in an area close to the river Mersey. Public consultation showed overwhelming support for the £100 million project, part of Mayor Steve Rotheram's ongoing work to improve rail access across the Liverpool City Region.

Construction is expected to start next year, with the Mayor aiming to have the station open by 2027. Liverpool Baltic will be on Merseyrail's Northern line, the cross-city route which runs from Hunts Cross in the south, via an underground section through the city centre and with branches in the north to Southport, Headbolt Lane and Ormskirk.

Liverpool Baltic will serve a dynamic district, recently named the 11th coolest neighbourhood in the world by Time Out magazine. Associated enhancements aim to encourage more people to choose public transport or active travel – walking and cycling.

Bee Network. The Salford Central enhancements scheme will contribute to the provision of a modern accessible station, with improved operational facilities and better passenger facilities to match its key central location. The scheme will be delivered in collaboration with Network Rail and Northern Trains, which have contributed £5 million and £490,000 respectively.

Much of the rest of the £1 billion will go on improving Manchester's bus network. But the overall aim is to create an integrated and affordable public transport system, accessible to all, which has a vital role in unlocking development, enabling housing growth, acting as

a catalyst for regeneration, reducing carbon emissions and supporting social inclusion and active and healthy lifestyles. More than £1 million will go on developing plans for high speed and Northern Powerhouse Rail, particularly the high speed stations and wider connectivity at Manchester Piccadilly, Manchester Airport and Wigan.

Chinley for Christmas markets

The first Christmas markets are staged in early November, starting with Birmingham's Frankfurt Market. With this in mind, Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group has been encouraging people to travel to the markets by rail, as a way of offsetting the environmentally

Mayor Rotheram said: "A world-class transport network is key to unlocking the full potential of our region – and that is exactly what we are building. This new station at Liverpool Baltic is just another step on the journey towards making our Merseyrail system bigger, better, and more accessible for everyone.

"It is about more than just getting from A to B – it is about connecting people with jobs, education, and each other while cutting down on car journeys to help us hit our net-zero targets.

"The station will change the face of one of the coolest, most vibrant areas in the country – and we are not stopping there. We have got plans for three more stations in Daresbury, Woodchurch and Carr Mill. Good public transport is a right that should be enjoyed by all, not just those living in London."

The development builds on the success of the £80 million Headbolt Lane station, which opened last year in Kirkby and is served by battery-powered trains.

unfriendly aspects of the markets. The Chinley campaigners have provided practical advice on how to travel by train to Halifax's Piece Hall Christmas Market, with one change of trains at Manchester.

For the Hepworth Wakefield Festive Market, one change is needed in Sheffield. For the Christmas fair at Buxton, to New Mills Central, followed by a 25-minute cross-town walk to New Mills Newtown.

For Rotterdam's Green Festive Market at the Botanical Gardens, train to Sheffield, to Hull, and then ferry to Rotterdam.

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

Freightliner launches new Tilbury to Manchester service

Freightliner celebrated the launch of its new intermodal rail freight service from Tilbury2 ferry port in Essex to Manchester Trafford Park in September.

This new service, transporting containers from Europe, was the first to take advantage of Network Rail's access charge discount scheme to encourage new services.

Tim Shoveller, chief executive at Freightliner Group, said the service is delivering significant modal shift from road to rail.

John Freyne of P&O Ferrymasters said the industry had worked collaboratively to make the new UK service a reality.

The five-days-a-week round trip is expected to take around 10,000 lorries off British roads.

Network Rail's scheme offers six months free of track access charges.

Paul Dale, chief operating officer at Forth Ports, said: "Green rail logistics is transforming our customers' supply chains and this new service is a prime example."

Jen Craft, Labour MP for Thurrock, said: "Rail is central to the growth of the green economy and I am pleased to see the proactive steps to deliver this daily rail service carrying food and other essentials across the country."

Tesco makes it 10 trains

Supermarket company Tesco has introduced its tenth rail service as it switches more freight from road to



Picture: Freightliner

TILBURY2 CELEBRATION (from left): Paul McMahon of Network Rail, Tim Shoveller, Phil McKennell, Clive Slayford, Peter Graham and Michael Leadbetter of Freightliner, John Freyne, Eva Van Steelant and Peter Heath of P&O and Ross McKissock of Forth Ports

rail with the aim of decarbonising the Tesco distribution network. The latest Tesco train runs from Daventry, Northamptonshire, on a 260-mile round trip to Tesco's distribution centre in Widnes, Cheshire.

The new six-days-a-week service, in partnership with Direct Rail Services and Maritime, will move fresh and dry goods, and will bring the number of Tesco stores receiving deliveries by rail to 198.

Tesco suppliers benefitting from the route include L'Oréal, AB World Foods, PZ Cussons and Heinz.

Heyford railfreight interchange

Plans to build a strategic railfreight interchange at Heyford,

Oxfordshire, near the Chiltern main line, are being revived after being paused in 2023.

The promoters said: "Work is ongoing to prepare updated information to hold a stage 2 consultation".

As a nationally significant project, any planning decision would be taken by central government rather than local councils.

Dove Holes partnership

Cemex and Victra Railfreight have announced the renewal of their rail terminal operations partnership at Dove Holes quarry in the Peak District. Cemex, which sells cement, readymix concrete and aggregates, is expanding its rail operations to

improve its environmental and sustainability stance, with the aim of becoming a carbon net zero business by 2050.

Cemex delivers around three million tonnes of aggregates a year, with help from Victra Railfreight, to 12 rail-connected sites around Britain.

Cemex's Dave Hart said: "Delivery by train produces around 50% less carbon dioxide per tonne-mile than a road vehicle.

"We are extremely proud of the growth that we have seen across our rail operations at Cemex in recent years, and of the contribution that this has made to our overall sustainability commitments. It will play an ever-increasing role in our supply chain network."

Mail by rail

In contrast to many logistics companies, Royal Mail has provoked protests from environmental campaigners by abandoning its dedicated trains.

The Campaign for Better Transport sent a postcard to Keith Williams, chair of Royal Mail, urging him to increase the amount of mail by rail.



West Midlands

Steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk

West Midlands mayor's taskforce panels

West Midlands mayor Richard Parker is in the process of setting up four panels to provide expert and stakeholder input into decision making. One of these is to be specifically for transport, under the title *Journeys for Everyone*, and a few of Railfuture members are applying for membership of this panel. Hopefully at least one will be successful and be able to promote the use of rail-based transport as a worthwhile development in appropriate areas.

Worcestershire Parkway development

Recently Railfuture has been examining opportunities for creating new towns of 10,000 plus properties around new rail stations or links. In the West Midlands, we are ahead of these proposals, as in the first weeks of the new government, deputy prime minister Angela Rayner announced the go-ahead for three new towns. One of these will be around Worcester Parkway station. This is served by both the North Cotswold line to Oxford and Paddington and the Birmingham-Bristol line via Cheltenham. Three developers, St Modwen Homes, Hallam Land Management and Wain Estates, have already put in scoping report requests to Wychavon District Council. These are for 2,500 homes in the northern part of the site, between the M5 and Worcestershire Parkway station alongside the B4084, and a further 1,200 homes on the south-east side of Worcestershire Parkway. A primary school and a solar farm are also included. Thus 3,700 homes are currently in

the planning process for this new town, which is will eventually rise to 10,000 by 2040.

CrossCountry Trains

For some weeks CrossCountry Trains had been stopping several of its Birmingham to Bristol services at Worcestershire Parkway, one of which continued to Plymouth. In the opposite direction, most trains stopping went forward to Manchester, with two to Leeds (one going on to Newcastle and Edinburgh). Unfortunately, this was only temporary while some of the normal stoppers (Cardiff-Nottingham) were removed from the timetable. By the time this is published "normal service" will have been resumed. However, all is not lost, as XCT is discussing with Department for Transport and Worcestershire County Council scope for permanent stops at Parkway of some of their longer-distance trains. Railfuture is disappointed that there seems to be little sign of improvement to the services between Reading/Oxford and Birmingham, even though XCT promised reinstatement of more of the Reading to York/Newcastle trains in November. A quick search of the National Rail website still shows only the 0645, 1145, 1445, 1543 and 1745 ex Reading in between the hourly xx15 departures to Manchester throughout November and December.

Lichfield-Burton service

A major housing development is planned for the Fradley area, which could be served by a new station and reinstatement of Lichfield-Burton passenger services. The line already exists and is used by occasional freight trains and as a

diversionary route. Railfuture is seeking a meeting with Staffordshire Council to discuss its local transport plan and to make suggestions for what should be included in the plan. Our preference is for the bay platforms at Burton to be reinstated to enable both a regular Lichfield-Burton and Leicester-Burton service.

The Lichfield-Burton line also passes Alrewas, itself a significant settlement but also close to the National Memorial Arboretum, so a station here would also be beneficial to the local and wider communities.

Midlands Connect

The Midlands Rail Hub scheme has been split in half in an attempt to make faster progress. The two parts of the scheme are East and West. Midlands Connect expects the west-facing part of the scheme to open in the early 2030s with the east-facing part following by the mid 2030s. Midlands Connect is working with the DfT, Network Rail and West Midlands Rail Executive to make progress on the full business case for the west-facing section at pace.

The government will be approached next year for funding to allow the entirety of Midlands Rail Hub to be developed to full business case, including the section from Birmingham to Derby and Nottingham, which was expected to be served by HS2 but which now forms a key component of Midlands Rail Hub. Railfuture wholeheartedly supports the scheme, especially any acceleration of the Birmingham to Nottingham services.

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

paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

Wisbech hope

A long-awaited report from Network Rail setting out the business case for a Wisbech-March rail shuttle service was published in October, and was expected to be discussed by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in November. The plans to reopen the mothballed line have been progressing for over a decade. The authority's 2020 investigation found a good cost-benefit case (3:1) for a scheme with a half-hourly direct heavy rail or tram-train service to Cambridge. At the time, it was assumed that the Ely area capacity enhancement project would provide extra capacity through Ely to allow this new service. Unfortunately, the Ely scheme was stalled, awaiting government funding, so in 2022 it was decided to study whether there was a business case for a simple shuttle from Wisbech to March, and it is this Network Rail study that has just been published. Unfortunately, reducing the reopening to a shuttle has a serious effect on the benefit to cost ratio, caused by the longer journey time, unappealing and time-consuming change of trains in March on to the relatively



Paul Hollinghurst

poor rail service to Cambridge. Railfuture is calling on the combined authority to go ahead with a shuttle service. But a definite plan is also needed, when the capacity at Ely is enhanced, for a train service of at least once an hour direct to Cambridge and eventually to Peterborough, matching the strong business case from 2020. This will enable sustainable growth in Wisbech through the proposed new town suburb with approximately 12,000 new homes, and will also benefit economic growth in Peterborough and Cambridge. Wisbech is the only major town in Cambridgeshire without a railway station, and is the worst performing urban district in an otherwise prosperous county. It is in urgent need of this quality infrastructure to begin to make it thrive once again and enable its residents simply to enjoy the mobility their fellow county residents take for granted. People want a new station and rail service that inspires pride. For more information see: www.wisbechrail.org.uk/ Since 2013, when Cambridgeshire County Council accepted a petition calling for their railway to be restored, there has been procrastination and numerous consultations. Wisbech is within 40 minutes of Cambridge by direct train service, and Cambridge is experiencing massive growth in jobs based around the knowledge industries. **Cambridge-Haverhill: Rail is best option** Several opportunities have already been missed to improve public transport links from Haverhill to Cambridge. Rather than seriously considering reopening the rail line, there have been mistaken ideas for a bus-only road across open greenbelt at the foot of the Gog Magog Hills, from the Cambridge Biomedical Campus to a giant car park alongside the A11 trunk road, also near the large Granta Park research centre. There has been huge opposition to this, with many calling for bus lanes along the A1307 road as an interim measure before ultimately restoring the railway from Shelford to Haverhill. Railfuture, backed



Wisbech East in 1971. The station closed in 1968 but excursions continued to run as late as 1984

Picture: Brian Sullivan

Severnside

Bristol's newest railway station, Ashley Down, opened in September with local children joining the celebrations. It gives people a station to replace the one they lost 60 years ago. The step-free station is served by hourly rail services between Bristol Temple Meads and Filton Abbey Wood. New stations at North Filton and Henbury are also planned. Ashley Down was opened by West of England Mayor Dan Norris and he was joined by children from Ashley Down Primary School, Scouts from the 1st Bristol Muslim Scouts and members of Lockleaze Community Hub, who provided

artwork for the station, thanks to an initiative by local artist Aumairah Hussan. Also there were Darren Jones MP, the Lord Mayor of Bristol, GWR, Network Rail and the mascots of nearby Bristol Rovers and Gloucestershire County Cricket Club. The station was funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, with contributions from Great Western and Bristol City Council. **Railfuture Severnside contacts:** wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk bruce.williamson@railfuture.org.uk severnside@railfuture.org.uk **X @RailfutureSevnSide**



OPENING DAY: Celebrations at Ashley Down in September

Picture: TRAVEL WEST

by research from Jonathan Roberts Consulting's report *A Big Role for a Railway to Haverhill*, has shown rail reopening is feasible. JRC found that more than 2,000 people in the peak hours alone would initially use the railway all the way from Haverhill to Cambridge. The Greater Cambridge Partnership has refused to consider such work and has pushed on with its plans for its five-mile bus road at a cost upwards of £160 million, never engaging properly with the railway industry or Railfuture. These decisions have set the partnership on a disastrous trajectory which has led directly to the current scheme, and which will increase car dependency, and not do anything to improve public transport journeys from along the A1307 to Cambridge. Cambridge needs to look forward not back. A railway would provide a fast, high quality public transport link, available to all, along the whole A1307 corridor and to stations across Cambridge, including South, Central, North stations and Waterbeach New Town. Haverhill to the Biomedical Campus would take 20 minutes by rail. Along with many other organisations Railfuture will object to the bus road at the official enquiry. **Norfolk new stations review** Norfolk County Council has appointed consultants to look at the prospects for new stations. The results will be fed into the Norfolk Rail Prospectus, which sets out rail priorities over the next decade. The existing draft prospectus had been criticised by Railfuture and councillors for being too negative towards new sites, so the decision to appoint consultants to reassess potential for new stations is welcome. Apart from a relook at the Broadland Business Park site, where feasibility work has previously been carried out, Railfuture is pleased that candidates include Hethersett/Thickthorn, south west of Norwich on the Cambridge line, and Long Stratton between Norwich and Diss on the Great Eastern main line. Railfuture has long advocated these as potential sites. A new station site is also being looked at to the south of King's Lynn where new housing is planned. Further sites to be considered are at North Thetford, again due to more housing, Postwick, east of Norwich on the Wherry lines, and another site in the Rackheath area on the Bittern line. In this instance, Railfuture believes it makes sense to develop the existing Salhouse station to cater for the new North Rackheath development. www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia **X @RailfutureEA**

tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk
alan.clark@railfuture.org.uk

Buses connect with GWR trains

Devon County Council, which won a Railfuture award last year for its proactive support for rail, has also won praise for promoting bus links to connect with rail services. It has supported five such routes at Okehampton and Barnstaple stations. Services 309/310 are timed to connect with train services at Barnstaple, and also pass the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway's station at Woody Bay. Stagecoach announced that the arrival of these new buses comes ahead of a broader electric vehicle roll-out in 2025, which will include 20 new electric buses for the North Devon bus network. This includes routes between Barnstaple and Appledore / Westward Ho! via Bideford, and Ilfracombe via Braunton, all running via Barnstaple rail station. Railfuture members had previously contributed to the county council's consultation on bus-rail integration at Barnstaple rail station. By contrast, Bude and Padstow in north Cornwall have less fortunate tales to tell. Railfuture affiliate Connect Bude is worried about the frequency and reliability of buses to Okehampton rail station. <https://connectbude.co.uk/> Connect Bude is awaiting the results of its Railfuture Fighting Fund-supported survey of the potential use of increased services. Meanwhile Padstow is in the thick of a row over the town council's recent withdrawal of permission for operators to use the bus stop on its land at the foot of a hill by Padstow Museum, which was the rail station building until line closure in 1967. A public meeting was being held in October. **Campaign targets at risk** A dark cloud has hung over three rail development projects in the Devon Metro area since the new government cancelled the Restoring Your Railway scheme. Even before the July cancellation, the planned new station at Edginswell in Torbay, sometimes referred to as Torquay Gateway, had funding difficulties because of rising costs. Restoring passenger services to Cullompton, on the Exeter-Taunton line, had by contrast received project development funds. Funding for an outline business case to restore passenger services to Tavistock from Plymouth via Bere Alston had been promised by the previous government's rail minister. If these projects fall victim to project reviews, campaigners will have to appeal to the new County Combined Authority for Devon and Torbay, which will have devolved funding for transport. Two other projects supported by Railfuture are safe. Works for the Mid-Cornwall Metro have begun at Newquay station. In west Devon, track will be slewed in March in preparation for the new **Farewell to Gerard, the Open University geologist who campaigned with Railfuture for 30 years** The funeral of Railfuture stalwart Gerard Duddridge took place on 30 October at the Church of St Cyr and St Julitta in Newton St Cyres, Devon. Gerard, pictured right, a long-standing chair of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall, died in the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. Gerard's widow Lynette and his brother John welcomed Railfuture members to the funeral. A geologist and geographer **Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways**



Stagecoach Buses unveiled its new 12-strong fleet in October to provide upgraded services to connect with GWR train services at Barnstaple station. Andrea Davis, who received a Railfuture award on behalf of the county council, is in the red jacket, third from right, with Railfuture and ACE Rail's Tim Steer, second left. Andrea is Devon's deputy leader and the cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport



Volunteers at Barnstaple station with Barnstaple Town Council's deputy mayor Joanna Orange (fourth from left). The trophy is held by Tim Steer (fourth from right) Photo: GWR Barnstaple station staff

Okehampton Interchange station, which is expected to open in 2026. **First class station volunteer team** Barnstaple station volunteers were praised for taking on a "Herculean task", by Britain in Bloom judge Derek Beer. The team excelled in their innovative use of recycled materials, transforming the redundant platform to create sustainable planters and rockeries. Railfuture member and local project lead for the ACE Rail campaign Tim Steer has set up the Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station as a formal adoption group to make an inclusive environment for all ages and abilities. There will be sustainable and seasonal planting within permitted planting areas including the former island platform. The establishment

of the Friends coincided with Barnstaple station being awarded the Gold Award at a regional Stations in Bloom competition. The October awards ceremony was held in the Castle Gardens, Sherborne, Dorset. Volunteers Tim Steer and Graham Hayward accepted the accolades on behalf of Barnstaple station. **Train travel is now more popular** The national headlines continue to lament the general struggle to recover passenger use of the rail network to pre-pandemic levels, but recovery plus growth is under way in the South West and on North Devon's Tarka line in particular. Railfuture's analysis of official data shows growth in Devon and Cornwall. North Devon's Tarka line to Barnstaple outstripped the other six lines with a post-pandemic 36.5% increase in station footfall. Since such records began in 1997-98, passenger numbers on the line have almost trebled, while passenger numbers since 2009-10 have doubled. All this growth has been achieved with little more than patch and mend expenditure on infrastructure maintenance. **Influencing and convincing** The Railfuture-initiated Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, which has absorbed the ACE Rail campaign, has focused its work on submissions to the sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport for its strategic implementation plan. A local transport plan is also being prepared for the new Devon and Torbay combined county authority. Railfuture is calling for new rail services to reach Bideford. Network Rail has assisted Railfuture's cause with the recent publication of *Connecting Communities – framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route*. It included Bideford as one of the five case studies which were selected for detailed assessment from the 23 potential new or reopened stations shortlisted. www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch providing articles and maps to professional standard. Former Railfuture board member Philip Shelton said: "I came to appreciate what an enormous amount he contributed to Railfuture in general and the Railfuture branch in particular. His output was prodigious. "He compiled an analysis of every rail line in the two counties which had been closed in the past, together with details of what was needed to reopen it, the feasibility of doing so, the economics of reopening and a score on a scale of 1 to 5 of whether campaigning to reopen it would be worthwhile."

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

Tram-train signals a bright future for Cardiff



By Julian Langston

Cardiff will soon be getting its own version of Crossrail. It will not be like the nearly £19 billion mainline railway with its deep tunnels under

central London, but a tram-train line running from towns west of Cardiff, through the city centre and Cardiff Bay to Newport Road station, a proposed interchange on the South Wales main line in the eastern suburbs.

For a city with nearly 400,000 people, Cardiff does well with 20 stations on the Valleys network. Currently a £1 billion upgrade is under way to create the South Wales Metro, which involves converting some existing rail lines for tram-train operation, building new stations and partially electrifying the network.

Cardiff Crossrail will go some way towards addressing the fact that large parts of the city, particularly in the east, are not served by rail.

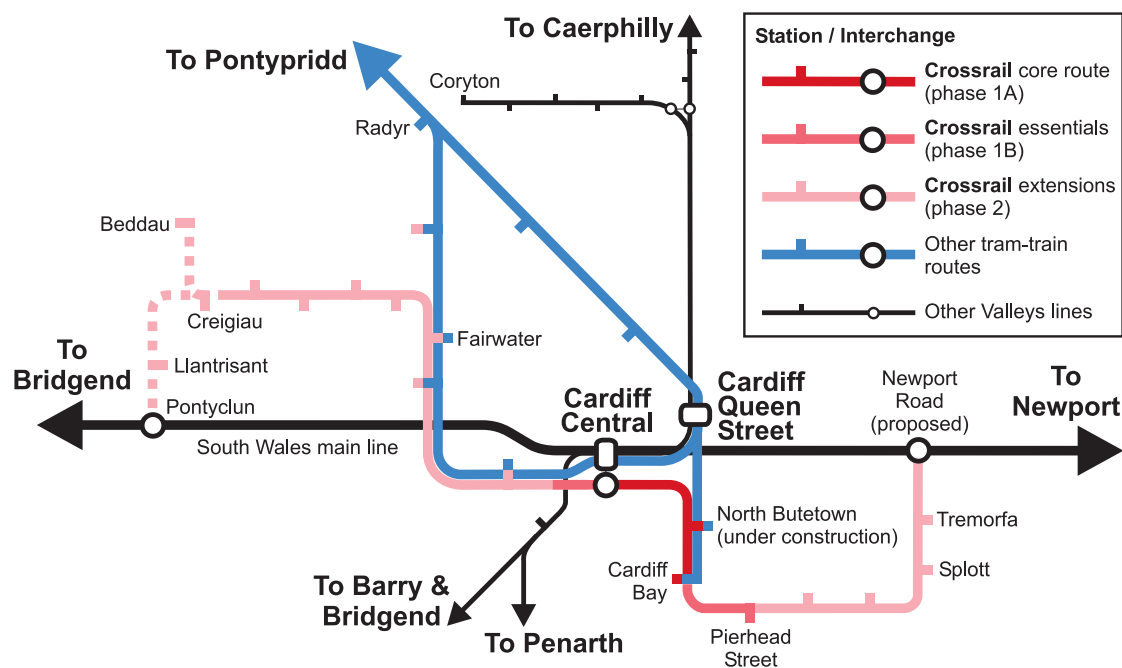
This is not a new idea. Railfuture partnered with Cardiff Friends of the Earth in the 1990s to produce a map of what a tram network in Cardiff could look like. Crossrail is remarkably similar to one of the lines proposed at that time.

One aim of the current scheme is to improve transport links between Cardiff city centre and Cardiff Bay, two kilometres to the south, which is a major development area conceived in the 1980s. Think London's Canary Wharf but on a smaller scale. The existing rail link to Cardiff Bay runs from Cardiff Queen Street station and main line passengers from Cardiff Central need to change twice. Crossrail will offer a direct service.

Crossrail is intended to speed up property development in Cardiff Bay. A new arena is planned on the site of the Red Dragon Centre, near Cardiff Bay station, which already serves tourist attractions, offices and local people. Fifteen thousand new homes may be built in Cardiff Bay and elsewhere in the city, with up to 20,000 new jobs created. Crossrail will move the increased population without clogging up the streets with cars.

Crossrail could also ease congestion at Queen Street, where most of the Valleys passengers arrive. When the full Metro service is running, 16 trains per hour will pass through the station, and its flat junctions at either end will result in many conflicting moves. Crossrail would provide an alleviating route to Cardiff Bay.

Crossrail will transform connectivity across the city and open up areas for new development and



A tram-train Crossrail will complement the east-west main line through Cardiff Graphic: Julian Langston

regeneration, believes Mark Barry, professor of Practice in Connectivity at Cardiff University.

He said it will help address the primary issue facing Cardiff.

"It is dealing with the legacy of a transport network designed for a city with fewer than 300,000 people but needing to develop a network for one with more than 400,000 at the heart of a city region of 1.6 million people, with increasing numbers of those people wishing to travel to/from and across the city," he said.

"It is not just about getting to Cardiff city centre. It is about making it easier for more people to get to other places, so that we can support a more polycentric city region."

Work on Crossrail is planned to take place in three phases.

The core
Cardiff Central station to North Butetown. Funded.

One kilometre of new tramline will run from new street-level platforms at Cardiff Central to join the existing line to Cardiff Bay near a new station at North Butetown. The existing single line from Cardiff Queen Street to Cardiff Bay is currently being doubled and partially electrified in preparation for tram-trains. An additional platform is also being added at Cardiff Bay. The new tramline (dubbed Phase 1A by Transport for Wales) will cost £100 million – £50 million from the previous Westminster government's levelling-up fund and £50 million from the Welsh government.

This core route is planned to open in 2028-29, with the current upgrade of the existing line expected to be complete next year. At that point, Cardiff Central will be

connected to Cardiff Bay, but much more importantly the key central section of Crossrail will be in place, enabling further phases to link east and west Cardiff.

Essential links (Phase 1B)
Cardiff Central west to join existing railway; Cardiff Bay east to Pierhead Street. Currently unfunded.

At Cardiff Central, a short extension would take the tramway up a ramp to join the existing Valleys lines west of the main line station, so that tram-trains can continue to destinations west of Cardiff. However, when Cardiff West junction (which Crossrail would need to negotiate to reach the City line) was resignalled in 2016, the junction redesign was "value engineered" to save money, meaning little was done to the track layout. There is capacity only for two trains per hour on the City line, the likely onward route for Crossrail. Thus, alterations to the track layout and signalling are required before Crossrail can proceed west.

From Cardiff Bay station, a short extension would be built to a station near Pierhead Street, which would serve parts of Cardiff Bay.

Extensions (Phase 2)
East to Newport Road station and west to Creigiau. Currently unfunded.

To the east, Crossrail would run through eastern parts of Cardiff Bay

which are ripe for development to an interchange with the proposed Newport Road station on the South Wales main line, in part using a freight line. Sploot and Tremorfa in East Cardiff, which currently have no rail access, would join the rail network. Onward connections to Newport and beyond would be easy at Newport Road station.

To the west, Cardiff's City line would take Crossrail to a new junction in Fairwater, from where it would largely follow a disused railway trackbed west to Creigiau, and perhaps beyond to Llantrisant, Pontyclun or Beddau. Nearly 9,000 houses are being built over the next 20 years between Fairwater and Creigiau, and Crossrail would pass through the site. Existing roads struggle to cope with traffic levels now. Gridlock will result without Crossrail.

Cardiff Crossrail will not be complete for years. Most of it is not yet funded. However, this and other rapid transit schemes are necessary to transform travel in and around Cardiff. Professor Barry is confident: "We can do this...! The Metro was heresy in 2011... they all told me it would never happen – and now it has!"

Longer term, Cardiff council also wants to create a Circle line by building a new connection between Radyr and Coryton.

Cardiff shows the way for Bristol and Bath

Professor Barry was enthusiastically received in Bristol to explain how Cardiff-style tram-trains could revitalise Bristol and Bath's public transport. The meeting on 8 October 2024 at Bristol Royal Infirmary was organised by Bristol Civic Society and TramForward. The campaign group Bath and Bristol Trams held a follow-up meeting later in October to agree a strategy which could include linked buses and heavy rail. The group also expects to use the successful public transport operations in Barcelona, Freiburg and Denver as examples for Bristol and Bath.

North East

peter.walker
@railfuture.org.uk

Saltburn losses

Saltburn is losing some of its TransPennine Express trains from December. Services from Manchester Airport now terminate at Redcar Central, rather than Saltburn. All TPE trains, however, now stop at Eaglescliffe.

From December 2025, the Middlesbrough-Whitby line is expected to gain at least one additional service each way on weekdays to cater once again for morning commuter traffic from Whitby to Teesside and beyond.

Looking further ahead, Railfuture has been reassured by Tees Valley Combined Authority transport planners that, contrary to what had been feared, there are no proposals to alter the present through workings between Bishop Auckland, Middlesbrough and Saltburn by splitting at Darlington.

New trains all round!

Open access operator Grand Central has confirmed that it is applying for renewal of its operating rights up to 2038 on both its present routes – from London to Sunderland and to Bradford. It has also invited manufacturers to quote for the provision of entirely new rolling stock, either electric with battery provision for non-electrified sections or bi-modal trains. It wants a firm decision by Christmas.

Northern Rail is hoping to acquire new electric trains, multi-mode trains and battery-electric trains. Both of the latter types are expected to be built with provision for electric later. None of the new trains are expected, however, for five years. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that they will be either three-car or four-car sets. Railfuture will be campaigning to ensure that the

ADVERTISEMENT



North East gets its fair share of the trains, which are expected to be spread across the Northern Rail network. This area has made do with old, two-car units, including the now-gone Pacers, for too long.

Rail art trail in Tyne valley

An ambitious art project is being developed in conjunction with the Tyne Valley and Cumbrian Coast community rail partnerships and Northern. Artwork created by young LGBTQ+ artists will be displayed on 25 stations between Newcastle Central, Carlisle and Whitehaven. As well as enhancing the railway, posters will give safe travel information and draw attention to railway career opportunities.

S&D200 – more details



There will be special exhibitions from April to September for the Railway 200 celebrations at Shildon, Darlington Hopetown and Preston Park Museum grounds in Yarm Road, Eaglescliffe. Some will have displays of early locomotives among the extra events. Rumours abound about two special steam trains which are expected to go to Stockton near the exact date of the 200th anniversary – 25 September.

Northern Rail has been trying to find out for some time who owns the long brick wall on Stockton station's northbound platform, a relic of the original overall roof that was removed more than 50 years ago. The happy result of their research is that this wall is the property of ... Northern Rail, so Railfuture is looking forward to an entirely new display of art work which will be applied to this vast surface in what we hope will be the near future.

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

X @RailfutureNEast

Group visit to Utrecht
Heart of the Dutch rail network
RDS Group Travel (established 1994)
By Eurostar and then inter-city
14-21 May 2025
Details: tgarrod21@gmail.com
Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

Business travel by rail increased by 21% to June 2024 – (source: GBR transition team)

Thames Valley



Railfuture's stand at the September Abingdon Air and Country Show won over some new friends Picture: Richard Stow

andrew.mccallum
@railfuture.org.uk

Skyhigh support

Thanks to Andy Holding of our affiliate Wantage and Grove Station Supporters Group, Railfuture Thames Valley had a free stand at Abingdon Air and Country



Andrew McCallum

Show in September. This was a new venture for us and we focused on the Wantage Grove station campaign. We were pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming level of support. It was certainly a different kind of audience for us, with many local families enjoying the day out. Railfuture Thames Valley will, as usual, have a stand at the Oxford Green Fair at Oxford Town Hall on Sunday 1 December.

Great Western overcrowding

Railfuture Thames Valley's Nigel Rose and I logged into the online Great Western Railway local transport forum for Thames Valley and North Downs. Nigel also attended in person the forum for the North Cotswold line in Moreton-in-Marsh. Discussion took place at both meetings about the impact on passengers of stopping more intercity express trains from Oxford at Didcot. This has led to overcrowding and delays. The problem of trains from Oxford towards Hereford being stopped short was also raised.

Arrangements for following trains to pick up the affected passengers were far from ideal. Concern was also raised for disabled passengers on rail replacement bus services. Coaches are often not suitable for people with access problems. Buses are more suitable for rail replacement work.

GWR was also asked to extend its summer-Sunday-only Banbury-Oxford local service to all year round operation. One benefit of this would be to allow more people to get to Oxford for shopping.

CrossCountry high hopes

BBC News joined members of the public when Railfuture Thames

Valley hosted a public meeting in October, where Richard Gibson of CrossCountry Trains answered questions about performance problems and "shocking" overcrowding. Mr Gibson acknowledged that there was a capacity issue and outlined aspirations to reinstate

more services. CC is acquiring 12 Voyager trains from Avanti next year, but some merely replace the InterCity 125 trains CC is withdrawing. Railfuture has called on the Department for Transport, which has reduced support to CC since the Covid pandemic, to allow more Voyager trains to be drafted in. CrossCountry hopes to re-introduce more Reading-Newcastle trains from May next year, but the CC platform at Newcastle is restricted to four-car trains. A questioner suggested that it might be better to run five cars to York rather than four cars to Newcastle.

After the CrossCountry session, Pete Brunskill of Oxfordshire County Council talked briefly about the county's plan for rail – OxRail2025 – which will cover infrastructure, connectivity, electrification, climate change and new stations. There will be public consultation in the new year, but the consultation has to avoid the council elections in May. Final publication is likely in September. In the meantime Railfuture will continue to lobby for priority for electrification and freight capacity.

High quality Chiltern

Railfuture Thames Valley was represented by committee member Nigel Phillips at a Chiltern Railways event at Marylebone station on 9 October to mark the refurbishment of Chiltern's class 168 trains, and he reports that the quality of the work seems to be of a very high standard. Afterwards, the showcased unit departed on a service to Oxford. How many passengers noticed the difference?

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames-Valley-Branch
X @RailfutureTV

janeann.liston@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Fares shocker
Peak fares returned with a bang in September after a year's trial without them. Although there was an increase of 6.8% in passenger numbers during the experiment, and some also claimed that there was an increase of nearly 40% in travellers during the former peak times, the Scottish government said that a 10% increase was needed to make the system pay. One does wonder, though, whether the reduced timetable, staff shortages and other disruptions, to say nothing of a lingering reluctance to use public transport anyway, due to the risk, albeit waning, of Covid, might not have significantly suppressed the numbers travelling during the period of the experiment and if so, did the Scottish government take this into account when reaching their decision?

‘Full’ timetable restored

A week later on 7 October, the ScotRail emergency timetable came to an end, with the full 2022 timetable being restored in good time for pre-Christmas jollifications, although as some pointed out, this still did not return to the level of the pre-Covid privatised service. Still, at least people outwith the Central Belt can once more catch a train home after an evening out in Edinburgh or Glasgow, which had greatly cramped the style of festival goers and concert attendees over the summer.

Ticket office threat

The UK government, at the behest of train operators, proposed to close ticket offices in nearly all stations in England and Wales (and Glasgow Central!). The plan was



Reopened Reston ready to grow



2022: Historic day when Reston station opened Picture: TPE

It is just over two years ago that Reston station reopened just as Covid precautions were noticeably being relaxed, finally removing Berwickshire from the list of counties without a station.

It is fair to say that things have not run as smoothly as they might, first of all with CrossCountry withdrawing its services, then post-pandemic reluctance to travel, industrial action, staff shortages and the much-reduced emergency timetable. ScotRail trains do not actually stop at this station, it being served by

TransPennine Express and the odd LNER train. Nevertheless passengers are using it, mainly to travel to Edinburgh, as well as across the Border to Berwick and Newcastle.

Although the village of Reston is small, the station is within five miles of St Abbs, Coldingham, Chirnside and Eyemouth, giving a catchment area of 6,000. During its first 10 months, Reston attracted 13,190 passengers but it is confidently expected that this will grow now that the full timetable has been restored and the disruptions are at an end.

dropped after widespread public opposition, with 99% of respondents opposed, one reason being the effect upon passengers with disabilities. It therefore seems strange that ScotRail is proposing to revive the idea. It plans to curtail opening hours of ticket offices, reducing them at 54 stations, although hours would be increased at a handful of others. Will there be a similar reaction north of the Border? The sound of metaphorical

quills being sharpened, ready for the fray is discernible.

Local transport plans

Planners in Scotland have introduced “local place plans” which, although not binding, will support documents for the latest round of local plans. Community councils of both Moffat and St Andrews have included support for reopening of respectively Beattock and St Andrews stations in their local place plans.

Model campaigning

Finally, Railfuture Scotland has started its attendance at the usual round of model rail exhibitions, beginning with Aberdeen, where the most popular proposal was restoration of the line to Buchan and the Stanley-Laurencekirk proposal also attracting support. Reopening Dunblane to Doune and Callendar and reopening St Andrews were also mentioned by those visiting our stall.

Contacts:

Campaign for North East Rail
www.campaignfornortheastrail.org
www.facebook.com/CampaignforNorthEastRail
info@campaignfornortheastrail.org

Newburgh
newburghtrainstation.org.uk
www.newburghtrain.com
www.facebook.com/Newburgh-Train-Station-Campaign

RAGES
www.rages.org.uk
[X:@RailActionGrpES](https://www.facebook.com/X:@RailActionGrpES)
<https://www.facebook.com/RailActionGroup>

Levenmouth Rail Campaign
www.levenmouth.co.uk/
[facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/)
Bonnybridge Railway Campaign
www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway

Friends of the West Highland Lines
www.westhighlandline.org.uk
St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink)
www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/
www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign

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

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

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

Chair’s column by Chris Page

Autumn statement

Our expectations for the budget at www.railfuture.org.uk/article1913#threadId490 were met with a lot of disappointments. The government wants growth, it needs cities to thrive, it wants houses to be built, but it will not fund better rail services to connect them. In fact, the Department for Transport budget is reduced on the assumption that passenger numbers will increase. No funding is identified to set up Great British Railways.

Fuel duty is frozen again, so motorists are the headline winners but more important for the future is that chancellor Rachel Reeves bottled out of the opportunity to introduce road user charging, which will become politically more difficult each year as the next general election gets closer. The government is investing in electric road vehicle charge points and is extending the electric van grant and tax incentives to purchase electric cars. As more people switch to electric vehicles, we are moving toward a situation where use of the roads is effectively free. Without any tools to manage road use or revenue to pay for road maintenance and improvement, the road network – and our economy – will be strangled by congestion, and although carbon emissions will be reduced, our health will be compromised by more particulates in the air.

Air Passenger Duty is increased, but there is no focus on reducing domestic air travel, except by private jet. The cap on bus fares continues, but is increased to £3.

Tilting the playing field still further, rail fares will increase from 2 March by 4.6% (retail prices index plus 1%). The government claims this is the lowest absolute increase for three years, but it is probably the highest it could credibly get away with. The consumer prices index, the government’s official measure of inflation, was only 2.2%. Railcard prices will also increase by £5.

Investment

The commitment to funding the railway’s Transpennine Route Upgrade is welcome, although it is not clear how much electrification is included. Likewise, the commitment to East West Rail, from Oxford to Bedford by 2030. Continuing to Cambridge will, however, be subject to further consultation.

In the north of England, there is commitment to West Yorkshire mass transit between Leeds and Bradford and funding for the new Liverpool Baltic station is confirmed, but a new route between Liverpool and Manchester is funded only for planning and design. In the West Midlands, the Metro will have funds to extend to Brierley Hill. However, the outcome of the DfT’s project review following the cancellation of Restoring Your Railway has not been

published, so there is no news of key projects such as increasing capacity at Ely (essential for freight) or reopening to Portishead, for which the former government had approved a development consent order. There is no commitment to a consistent funding stream for electrification, nor has there been an update of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.

HS2 questions remain

Transport secretary Louise Haigh announced urgent action to get a grip on spiralling HS2 costs, but did not recognise the role of the client (DfT) in the failure of HS2, although the review will include the effectiveness of DfT’s sponsorship. Railfuture is pleased that tunnelling will be funded to Euston. But what then? Can Euston be fully funded by the private sector, will it be big enough, and how will capacity be provided to get from Euston to cities such as Liverpool and Manchester? Rail minister Lord Hendy has announced that land bought for HS2 phase 2 will not be sold until the government considers a privately funded proposal by the Birmingham and Manchester mayors to build an alternative. Safeguarding of the route, however, has not been reinstated.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1914

What passengers want

The transport secretary committed to improving the performance and reliability of rail services, ensuring the rail sector can operate effectively and become financially sustainable.

The change of ownership is no magic wand. Fares, services and workforce practices need to change to improve performance and create a railway that meets the needs of passengers, freight users and taxpayers much more effectively.

Sensibly, the government has not rushed to bring any more operators into public ownership. To do so before the structure of GBR is decided and in place would create double the management disruption. The resulting confusion would be likely to impact passenger experience.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1915

First 100 days

Railfuture set 11 actions for the transport secretary in the first 100 days of the new government, which culminated with the budget. Three actions have been completed, three part-completed, and one failed, making a score of 41%.

Laura Shoaf was appointed chair of shadow GBR only. She is not the chair designate for GBR. This weakens her authority.

Actions outstanding include definition of clear strategic (as well as operational) objectives, definition of powers in a white paper, and setting modal shift targets.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1912



London & South East

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

Be bold for rail

Railfuture aimed to convince Medway Council in September to be bold in planning for rail, with an upbeat consultation response to the council’s draft local plan. Railfuture backed the council’s plans for a revived railway to link the Hoo peninsula to Gravesend and London, although we also emphasised the need for links to Medway towns and the Medway valley line. A new Hoo-Higham chord is needed, to help counter local perceptions that the railway plan would benefit only commuters to London. A month later, Railfuture also aimed to convince Kent County Council to be ambitious in planning for rail,



including light rail. In the Railfuture response to Kent’s next local transport plan draft entitled *Striking the Balance*, we again argued the need for the Hoo-Higham chord which is in Gravesham District Council territory.

Railfuture also backed plans for a tram linking Gravesham, Dartford and Thurrock proposed by Thames Gateway Tramlink. Railfuture responded to Network Rail’s strategic study into East Sussex Coastway and MarshLink by supporting Kent in advocating for improving the Southern service between Ashford International and Brighton. We believe there is a need for a limited-stop service to supplement existing trains which stop at every station. It would require infrastructure upgrades in the Kent section of MarshLink. The National Rail website advises Ashford-Brighton travellers to go

via London St Pancras – at three times the price.

Celebrating station anniversaries

Proof of Railfuture campaign successes are anniversaries in November of Basildon station which opened 50 years ago, the opening of the Channel Tunnel and Waterloo International station 30 years ago, Luton Airport Parkway and Braintree Freeport stations 25 years ago and Stratford International station 15 years ago.

Allies in rail campaigning

Railfuture collaborated with community rail partnerships in events at Farnborough North station and in Edenbridge and Rye. Railfuture also took part in the online Kent Rail Summit, and Network Rail’s online workshop for the strategic study into East Sussex Coastway and MarshLink. Railfuture participated in

Southeastern’s stakeholder forum and Govia Thameslink’s stakeholder drop-in, both in London.

Come and canvass with Railfuture

Railfuture members are invited to join the Railfuture team at weekend rail exhibitions near Abbey Wood station in south-east London in January and at Alexandra Palace in north London in March. It gives us a chance to engage with members of the public about Railfuture’s campaigns. Details are in the events page of Railfuture’s website.

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.

www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East
[X:@RailfutureLSE](https://www.facebook.com/X:@RailfutureLSE)

ISSN 0267-5943

www.railwatch.org.uk

Editor: Ray King, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU

Tel: 020 8985 8548 editor@railwatch.org.uk

Printer: Print-Out, High Street, Histon, Cambridge CB24 9JD Tel: 01223 232709

Distribution: Intercity E2 9HE 020 8923 8080

Non-members can subscribe online at www.railfuture.org.uk/shop

or by sending £12 (cheque to Railfuture) to: Alan Cocker, 11 Derwent Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 0QR

Copy deadlines: The next issue is published in April. Please email material as early as possible to editor@railwatch.org.uk

Late copy: Friday 31 January

Emergency late news: Friday 7 February

Advertising: Full page: £190. Half page: £95. Quarter page: £45. Small ads are free to members. Otherwise: 30p per word

Please report any problems with the delivery or condition of *Railwatch* to editor@railwatch.org.uk or to the E9 7HU address above

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

Railfuture is independent and voluntary. Railfuture Ltd is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No 05011634

Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only)

All other correspondence to 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU

General inquiries: info@railfuture.org.uk

Media enquiries: Bruce Williamson

Email: media@railfuture.org.uk

Tel: 0117 9272954 Mobile: 07759 557389

Elections: Board elections held annually. Nomination forms can be obtained from www.railfuture.org.uk/Elections

Who’s Who: Many other useful contact details can be found on the Railfuture website: www.railfuture.org.uk

JOIN Railfuture

Railfuture members receive *Railwatch* free. Get four copies of *Railwatch* magazine a year, early-bird price for our annual national conference and the chance to help improve Britain’s railways

YOU CAN JOIN at www.railfuture.org.uk/join

- Individual £20 per year
- Joint £22
- Under 26 £14
- Rail user groups, community and parish councils £25
- Businesses £35

Or you can write to:

Railfuture, 1 Queens Road, Barnetby le Wold DN38 6JH, giving your name, address, postcode and email if you have one
Cheques payable to Railfuture
Email: membership@railfuture.org.uk



Scan this QR code to join Railfuture

Renewals and other membership queries: www.railfuture.org.uk/renewal

or by post to Railfuture Renewals, 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU
Email: renewals@railfuture.org.uk
Railwatch abides by the National Union of Journalists’ code of conduct

Give and take budget for rail users

By Roger Blake and Ray King

Rail campaigners are waiting nervously for news after conflicting messages from the new Labour government.

Key rail projects were given the go-ahead in chancellor Rachel Reeves' budget of 30 October so Railfuture's campaign for a bigger, better railway moves a few steps forward.

But many rail projects are left in doubt and one of the glaring omissions was the failure to approve a rolling programme of rail electrification.

"The rail industry needs certainty to succeed," said Noel Dolphin of rail electrification experts Furrer + Frey, "So it was good to hear Rachel Reeves confirm the futures of several rail projects that are already under way."

"However, bold action is needed to secure the climate resilience and modern rail network only a rolling programme of electrification can deliver."

The chancellor confirmed she would guarantee funds to start work on the £1 billion 4.5 mile twin-bore tunnel for HS2 from Old Oak Common to Euston and press on with East West Rail from Oxford to Bedford and Cambridge. Oxford-Milton Keynes services will start next year.

Money was also confirmed for rail projects which are already under way, including the Transpennine upgrade from Manchester to York.

However, the big cash handout was to car drivers, with the chancellor continuing with the ludicrous policy of freezing fuel duty for motorists for the 15th year running.

Pointedly, the chancellor made no reference to train fares in her budget speech, and a few days later it was announced that fares would go up by 4.6% in March. That is too much when you see the reality of transport costs in the chart (right).

Railfuture is also still waiting for a decision about what will happen to HS2 north of Birmingham, although there was speculation in response to the call by the mayors of West Midlands and Manchester for the track to be protected from Birmingham northwards.

More bad news

Some projects have been ruled out completely. The Department for Transport has given the thumbs-down to the Waterside line from Southampton to Hythe, via a reopened station at Marchwood. The DfT has also told MPs in Devon that plans to reopen Cullompton station have been dumped.

Progress

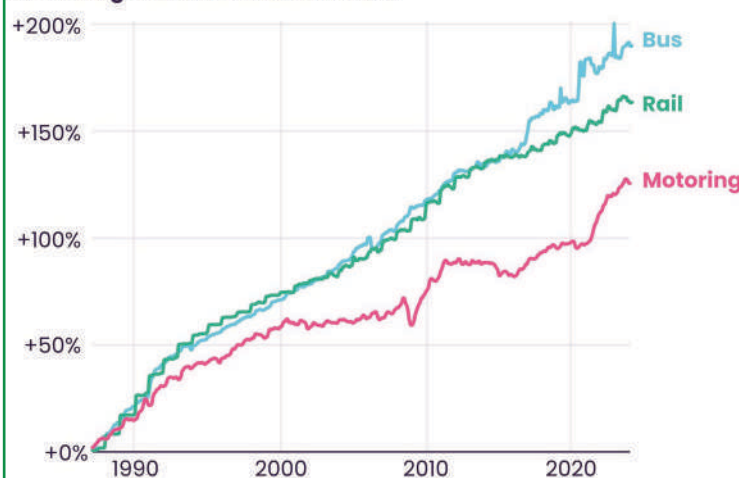
Positive things are still happening. The Northumberland line and the first three of its six new stations look likely to open with the



HIGH HOPES: Railfuture members were cheered by the clear message last year from Louise Haigh when she was shadow transport secretary. She wanted the 21-mile mothballed Leamside line from Ferryhill to Gateshead to be reopened. Ms Haigh is now the Labour government's transport secretary and is carrying out a review of 44 Restoring Your Railway projects, including Leamside
Picture: @LouHaigh

Climate-friendly transport costs have risen faster than motoring costs for more than three decades

Percentage cost increase since 1987



Data: ONS Consumer price inflation time series (MM23)

Possible.
Inspiring climate action

15 December timetable change, a major triumph for one of Railfuture's longest-running campaigns.

■ Liverpool Baltic station will open in 2027 with funding from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the DfT's city region sustainable transport settlement, as reported on page 16.

■ Ashley Down station in Bristol opened earlier than anticipated in September.

■ Okehampton Interchange is expected to open, although not until the year after next.

■ Work is under way at Newquay as the Mid-Cornwall Metro begins to become reality, with Newquay-Par service doubling to hourly in May.

■ East West Rail, another of Railfuture's longest-running campaigns, has carried its first test trains between Oxford and Milton Keynes, as reported on page 4.

Delay

Plans to reopen stations on Birmingham's Camphill line at Kings Heath, Moseley Village and Pineapple Road have been delayed until next year. Also delayed until

next year are new stations at Darlaston and Willenhall on Birmingham's Walsall-Wolverhampton line.

Rail transport for new homes

Property development can unlock funds for new rail projects, as Railfuture members at the AGM in Edinburgh heard from E-Rail's Dr George Hazel and his colleague Tony Cahill, at Railfuture's branches and groups away in Tamworth. See also page 6.

Both presentations can be found in the library of our website, and support Railfuture's focus on our three campaigning priorities for bringing rail closer to growing communities.

Connecting communities

The government appears to have shifted its priorities to using rail to drive economic growth rather than connecting isolated communities, although Railfuture knows that giving communities a rail service boosts their economic performance.

Network Rail has identified 29 of the largest population clusters on its western route which are more than three miles from an existing rail station in a Connecting Communities document.

Progress has been made on the following five which have been through Network Rail's advanced business case analysis.

- Portishead line, Bristol
- Cullompton station, Devon
- Tavistock station, Devon
- Wellington station, Somerset
- Cowley branch line, Oxfordshire

Doubt has, however, been cast on some in DfT missives.

Devizes station, Wiltshire, has also been subjected to a detailed business case study, and case studies have been carried out for possible reopening of Bideford and Plympton in Devon, Corsham and Royal Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire and a station south of Gloucester.

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

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national infrastructure and networks and freight and 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

ISSN 0267-5943



9 770267 594000

