

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture: NETWORK RAIL

Glasgow's newest station

Balgray bows in: Page 2

Also inside: Christian Wolmar on GBR • Ely bottleneck opportunity • In the Eurostar cab Northern's Sunday challenges • New trains for Wales • Ian Brown opens devolution gates

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Work and play role for new station

PAGE ONE PICTURE

By the time you read this, another new station will have been added to the British rail network.

Balgray station in south Glasgow was scheduled to open on 27 September. Costing £18 million, it has taken a year to build the two-platform station with lifts and shelters on the Neilston to Glasgow Central line.

Some locals are already saying the 80-space car park will be too small for the large number of people who will want to commute into central Glasgow. "It's a bit wee for the amount of car drivers who will want to use it," said one resident.

Others are asking about improved bus services to serve the station which will be a leisure destination in its own right as the station for the Dams to Darnley Country Park.

There are charging points, parking for cycles and walkways to connect with the country park path system. There is parking for cycles, charging points and walkways to connect with the country park path system.

"The opening of Balgray station is fantastic news for the local community and everyone who travels by rail in East Renfrewshire," said Mark Ilderton, ScotRail's service delivery director.

"By creating a new gateway to the railway, it will give people more choice over how they travel and make it easier to leave the car at home for everyday journeys.

"We know that convenient, accessible stations encourage more people to choose rail, and

Balgray has been designed with that in mind."

Balgray Reservoir is a popular recreation spot but some residents would have preferred the station to be called Barrhead South.

The station is part of the Glasgow City Region City Deal, funded by the UK and Scottish Governments and East Renfrewshire Council. It was delivered by Network Rail in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council, Transport Scotland, ScotRail and Story Contracting.

East Renfrewshire Council leader Owen O'Donnell said: "There is huge excitement from local residents about the opening of Balgray station, the first new train station in East Renfrewshire in almost 100 years."

Railwatch 188 (July 2026), reported the imminent opening of the new Cambridge South station, which has no general car park because it was designed to be car free. It has parking for up to 2,000 bicycles.

Regular buses serve the station and there are only five parking spaces available for Blue Badge holders and six limited-stay bays for dropping off or picking up passengers, enforced by cameras with a strict 10-minute stay limit. Three of the six drop-off bays are for taxis, and you must pre-book as there is no active taxi rank. No drop-offs are allowed on roads near the station.

Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Paul Bristow has said Sunday's opening of Cambridge South Station is key to unlocking growth, opening up opportunity, and supporting better journeys in Cambridge and the region.

More on Cambridge South: Page 18

It's time for all rail tickets to be refundable

By Neil Middleton

Travelling by train at the moment means either locking into a cheap price early – and hoping that when the time comes you do actually make the journey – or leave it to the last moment and buy a more expensive but flexible ticket.

I believe it is time for all rail tickets to be refundable, at least up to the point they become valid.

Before I go on, I want to be clear that this advocacy is based on a view that the new flexibility will increase demand and passengers, some paying higher prices, with a by-product of some additional fees – so this is not something that looks for additional government funding.

I talk to people regularly, including Railfuture members, who have good and valid reasons for being unable to plan well in advance.

Caring responsibilities and personal health are regularly mentioned. These situations often mean that the industry forgoes any revenue as cheaper tickets are no longer available. The result can be that people decide NOT to travel by rail.

So, how might a more flexible system work?

1 The option for a refund, less a very small fee, is available for a very short time, unless the ticket is immediately valid.

2 A small additional fee could be paid at the time of purchase, which would give the ability to swap a ticket at any point before it becomes valid. If relevant, the difference in price between the new and the old ticket would need to be paid.

3 If the small additional fee was not paid, a larger fee would be paid at the time of change to authorise the change and also, if relevant, the extra cost would be charged.

I would allow these changes right up to the moment a ticket becomes valid. That would be midnight of the day before for a flexible fare, typically after the morning peak (Monday to Friday) for many off-peak tickets, and the booked train for Advance tickets.

The push-back from the industry in making it so close to departure time could be that the railway would not be able to resell the seat.

My view is that we need a turn-up-and-go railway, and so there will always be an element of randomness as to how many passengers a specific service will have on it. That should be seen as a strength of the railway.

Flexibility should be a key part of the railway's sales pitch, and one of the consequences is that there are usually some empty seats.

One of the advantages for the operator is that someone rescheduling a cheap ticket to another service allows the possibility that the original seat can be sold at a higher on-the-day price.

I would extend that option to change for fixed tickets for a short period after the booked departure with the period being linked to journey duration. For example, for London to Edinburgh it might be 60 to 90 minutes. The logic being that if you are at X with a ticket to Y, you have not had time to go to Y and return.

Some of these choices have fraud risks with them – and yes, these should be mitigated.

But generally, the industry needs to be confident that ticket reuse is not possible. The checking system has to be good enough for passengers contemplating fraud to realise there



Mayor Paul Bristow outside Ely station, a rail bottleneck which must be tackled

Mayors fight the good fight for rail

In the new Britain where power will be devolved to the regions, it is mayors who will be crucial in making rail fit for purpose.

Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Peter Bristow is already marching forward.

He has launched a new report which highlights how upgrades to rail infrastructure around Ely are essential for regional growth.

His combined authority's new report sets out a clear and compelling investment case, highlighting that the upgrades would deliver a boost to the economy equal to £5 for every £1 invested.

They would also of course provide capacity for more frequent, faster rail services in Cambridgeshire and the East – and they would be a boon to rail freight, essential if climate change is to be combatted.

Mr Bristow says failing to sort out rail capacity around Ely would hold back the local economy's potential to create

jobs and opportunity, and drive economic growth.

The long-awaited £466 million upgrades, called the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement, would tackle the Victorian-era bottleneck where five rail lines meet at Ely, restricting both passenger and freight capacity.

The new report, called *The Growth Intersection*, positions the project as a lynchpin for unlocking economic and housing growth in the whole East of England economy.

Better rail services would benefit freight traffic from Felixstowe port, support growth in Norfolk and Suffolk, boost the Oxford-Cambridge corridor connectivity, and support journeys to London and the Midlands and the North via Peterborough.

The need is pressing. Over the next decade, the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Wellcome Genome Campus alone are forecast to expand to create a combined 32,000 new

roles, and this level of job demand cannot be met within Cambridge alone.

Upgrading rail infrastructure around Ely North Junction will open up those opportunities to more people in Cambridgeshire and the East of England by improving rail services. The project would also take freight away from the roads, removing 98,000 lorry journeys from the A14 each year.

The combined authority and its partners are already exploring funding routes, and setting up a strategic taskforce to persuade the government to move the project forward.

Mayor Paul Bristow said: "This investment will repay itself many times over and help deliver my ambition to triple the size of our local economy. We are working on it, making the case to government and not letting up."

Ely can be the new gateway to the whole east of England economy.

is a good chance they will be caught. Maybe that implies consistent ticket checks.

An issue I have been contemplating is a form of "check in". Should this exist for a rail journey as it does for airlines? With the current system, the answer is "no". You book, download or obtain your ticket at a station when convenient – and then travel.

This has the disadvantage that for flexible tickets the ability to get a refund or a change has to stop at the point the time the ticket is first valid,

perhaps when you collect the tickets several days in advance of travel.

In a world of "check in", the key point could be that you activate the ticket only just before travel starts. Failure to do this would leave the traveller without a valid ticket. Where barriers are in use, there would be an effective reminder, but that does not always apply.

What do members think – a bit of complexity for later ticket changes or simplicity and an earlier deadline?

Picture: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

Burnham must give railway a fares-fair bounce

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
By Christian Wolmar

The arrival of Andy Burnham in Downing Street undoubtedly offers hope that things will get better. He has a track record of being interested in public transport and actively supporting it. Moreover, he has been dealt a great hand by his predecessor as the creation of Great British Railways is progressing well.

Operations are gradually being transferred to the new Department for Transport team currently running the trains, ready for the inauguration of GBR, and railway managers are beginning to understand the depth of change required under the new system.

With the railway legislation still going through Parliament, Burnham has the opportunity to influence the very structure of the new railway.

His key emphasis is likely to be on devolution, something he has personally supported for a long time, by increasing the powers that local mayors will have over transport.

This could possibly include taking over rail services, though there are always complexities as rail does not fit easily within local authority boundaries. There are also potential pitfalls. What if the local

mayor is an anti-rail politician? Moreover, the fact that Network SouthEast, which was essentially designed to handle commuter services, actually ran trains right through to Weymouth is the kind of anomaly that the DfT will be keen to avoid.

Broadly though, devolution affords the opportunity for campaigners to make a difference locally without having to lobby centrally. That could be a big boost for some campaigns.

Burnham could, too, have an influence on fares and has already suggested that he would like to see the high price of train travel come down, but no detail has been offered. Some railcard restrictions have already been eased to allow

young people to get to school and college at reduced rates. There have even been hints in the media that the Network SouthEast railcard could be extended nationwide. As I have argued elsewhere, making rail affordable must be a fundamental aim of GBR, which has to be shown to be a success in order to encourage further reverses of Tory privatisations. The renationalisation

of the railways, which necessarily entails their reintegration, is a move almost universally supported within the industry. It also provides Burnham, who is keen on public ownership, with a fantastic opportunity to showcase how an emblematic Tory policy can be reversed. That is why I think he ought to call it the People's Railway. He must show that this is not just

an administrative or structural change, but one which will fundamentally alter the way the railways interact with the public. A genuine move to a People's Railway requires a change in attitude. No longer should staff tell passengers that "rules are rules and cannot be broken". There was a good example from a friend of mine who

was waiting for an 0855 train at Winchester station when the delayed 0848 arrived at 0856. "Don't get on this train," he was told by the station staff, even though there were plenty of spaces because "your ticket would not be valid". The job of the railways is not to ensure every i is dotted, every t crossed. Instead, it is to get people to their destination as near on time

as possible. The default action should be to help passengers achieve this and that requires a cultural change after 30 years of privatisation.

This should involve other changes, in addition to a comprehensible and comprehensive fares structure making the railway affordable for all. Notably, the railway should also be made accessible for all, with much more help for people with disabilities, and there should be far more marketing of train services, making use of the opportunities offered by social media.

There should, too, be a recognition that the railways are no longer primarily used for work or business purposes, and that therefore attracting leisure travellers should be a priority. Bring on the People's Railway, in which we can all feel a sense of ownership and control.

■ *Christian Wolmar's latest book Fast Track, The Extraordinary Story of High Speed Rail, has just been published, and signed discounted copies are available from christian.wolmar@gmail.com*

■ *Christian is also producing a weekly substack. Sign up for free or go for premium and get lots of extra features at:*

<https://transportnews.substack.com/>

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

AI (artificial intelligence) for rail campaigners

By Graham Collett
with lots of help from Claude

Rail campaigning has always been a battle fought largely by volunteers against organisations with far greater resources – paid comms teams, in-house analysts, and the time to produce polished, evidence-heavy submissions.

Artificial intelligence will not level that playing field entirely, but it can close the gap more than you might expect.

This guide shows how AI tools can help in building a case for a new station or service, making sense of lengthy consultation documents, drafting responses that carry real weight, and assessing proposals that affect your community.

However, AI tools can also lead you astray and land you in trouble if used carelessly.

Getting started with AI

You may have already used AI – for example, asking a chatbot to summarise a planning document, or getting it to tidy up a letter to your MP.

For rail campaigners, tools like ChatGPT and Claude can be genuinely useful allies. They are quick at digesting a 200-page consultation document, handy for drafting a first cut of a press release, and can help a small local group produce the kind of polished response that used to need a professional comms team.

To understand how AI can help you, it is useful to get a better understanding of all the different components and technologies that make AI possible.

What do we actually mean by AI?

AI gets used as a catch-all for quite different things. Artificial intelligence is the broad field of getting computers to do tasks that normally need human judgement, such as the spam filter on your email.

Generative AI is a more recent and more visible branch of this. Tools like ChatGPT and Claude are built on what are called large language models, are trained on vast amounts of text to predict and produce plausible-sounding writing, summaries, and answers.

The generative part simply means they create new content, maybe a letter, a summary, a first draft, rather than just sorting or filtering existing information.

For campaigners, the generative bit matters most day to day. It is the difference between a tool that flags relevant paragraphs in a document and one that will actually draft your letter for you.

Building the case for a campaign

One of the most time-consuming parts of campaigning is assembling the evidence base for a new station



Image: PIXABAY (Creative Commons)

or better service by using patronage forecasts, comparable schemes elsewhere and the economic case for investment.

AI will not do this research for you, but it is a strong starting point for organising your thinking. Ask it to pull together the standard arguments used in successful station reopening campaigns, or to help you structure a business case around the Department for Transport’s own appraisal criteria, and you will get a usable framework in minutes rather than hours.

It is particularly good at helping you to anticipate the counter-arguments a council or train operator might raise, so you can address them before they are even asked.

As ever, the facts and figures that go into that framework need to come from you, such as transport

appraisal guidance, Office of Rail and Road statistics and local growth data, but the structuring work is where AI makes its mark.

Making sense of the paperwork

Local authorities and train operators are not known for concise documents, and a rail consultation or a local plan can easily run to hundreds of pages of dense, technical prose. This is where AI genuinely shines. Give it a long document and ask it to summarise the key proposals, extract anything relevant to your line or station, or explain a piece of jargon in plain English.

It can save a volunteer committee hours of collective reading time. However, many free AI tools have limits on how much text they can process at once, so you may need to break a document into sections. Always ask the tool to tell you

which page or section a point came from, so you or a colleague can go back and verify it in context.

Getting your case heard

A well-argued, professionally presented consultation response carries more weight, and AI can help a small group produce one without needing a comms professional on the committee. It is useful for turning a bullet-pointed list of concerns into flowing prose, checking that your response reads clearly to someone outside the campaign, or drafting alternative versions pitched at different audiences. A technical annex for officers contrasts with a plainer summary for elected members.

What it cannot do is know your local railway line, your community or your history with the operator, so the strongest responses tend to come from campaigners feeding AI their own knowledge and asking it to help present that well, rather than asking it to invent the argument from scratch.

Assessing proposals

When a new timetable, a service cut or a planning application lands on your desk, AI can act as a useful sparring partner for working out what actually matters. Ask it to compare a proposed timetable against the current one and flag the changes, or to summarise what a planning application would mean for a station or level crossing you care about.

It is also helpful for spotting the questions you should be asking, the kind of thing an experienced campaigner would know to check, but which a newer volunteer might miss. Treat its analysis as a prompt for your own scrutiny rather than a verdict in itself. The final judgement on whether a proposal is good or bad for your community should always be yours.

Always double-check

The golden rule is simple. AI is a fast first drafter but is not a fact checker. These tools are very good at sounding confident, which is precisely the problem. They will occasionally produce a statistic, a quote, or even a whole report title that sounds entirely plausible but is completely made up.

This matters enormously for campaigners, where a single wrong figure in a consultation response can undermine your credibility with a council or train operator. Before anything goes out under our organisation’s name, treat AI-drafted content the way you would treat a submission from a keen new volunteer. Welcome the effort, but check every number, quote and date against a primary source, whether it is the operator’s own figures, ORR data or the consultation document itself.

Eurostar buzz for train driver from steam era

By Bill Davies
who began his rail career at Nottingham as a steam fireman

At long last I got the official invitation to have a cab ride to Brussels on Eurostar.

It was fantastic and I am still buzzing the day after, so thanks to all concerned for making an old hand very happy.

My previous dates had all been cancelled for good reasons so I have no complaints, though I was disappointed.

As an ASLEF union representative, I had ridden on the original class 373 set that was tested on the West Coast main line to look at various aspects of driver comfort. Sadly, the unit failed and had to be dragged back by two of the Eurostar-operated class 37s which date back to the 1960s, the era when I began my career on the railways.

In August 2026, I boarded one of the new Eurostar e320 trains on an Amsterdam service driven by one of my former secondmen from 1979!

I was playing very much a reverse role. Accompanied by a knowledgeable inspector, the “footplate office” was fully staffed.

Leaving St Pancras on time I was into a new world of cab signalling and very different controls. Yes of course there was a handle for stopping, another for power and the third, a luxury, cruise control.

All other operations were controlled by computer screens requiring attention along the way for a variety of reasons. All this was done competently by our driver as we reached various locations where “trimming” of the computer was



London St Pancras: The e320 Eurostar (left) which began operational service in 2015 and the original Eurostar design (right) which dates back to 1994

required. With cab signalling, below the speedometer is displayed the recommended speed to adopt in relation to traffic up ahead of us.

On the high-speed sections in Kent, the 300 kilometre per hour mark was soon achieved, well before we reached the disappointingly austere entrance to the Channel Tunnel itself.

The advisory computer advised us to run at such a speed so as not to catch up with the Eurotunnel Shuttle train in front of us. I was all eyes watching this totally new system I had never encountered before. Complex computer technology, but simplicity itself for the driver. No longer is there the need to observe signals at the side

of the track although marker boards still have significance.

In the darkness of the tunnel, it was pointed out where there are English and French crossovers, plus emergency cross tunnel exits for passengers to a service tunnel.

Emerging into France, our service passed various rather disappointing stations where we did not stop before “turning” left for Brussels.

My concentration levels were high as I watched with amazement at how calm all concerned were.

They just got on with the job in hand as we approached another area of activity, where a voltage change to Belgian 3,000 Volts DC was selected for our run into our

crew change point. The last 15 kilometres was over conventional Belgian signalling, which I found particularly fascinating as suddenly audible cab warnings came into play.

Arriving in our platform, a young Dutch driver was there to relieve our English driver, to take the train to Amsterdam.

Yes, we were three minutes late, but through no fault of our driver or Eurostar. I was still trying hard to keep up with what I had witnessed, hoping that I could add it to my conventional driving knowledge.

What a fantastic experience it was, especially the incredibly smooth ride in our fully fitted carpeted cab.

East Midlands

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Strategic freight country

Rail freight is vital for the economy, environment and defence, members of Railfuture East Midlands were reminded at the branch AGM. Supermarkets would run out of supplies within three days without rail freight, said Simon Walton, the UK editor of *railfreight.com* magazine. Governments, however, do not appreciate its importance and proposals for new rail freight terminals often meet local opposition, even though they can take many lorries off the roads.

The East Midlands is the strategic and geographical centre of Britain, with its logistics hubs and rail connections to ports. The Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station site offers redevelopment opportunities. However, there is currently no collaboration between East Midlands Airport, a major airfreight terminal, and the adjacent East

Midlands Gateway rail freight hub. Nearby, the nationally significant Mountsorrel granite quarry in Leicestershire moves 60% of its material by rail. Simon’s presentation was followed by the formal business of the AGM, and then a presentation by Anne Robinson of East Midlands Combined County Authority’s climate coalition. The coalition is a group set up three years ago to lobby candidates for the combined authority mayoralty. The coalition wants transport funding switched away from road towards active travel and public transport.

Clay Cross station hopes

Railfuture’s Stephen Chaytow made a presentation to local businesses about proposals to open a station for Clay Cross. A 2023 study chose Egstow, where the Erewash Valley line passes under the A6175 road, as the preferred location, although the railway corridor here is more constrained than at the former station at Tupton, which closed in

1967. Tupton is further from the centre of Clay Cross but would serve the large areas of housing north of the town, and offer connections to Derby as well as Nottingham and Sheffield if new local services on main lines in the Derby area are introduced. Rail would offer a public transport alternative to the A38 Derby roundabouts scheme, which has been shelved by the government.

Inter-city trains crisis

Continuing problems on East Midlands Railway’s inter-city services dominated a meeting between Railfuture East Midlands chair Phil Thomas and secretary Steve Jones with EMR’s stakeholder engagement managers Laura Etheridge and George Selby at Derby in August. Late delivery of the new Aurora bimode trains and reduced availability of Meridian units caused many cancellations, forcing EMR to introduce a reduced timetable. There has been public anger about the deterioration in the

inter-city service. EMR regional routes also faced problems on very hot days. Railfuture was concerned by shutdowns from midday of the Robin Hood Line (Nottingham-Mansfield-Worksop) and the Nottingham-Leicester local services, leaving passengers to transfer to buses.

Ivanhoe line initiative

Both the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line and rail minister Lord Hendy have welcomed the initiative by Amanda Hack, MP for North West Leicestershire, to form a steering group to make progress on reinstating passenger services on the Leicester to Burton-upon-Trent line. Reopening would bring rail services back to Coalville and Swadlincote, two large towns without passenger rail, as well as providing sustainable access to the National Forest.

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

AGM 2026 briefing

The 2026 Railfuture AGM, held on 4 July in Birmingham, was told that Railfuture is working on introducing remote voting so people unable to attend the AGM in person will be able to participate directly in future.

The AGM heard that another reception for MPs is being planned for November and Railfuture members were invited to encourage their local MPs to attend the Westminster event, which is expected to concentrate on rail devolution. One question will be: How much of Great British Railways will be devolved?

The AGM thanked Jerry Alderson for his 21 year service as a Railfuture director. He continues with Railfuture but his place as finance director is taken over by David Buchan, who was also applauded by the audience.

President Christian Wolmar explained to the AGM how important rail minister Lord Peter Hendy is in seeing GBR through to reality, but he predicted that former Conservative transport ministers will give the Railways Bill a “rough ride” as it goes through parliament.

Christian urged the government to cut the cost of living by making off-peak fare prices the norm.

He said it was sad how Britain and America had been outperformed on high speed rail progress by Japan and China. He condemned successive governments for using too many consultants on high speed rail when in-house expertise was needed. But he was optimistic about new prime minister Andy Burnham’s pro-rail and pro-public transport approach. Labour as a whole also wants to see rail

nationalisation as a success. The public too were generally positive about railways, although value for money and overcrowding are causes for worry.

He said the railways need to be run by an arms-length organisation, the way that British Rail was. He said that in its latter years, BR was a tremendous success.

By contrast, the current public perception of train operator CrossCountry is “awful”.

Railfuture policy director Ian Brown, however, warned that GBR does not yet exist, it has no management focus, no strategy and there is no recognition of the importance of passengers and staff.

“Reintegration of track and train is not enough,” warned Ian. “Railfuture must decide what our priorities are and ensure that we campaign for them.

“It is essential that HS2 goes further than Handsacre Junction and that rail freight gets 100% support.”

Phil Smart reminded the AGM how important rail freight is. He called on GBR to set ambitious targets to expand rail freight, which is beset by the increasing problem of a congested rail network with little spare capacity.

Because HS2 has been cut back, vast sums will have to be spent on upgrading the existing network to cope – probably more than would have been spent if the complete HS2 programme had continued.

He is optimistic that progress can be made both on digital automatic coupling and providing more electric power for the existing overhead electric lines.

All change for chairs: Page 23

Railfuture directors line up

Ian Brown	Until 2027
Chris Page	
David Buchan (co-opted by board)	
Roger Blake	Until 2028
Allison Cosgrove	
Neil Middleton	
Owen O'Neill	Until 2029
Mike Southgate	
Kevin Swift	

Do you have IT skills?

The Railfuture membership system and the website are key challenges

Interested? Please contact

jerry.alderson@railfuture.org.uk
or
chris.page@railfuture.org.uk

West Midlands

After 96 years, tram rolls into Dudley again



Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

The tram at Dudley after a one-hour journey from Wednesbury

Dudley welcomed its first tram in 96 years with the completion of a test run in June, thanks to a £649 million West Midlands Metro project.

An earlier Wednesbury-Dudley tram line closed in 1930.

Dudley's new 11-kilometre extension of the West Midlands Metro will stretch from Wednesbury, through Tipton and Dudley, to Brierley Hill on the route of a former rail line. The extension has missed its projected August completion date but is now expected to open “by the end of the year”.

West Midlands mayor Richard Parker said: “Seeing the first tram run past Dudley Zoo is an exciting milestone for the project.”

It is the biggest extension to the West Midland tram network since the original Wolverhampton-Birmingham line opened in 1999. It will eventually continue to the Merry Hill shopping centre.

In August, a new operational control centre for the complete West Midlands Metro network opened at Wednesbury.

A party of Railfuture members visited the depot after the Birmingham AGM on 4 July. Modernising the depot is part of preparing for expanded services over the next few years. There will be extensions

to Digbeth, Merry Hill and the new Birmingham Sports Quarter site.

Heritage line trial

An eight-week trial started on 1 September to test whether heritage steam and diesel trains could be used to extend regular passenger rail services.

Severn Valley Railway trains were employed to connect with West Midlands Railway services to Birmingham.

SVR said the trial was part of a long-term project to assess the potential for introducing regular passenger rail services between Bewdley and the wider West Midlands rail network.

“If demand is demonstrated, it could pave the way for selected services that stop at Kidderminster to be extended to Bewdley in future,” it said. “Main line rail passengers can complete their journey on a heritage railway using their normal rail tickets,” said SVR chief executive Gus Dunster.

The service operated on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, with departures at 0640 and 0740.

Passengers changed trains at Kidderminster to arrive at Birmingham Snow Hill at 0746 and 0846.

Railfuture West Midlands: steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk

Lottery winners

May P Davis, G Smith, R King, I Kemp, L Butler, A Knibbs

June J Vokins, I Nurdin, M Edgell, G Smith, T Davies, P Odell

July R Crockford, C Fribbins, M Robinson, A Knibbs, M Hughes, R Blake

Join the Lottery

Railfuture Lottery profits go towards the Fighting Fund, which supports the campaigns our members are working on. For £12 per year for 12 entries, you can

take part and could win one of six prizes every month. Multiple entries are possible.

Taking part is easy – contact lottery@railfuture.org.uk and decide how many entries you want every month and how you would like to pay: via online banking, Paypal or cheque.

With 72 winners every year and increased prizes in the December draw, give it a try – who knows, you could easily be a winner!

www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/

A fascinating and unusual ride around Britain’s unique rail network

BOOK REVIEWS BY RICHARD LYSONS

Final Destination – Riding Britain's Trains to the End of the Line
By Nige Tassell Mudlark 2026
ISBN 978-0-00-870012-6 £10.99

Nige Tassell is a well-known and respected writer and journalist who has had books published on Wembley Stadium, British football, cycling and popular music. This latest book, *Final Destination*, is aimed at general readers, but will appeal to *Railwatch* readers and Railfuture campaigners who want accuracy and detail when reading about our railways.

I have lost count of the number of series about railways on television. After Michael Portillo we have had programmes presented by Julie Walters, Chris Tarrant, Hugh Bonneville and Simon King, to name but four.

Tim Dunn is a different kettle of fish, coming to television as a railway historian with a particular specialism in railway architecture.

At the same time as these television series, we have seen a large number of books published about stations, railway lines, closures, re-openings and so on. Tassell's book is one of the best because he writes better than most and tells the reader just enough to want to visit the book's locations themselves.

The author has celebrated the 200th birthday of the world's first passenger-carrying railway by riding our network to places that are seldom visited. He presents 16 chapters describing journeys to 16 final destinations that are less well known, starting in the far north of Scotland and ending up in Cornwall. The chapters are all about 20 pages long and I found myself reading the book quite quickly.

Rails around London – the planning and realisation of the orbital network

By Peter Kay Capital History 2025
ISBN: 978-1-854144973 £22

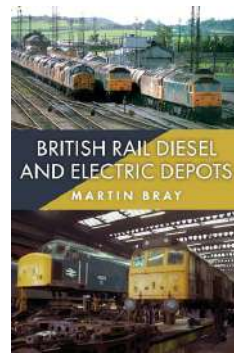
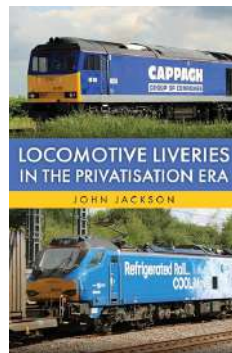
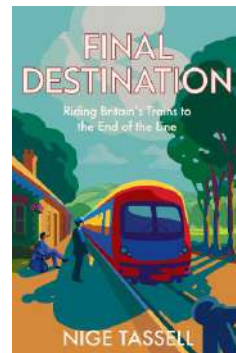
Review by Roger Blake

First mooted in 1971, the completion of an inner suburban circular railway was finally achieved as part of Transport for London's Overground network when a link between the East London and South London lines opened in 2012.

Since then, the new connections provided by this service have generated much new traffic along the lines absorbed by it.

The new facility included the reopening of the West London line to passengers between Willesden Junction and Clapham Junction.

This book tells the story of campaigning, planning and building the network over a period of almost 40 years. Extensive research of official documents show various options considered to bring new life to run-down and under-used lines that in many cases ran through large



Portillo's television programmes on railway journeys are fine, as long as one remembers that researchers have already been there ahead of him and most of his encounters are not spontaneous.

I can tolerate the presenter's taste in trousers and jackets, but it is his total lack of luggage that alienates me! Tassell's journeys are clearly well planned, but what he sees, hears and experiences are not predictable. In each chapter he captures something fascinating and unusual about each route.

I know the route from Manchester Piccadilly to Buxton quite well, but Tassell highlights aspects that were either new to me or I had forgotten. He pays tribute to train driver John Axon, who was posthumously awarded the George Cross for his heroic work near Chapel-en-le-Frith when his train's brakes failed back in the 1950s.

Nearly all of the 16 chapters in the book involve journeys to or from Britain's coast. Some of the seaside towns – Whitby, Pwllheli, Morecambe and Penzance – were already known to me and it was interesting to compare Tassell's opinions and experiences with my own. The route from Bristol Temple Meads to Severn Beach was completely new to me. I did not

even know that this line existed!

This was once promoted by Thomas Cook as “one of Europe's top scenic routes”. Tassell describes the reality of the route and the rise and fall of Severn Beach's past identity as a seaside resort. I am tempted to follow the author's journey some time. There is something enthralling about these types of locations.

I thoroughly recommend Tassell's book for both the armchair traveller and more active ones. I purchased a copy of this book myself and am a little reluctant to lend it out as I would be unlikely to see it again!

Locomotive Liveries in the Privatisation Era
By John Jackson Amberley Publishing
ISBN 978-1398126794 £15.99

British Rail Diesel and Electric Depots
By Martin Bray Amberley Publishing
ISBN 978-1398126756 £15.99

The privatisation of the UK's railways 30 or so years ago has had an extraordinary effect on all aspects of the industry, and all *Railwatch* readers, and Railfuture members will have their own views on its positive and negative aspects. One neglected area of interest is the visual appearance of freight

locomotives. Locomotive liveries have become more individual and, arguably, more attractive.

Businesses use this opportunity to promote themselves. John Jackson has travelled throughout Britain's rail network and captured on camera the corporate liveries of the rail-fleet operators. The book features all the “big” names that many of you will recognise such as Direct Rail Services, Colas Rail, DC Rail and Freightliner. The final three chapters of the book feature an interesting selection of diesel, electric and high speed liveries and operators. Jackson, the author of over 25 railway books, is an excellent photographer and informative writer. He has certainly opened my eyes to a different aspect of the railway landscape. Martin Bray's book, in contrast, looks backwards to the era of diesel and electric depots around Britain from the 1970s to the 1990s. This was a time when railway enthusiasts, often armed with a copy of Ian Allan's British Locomotive Shed Directory, could obtain permits to visit depots. I must confess that this book is outside my usual area of interest in railways, but as an enthusiast of industrial and transport history I found Bray's book quite an absorbing read. I am old enough to remember when the railway network had simply more variety and character. I can see the appeal of locomotive-hauled trains and the book reminds me of an era of guard's vans, dining cars, affordable drinks at station buffets and platform tickets. This is a specialised book but Bray's photographs and text will appeal to many.

■■ Richard Lyons is secretary of *STORM*, the Rochdale area rail user group, and co-organiser of the *Electric Railway Charter*

The power of “P” and 40 years of campaigning gave London a prize

Rails around London – the planning and realisation of the orbital network

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First mooted in 1971, the completion of an inner suburban circular railway was finally achieved as part of Transport for London's Overground network when a link between the East London and South London lines opened in 2012.

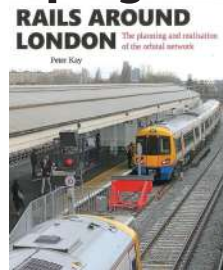
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This book tells the story of campaigning, planning and building the network over a period of almost 40 years. Extensive research of official documents show various options considered to bring new life to run-down and under-used lines that in many cases ran through large

populations and developing areas. The 100 pages of this book also serve as a powerful reminder of the twists and turns in saving threatened services and advocating expansion.

The author covers two periods, the British Rail/ Greater London Council schemes of 1969 to 1986/94 and the East London Line Extensions of 1986-2012.1 joined Hackney Council in 1985 as town then transport planner, leaving 30 years later as the orbital railway at Hackney Central was linked by direct walkway to the radial line at Hackney Downs, soon after Transport for London absorbed what is now the Weaver Line into the London Overground network. Contrary to the widespread and mistaken belief beyond the capital, London does not always get what it wants when it wants it. Rail improvements are hard-won. For rail development campaigners,



their sole resource is the power of persuasion. Think “P”, not just for persuasion but for persistence, patience, professionalism, politeness and pragmatism. For the latter half of the book's 40 years, the East London Line Group used the power of “P”. TfL credited the independent group of representative stakeholder organisations with safeguarding the strategic vision of an orbital network, even helping to save it from some near-death experiences.

Peter Kay's work is a thoroughly absorbing “once picked up, not put down” book. The East London Line Group was wound up in 2010 – “mission accomplished” – because by then, a commitment had been given to complete the orbital network by absorbing the Surrey Quays- Clapham Junction extension. The group's independent specialist adviser Jonathan Roberts wrote *An Enduring Legacy – East London Line Group 1990-2010*. Jonathan worked with Transport 2000's Stephen Joseph in the 1970s at the heart of the North London Line Committee.



Elgin marvels

I am writing this on my way to London Euston on Lumo's new Stirling to London service.

The train is on time, the crew is friendly and professional, there are working toilets, and the trolley has been along three times. Oh and the air-conditioning works well.

The train itself is a refurbished 22-year-old Meridian. It is reasonably comfortable, though that is helped by the fact it was less than one-third full as far as Preston. Many passengers boarded there and now the train is just over two-thirds full.

I would not like to travel on a fully loaded train, as luggage space is restricted in comparison with Avanti or LNER.

The overhead racks cannot take rucksacks or even small suitcases: passengers were chivvied to place such items in the space under their seat, leaving the limited luggage storage areas at the end of each carriage for larger items.

Would I travel by Lumo again? Yes! It is a good service. It is a journey of just under six hours from Stirling.

The attraction for someone like me, living in Elgin, is that I can catch the 0743 departure, which runs through to Glasgow Queen Street, arriving in Stirling about 40 minutes before the Lumo service departs. It is an easy single change at Stirling and, for now at least, Lumo is offering exceptional value fares from Stirling to London.

Using my senior railcard, I paid just £19.90 for an advance single. Combining that with a ScotRail advance single to Stirling for £14.90 means the whole journey has cost less than £35. That is impossible to beat.

I have already booked my next two journeys.

Douglas Clark, Duncan Drive, Elgin IV30 4NH
douglaspc@hotmail.co.uk

Rust and recycling

As a frequent rail traveller by first preference, I enjoy the passing scenes through carriage windows. Year on year, my notice has been drawn to the mounting quantities of rail, cast aside in lengths alongside or between running tracks, or in long abandoned rusting piles at many junctions and with no evident intention of recovery.

I appreciate that costs accrue for Network Rail in recovery but equally believe that the economics of recycling give larger opportunities for cost savings, not least in eliminating the necessity of iron-ore importing, shipping and smelting in the production of high quality British steel. Might not the South



Picture: EXETER PHOENIX

RAILWAY ALLIES: Left to right, representatives from Barnstaple Town Council, Crediton Town Council, Devon County Council, North Devon Line Rail Promotion Group, Peninsula Transport, Great Western Railway, Mid Devon District Council, Network Rail, Railfuture, West Devon District Council. Exeter City Council and Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority were also represented

Alliance for a bigger, better railway

Further to my letter in Railwatch 188 headed "Real campaigning" which I closed with: "There is going to be much more to come", I have more to say.

The picture taken above by the staff at the Exeter Phoenix is just one illustration. The Railfuture-instigated Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance held this workshop in July for funding

partners to gather financial support in support of an essential business case for modernisation of the Barnstaple-Exeter North Devon line. In the South West we do not mourn, we mobilise!

Tim Steer, chair of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall

More Devon and Cornwall reports on page 19

Western Railway become a strategic pioneer for a phased retrieval of these materials at such locations as Eastleigh and Woking (with siding capacity) for onwards conveyance to Port Talbot in due course?

Paul Anthony Newman, Cranworth House, Winchester SO22 6EJ

Safety beside busway

Further to the *Railwatch* 188 references to the busway from Cambridge to St Ives and Huntingdon, it is right that it should be fenced as, when I walked with a friend to Fen Drayton, buses passed us at about 60mph.

Charles Currey, Castle Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3WE

Editor's note: Fences are currently being erected alongside the busway after two pedestrians and a cyclist died and several other people were seriously injured in crashes. Bus company Stagecoach East runs the service but the county council is responsible for it and was fined £6 million last year when the Health and Safety Executive took it to court. The council installed fencing, reduced speed limits at crossing points to 20 mph and reviewed all signs on the busway.

It is ironic that a railway that Railfuture campaigned to have reopened to passengers was ripped up to make way for the busway and that ordinary buses on ordinary roads can run at up to 60 mph, while expensive buses using the

very expensive busway run at restricted speeds. Campaigners have asked: If safety fences are needed along the busway, should we have fences to separate all pedestrian pavements and all cycle paths from buses and other traffic?

The "white elephant" busway opened in 2011 at a cost of £181 million. The council and BAM Nuttall settled a court dispute over the costs of the busway in 2013.

Access in question

Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill writes in *Railwatch* 188 that "GBR will embed accessibility into the heart of the railway – making sure everyone can travel confidently and with dignity".

Why then is Berrylands, my local station, which is used by more people than many UK stations, being completely rebuilt without a

Boost the economy by investing in accessibility

Making trains, buses and stations more accessible would get millions more people into work and boost the economy by billions, researchers predict. More than 2.8 million disabled people are currently locked out of the workforce because of inaccessible transport. A report by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers also shows that local economies are being undermined because one in five shopping trips by disabled people are abandoned because of transport access failings.

"Fixing accessibility is one of the fastest ways to unlock jobs, boost the economy and future-proof the country," said the institute's James Partington. "The prize is enormous. The cost of doing nothing is enormous."

lift? Our MP has campaigned hard to make the Department for Transport see sense, but Lord Hendy and the department insist that having 48 steps to either platform is OK.

Tim Leunig, Berrylands, Surbiton t.leunig@gmail.com

A bright rail future

I agree with Stewart Palmer (*Railwatch* 188) that to leave Railfuture will not help those campaigning for a better rail system in the UK.

Indeed, we need more members to become a stronger force when faced with the powerful motorist lobby that seems to be active in the Treasury. We can all play a part, however small, in trying to ensure that railways are the bedrock of tomorrow's environmentally friendly transport network. When one considers the outlook for rail in

the early 1980s (remember Serpell?) then perhaps we can afford to be somewhat optimistic about the future.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP
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Noise plea

I am a frequent user of public transport across the UK and mainland Europe. I value public transport not only because it is efficient and environmentally responsible, but because it provides a shared public space in which people can read, work, rest, think, or simply travel in peace.

In recent years, however, I have noticed a growing tendency for passengers to play music, videos, games and social-media content through their phone speakers on trains, buses and at stations. Speaker-phone conversations have become increasingly common as well.

For many travellers this is simply an irritation. For others, including people with sensory sensitivities, autism, migraines, anxiety disorders, hearing difficulties, or other hidden disabilities, it can have a much more significant impact on comfort and wellbeing.

I do not believe this issue is fundamentally about enforcement or punishment. Rather, it is about establishing and reinforcing social norms within shared public spaces.

Most passengers already use headphones. Most passengers already understand that their entertainment should not become everybody else's. The challenge is simply to make those expectations visible and consistent.

I have therefore written to major train and bus operators in the UK and in mainland Europe, asking them to consider steps such as clear signage, occasional public-address announcements and staff training.

I am aware that Transport for London has recently run a similar campaign. Via my Facebook page [<https://www.facebook.com/neiljacobs.1291/>] I have invited comments from members of the public.

Neil Jacobs, St Matthews Road, Bristol BS6 1TU
neiljacobs101@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

Postal and email addresses may be published unless writers specifically ask to exclude them



BRITAIN'S BUSIEST RAIL STATION: Rail minister Lord Peter Hendy (in red tie) joined GBR Anglia managing director Jamie Burles (on his left) and colleagues from c2c, Greater Anglia and Network Rail Anglia to see new trains in the new red, white and blue GBR livery

Shades of GBR begin to emerge

An early milestone for GBR Anglia was marked in July by the unveiling of the first c2c and Greater Anglia trains in new Great British Railways liveries.

The ceremony took place at Britain's busiest station, London Liverpool Street.

Rail minister Lord Peter Hendy joined GBR Anglia managing director Jamie Burles and colleagues from c2c, Greater Anglia and Network Rail Anglia at the special event.

Two c2c Electrostar trains and two Greater Anglia Aventura trains – both built in Derby – were displayed in the distinctive red, white and blue Great British Railways livery.



SHOWING THEIR COLOURS: Two Derby-built trains in GBR livery at Liverpool Street station, an Electrostar which operates normal services out of London Fenchurch Street, and an Aventura in the background, which is used on many of the long-distance stopping trains from Liverpool Street

It was a positive, visible symbol of the creation of a simpler, more joined-up railway that is already delivering benefits for passengers across the East of England.

GBR Anglia brings c2c, Greater Anglia and Network Rail Anglia together under one unified leadership team, aligning track and train more closely to improve reliability, resilience and customer service across the region.

The new identity reflects that the three organisations are increasingly planning and delivering as one railway, supporting faster and better decisions, clearer accountability and more coordinated services for passengers. Early progress includes approval for Greater Anglia Aventura trains to operate on the c2c network, providing greater resilience and flexibility across the two train fleets.

Teams have also worked together to strengthen services for major events, including supporting thousands of Southend United fans travelling to Wembley, and to enable a trial of overnight Friday Stansted Express services.

It was the start of an ongoing programme of initiatives to deliver further benefits for customers and communities across the rail network. It is expected that passengers in East Anglia will see more trains carrying the GBR Anglia identity over the coming months, mostly through a simple switchover of names and logos on trains.

Meanwhile, further c2c class 357 trains will receive

the new livery as they pass through the operator's scheduled fleet repaint and planned maintenance programme.

The Railways Bill, which will officially establish GBR, cleared its third reading in the House of Commons in June and is expected to receive royal assent in late 2026 or early 2027.

GBR will be legally required to run the railway to high performance standards, act in the interests of passengers, disabled passengers and the public, promote the interests of freight, support private sector certainty, and use taxpayers' cash efficiently.

In April, the Department for Transport published *Better Connected – A Strategy for Integrated Transport* calling for an end to the traditional approach to transport, "thinking in terms of buses, cars or trains". It added: "We must prioritise how people experience the transport network as a whole."

The document also admitted that the transport system is complex and how decisions are made is evolving, "particularly in the context of increased devolution". Since July, things have changed at Westminster. We have a new prime minister committed to more devolution.

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Worst for overcrowding

When the Department for Transport recently revealed the 10 most overcrowded commuter trains, it did not escape Railfuture's attention that three of the 10 are South Western Railway services running into Waterloo (from Alton, from Fareham and from Portsmouth Harbour) and another is an SWR service from Waterloo to Basingstoke. This is not surprising since the renationalised operator has still not delivered on its promise to restore services to pre-Covid levels.

Railfuture is in regular contact with managers at SWR, and so we brought up the subject of further reinstatement of peak-hour trains across the network in view of embarrassing headlines about overcrowding. We are hopeful that some improvements will appear following the December 2026 timetable change.

Alliance bid refresh

Alliance Rail's 2025 bid to run services between London Waterloo and Marchwood on the Waterside line under an open access agreement was rejected by the Office of Road and Rail earlier this year. The company then made a fresh submission in July, addressing all of the points of contention.

Alliance Rail's managing director Ian Yeowart communicated details of his revised bid to Railfuture, as we had supported his original bid and shared some local perspectives about restoring passenger services to the Waterside line. We asked him whether the class 769 units that Alliance intends to use on the service would be fit for use, having been in storage for several years. Ian assured us that the trains are in decent condition, but nevertheless they would be given a complete overhaul and an internal refresh.

Railfuture wants to see restoration of pre-Covid service levels between Southampton and Waterloo, and supports the fresh bid. Clearly the proposal by Alliance Rail to back-start the service from the Waterside line would be a substantial bonus, as would their promise to give a couple of poorly served stations on the main line, namely Hook and Totton, extra direct trains to London. We await the outcome of the revised bid with great interest.

www.facebook.com/WessexRailfuture/

10 railwatch October 2026

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

Mission impossible

Railfuture was saddened to learn that John Rogers, former chair of Railfuture Wales, passed away in May. John was the leader of the battle (tagged Mission Impossible) to save the Cambrian Coast line when it was threatened with closure in the 1970s. He also oversaw the merger in 2015 of Railfuture's three Welsh branches – North, Mid and South – into one Wales unit, before handing over the stewardship to Peter Kingsbury a year later. John was a fervent Welsh nationalist and campaigned hard for the railways of Wales to be as independent of Westminster as possible.

Chris Magner writes: "Tywyn-based John Rogers founded the Cambrian Coast Line Action Group at a meeting at Dolgellau in 1971. Although many people were involved in saving the 'Coast' it was John who led from the front.

"At a CCLAG meeting at Harlech in 1972, it was decided to run a special train from Pwllheli to London so people could march down Downing Street to save the railway. The march took place in November 1972. A pipe band led the march attended by many people including MPs Goronwy Roberts and Will Edwards."

More than 700 people travelled on the special train, and there was a thousand-strong march through London, a rally on the Emnbankment with Welsh flags and plenty of placards, an unparalleled exhibition of unity – Welsh hymns, hwyl* and fervour. It was a grand success!

John was guest speaker in 1981 when the Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association was founded at Llandrindod Wells. Before retirement, he worked in education, most recently as examiner/marker for the Welsh Joint Education Committee.

* A little Welsh word with a big meaning. Hwyl is more than just a word. It describes a sense of exuberance and well-being.

Railfuture wants action

Railfuture attended the Transport for Wales liaison meeting in July, where TfW explained the reasons behind recent shortcomings across the Welsh network. It seems the air conditioning on mark IV coaches (used on some Cardiff-Manchester services) could not cope with temperatures of 35C or above and it shut down. Thus, during the hottest days of the July heatwave, the entire coaching stock was replaced by inferior units rather than having

raifuture.bsky.social

Picture:ROBERT BARTON

DOWNING STREET 1972: (left to right) MP Goronwy Roberts, John Rogers, MP Will Edwards and D J Williams. Two years later, John received a "reprieve for the Cambrian line" telegram. It came four months after Harold Wilson replaced Edward Heath as prime minister. MP George Thomas, later House of Commons speaker, warned Wilson that if the closure went ahead it would cost Labour seats at the next election

passengers sweltering in trains where the windows cannot be opened. Meanwhile, on the Heart of Wales line, the slow and patchy introduction of Active Travel coaches (class 153 units modified to carry bicycles and walkers) is blamed on HoW line trains also being diagrammed for other duties in West Wales.

The new CAF class 197 trains, which are used on both long distance and middle distance services, have developed gearbox problems. A significant number are out of service. While it is useful to know the cause of problems, Railfuture is more interested in what is being done to rectify them, so we have written to TfW to ask. While temperatures of 35C and above may be rare at present, the evidence is that they will become more common, so this cannot be ignored.

TfW v GBR

Doubts about TfW's ability to operate new services partly in England (*Railwatch* 188) have been assuaged. Railfuture member Phil Inskip has examined the Memorandum of Understanding, created by the Westminster and Welsh governments. Section 11.3 says: "New service proposals or substantial changes to existing cross border passenger services, as defined in paragraph 11.7, will be jointly developed by the Parties or TfW and GBR, as appropriate, with the ability for either public body (TfW or GBR) to deliver these."

TfW v GWR

Great Western Railway has been accused by the Welsh Government of trying to disrupt plans for new direct train services between West Wales and Bristol. Railfuture has seen correspondence between consultees and the Office of Rail and Road about TfW's open-access application to extend existing Fishguard and Milford Haven services to Cardiff as far as Bristol Temple Meads every two hours. A West Wales-Bristol service has long been a Railfuture aspiration, so we

support the idea. Only GWR has formally objected, on several grounds including the argument that the new service may abstract revenue from GWR which runs a Cardiff-Bristol service. As GWR is soon to be part of GBR, and TFW is owned by the Welsh Government, this will be a discussion between public bodies and we do not see the relevance to GWR. Other concerns relate to capacity issues, particularly in the Severn Tunnel and in the Bristol area. These may be valid. We are not obsessed by who runs the trains, and one possibility is that perhaps one of the Bristol Temple Meads-Cardiff services could be extended to West Wales every two hours, obviating the capacity issue for now. We are currently liaising with Railfuture Severnside about this.

Any capacity issues will have to be solved before the proposed new Cardiff Central-Bristol Temple Meads stopping service (serving six new stations in South Wales) is launched a few years from now.

Support for station at Caerleon

Railfuture member group *Towards Restoring a Caerleon Station* welcomes support from Professor Mark Barry in a recent blog (Professor Barry is the inspiration behind the South Wales Metro). In it, he calls for a station at Caerleon on the Newport-Hereford line to help boost the local service on the south end of the line. Professor Barry believes this is a better use of scarce resources than some other TfW projects such as reopening a link from the Ebbw Vale line to Abertillery. Railfuture supports both projects.

Come and meet us

Railfuture stalls at:

- Corris Railway Society Model Railway Exhibition (at Machynlleth, August 29 and 30)
- Swansea Model Railway Exhibition (Sept 19 and 20)
- Chester Model Railway Exhibition (Oct 10 and 11)
- Cardiff Model Railway Show (Oct 31 and Nov 1)

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

Northern struggles on Sundays

By Trevor Bishop

Rail services run by operator Northern in England's North West have been hit by cuts of up to 50% on Sundays.

The cuts are blamed on the continuing shortage of conductors volunteering to work Sundays to cover the original planned service levels.

In response, Northern has introduced a "temporary" reduced Sunday timetable with an average cut in services of 35%. Some rail services are completely replaced by buses on Sundays.

Railfuture's North West and Yorkshire branches have worked together to gather details of the problem.

The reliability of services on the Hope Valley line between Manchester and Sheffield was initially examined and then the overall level of cuts to services across the North West became clearer.

This situation has been ongoing since late 2024.

Talks took place between Northern and the RMT union, which represents conductors, but RMT members in the North West rejected an initial increased pay offer to accept Sundays as part of their working week.

Many subsequently chose not to volunteer to work them, leaving Northern to rewrite the Sunday timetable to match the level of volunteers available.

In gathering figures, Railfuture has found that parts of some routes were running and some were not.

Because of Northern's legacy agreements, there are different terms and conditions that apply to Northern conductors in different parts of Northern's operating area.

For those based in the North West, Sundays are always voluntary overtime, "rest day working" in industry language.

For those based in Yorkshire or the North East, Sunday is included in the working week.

Railfuture North West understands that over the past 18 months there have been several further offers put to the North West-based RMT conductors to persuade them to accept Sundays as part of their working week in future.

That would mean a full service could be scheduled again, but no deal has yet been accepted.

We believe the latest offer, which included a deal to harmonise terms and conditions across the company as a whole, plus a proposal for driver opening and closing of the doors (DODC), was accepted for the terms and conditions but rejected for DODC. Railfuture North West and Yorkshire branches have

Please remember Railfuture in your will: www.railfuture.org.uk/legacies



Service updates

Check for the latest information

Warning on Northern's website



High Peak and Hope Valley

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

highlighted the Hope Valley line which is operated from a North West depot, and where the problem seems be most acute, with on-the-day cancellations to already limited services causing widespread disruption.

Railfuture has heard about a number of examples of local walking groups that used the train to get to Hope Valley destinations to start and finish walks.

Sometimes the walks have to be cancelled but sometimes groups have been unable to board the train because it was short-formed.

Often the first service available after earlier cancellations can be extremely overcrowded.

There is also the issue of these cancelled services not appearing in any performance statistics as they are "scheduled" cancellations.

The Office of Rail and Road ordered train companies in 2023 to stop abusing the "P-code cancellations" loophole which was highlighted by Helen Pidd in *The Guardian*.

The loophole meant that any P-code cancellations the night before would not count in the official statistics.

The particular effect on the Hope Valley line seems to be contrary to all desired outcomes of reducing road traffic in this area, with the

project for a "mini Switzerland" almost stopped in its tracks.

The "mini Switzerland" plan from Hope Valley Climate Action (*Railwatch* 188) is supposed to be a national demonstrator to transform rural public transport.

Demand for weekend leisure travel into the Peak District is already rising with the creation of new footpaths such as the Steel-Cotton Trail and the GM Ringway, which promote healthy exercise and encourage the use of trains.

Social media coverage is also promoting attractive locations such as Mam Tor, but the current train service is wholly unable to meet this demand.

The concern is that for every weekend these problems continue, thousands more people will lose confidence in using the train to gain access to the Peak District after their days out have been spoilt by cancellations, delays and overcrowding.

This is replicated across the North West with many leisure destinations feeling the pinch.

Railfuture North West has contacted Northern for an update. We are told that there has been no deal yet.

Separately we have heard that Lord Barber of Ainsdale (the former general secretary of the Trades Union Congress) has been involved in some form of conciliation talks with the two parties.

Railfuture North West have since sent out a template letter, urging members to contact their MP and ask for this issue to be resolved.

ScotRail invites companies to build 69 trains

ScotRail has named five companies it wants to bid to build at least 69 new trains for routes such as East Kilbride, Fife, Borders and the Glasgow inner suburban routes, including services between Glasgow and Motherwell, Larkhall, Lanark and Shotts from the 2030s. It is an official "invitation to negotiate" to Alstom, CAF, Hitachi, Siemens and Stadler Rail.

The train drivers' union ASLEF has called on ScotRail and the Scottish Government to use public financing and green bonds to replace its train fleet, rather than relying on the rolling stock leasing companies which took over British Rail's trains when the industry was privatised.

Remembering Alan Harwood 1944-2026

By Graham Collett

I first met Alan on one of the Southern Region's Ramblers excursion trains in the late 1970s.

The Vanguards Rambling Club had been formed in 1967 by the (then) young regular walkers who gathered in the guard's van on these trains. Alan was a keen walker and joined the club in 1978.

Alan (right) had caught meningitis aged seven and although he survived, it left him almost totally deaf. This made it difficult for him to communicate and I tried to act as an "interpreter" for him, as did other friends.

He was a quantity surveyor at the Greater London Council but the closure of the GLC in the 1980s led to early retirement.

Alan volunteered at the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Kingston Hospital and for various heritage railways, notably the West Somerset Railway at Bishops Lydeard, where he was involved in lobbying for a through service to Taunton.

He was fascinated by trains from an early age and took many trips (usually by rail) to mainland Europe and places beyond Europe such as a coast-to-coast Canadian rail trip.

Alan joined the then Railway Development Society in the late 1970s and became sales officer, processing and posting out orders to members.

In the mid 1980s, RDS formed a partnership with Jarrolds of Norwich to produce and market a *Britain by Rail* series with regional versions covering the whole country.

These were written by members and proved very popular. Alan, Trevor Jones and I were involved in negotiating the contract and acting as the main link between RDS and Jarrolds.

Alan soon became a very conscientious member of the Railfuture publicity and sales team, helping at promotional and campaigning events at stations, depot open days and environment fairs. He worked closely with me when I was leader of the team.

As his mobility worsened, Alan was increasingly confined to his flat, which he found frustrating. He relinquished his much-valued independence and moved into a care home in Teddington overlooking the river. He was a life member of Railfuture and continued to take a keen interest in rail user issues.

He will be very sadly missed.

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Open the gates to a Great British Railways future

By Ian Brown

Looking back on the privatisation of what were **our** railways, I think most observers consider that the whole process was based on dogma and the premise that passenger and freight traffic levels were relatively constant. The no-growth scenario was accepted as the future.

Passenger and freight did grow under privatisation, however, as we know. This may have been the result of privatisation bringing innovation into the railways – or as a result of growth in the general economy. On freight, innovation certainly played a part but on passenger growth, the jury remains out. Demand forecasting tools might suggest much of the passenger growth is economy related or for external reasons such as price and growing congestion on the roads. The truth is that both passenger and freight use of the railways have grown – and the pips are squeaking.

This growth cannot be sustained for ever without serious investment in infrastructure to expand capacity and to facilitate modal shift to rail. Infrastructure must also include investment in signalling and control systems because a railway constrained by its signalling system and bottleneck junctions such as Ely misses out on its potential to facilitate that modal shift. We also need more (and more cost-efficient) rolling stock, capable of exploiting the electrified network where it exists.

Now we have a nationalised railway

Just changing ownership and perpetuating the old structure does not realise new potential. Simply babbling about the advantages of integrating track and train does not really help, although integration certainly helps with high frequency metro style operations. To unlock the key to investment we have to identify who is calling the shots on



Merseyrail has an integrated rail system operating on the National Rail network, just as Railfuture advocates



The original agreement to apply GBR branding was meant to apply only to Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central main line stations. Network Rail added the branding to Glasgow Central Low Level, which is ScotRail, to be met with a howl of anguish from Scottish politicians – such is the importance of devolution where it already exists in Scotland

the particular front. With Great British Railways, that current legislation is light on devolution, and particularly light on the need to find practical ways of accelerating the development and delivery of railway investment and mass transit schemes. Railfuture's approach is therefore focused on these two aspects, although some understanding of the context is critical if schemes are to rise above the largely outdated and narrow business case methodology and narrowly defined business or cost ratios. Railfuture contends that if schemes are to be expedited they must be presented as solutions to the economic, transportation, environmental and social needs of cities or larger conurbations. The same applies with more local regional service groupings, such as in Devon where a regional metro service is envisaged. This approach was adopted by the London mayor for the highly successful Crossrail project in London, where the scheme was positioned as the most cost-effective way to address the transport capacity needs of Greater London to achieve growth of both the economy and the population of London. The key takeaway was that the mass transit scheme was a solution to the city's range of economic and social inclusion needs, such as sustaining the working population and obtaining the benefits of concentrating productive activity in key centres, so boosting productivity. This was true with factories in the industrial revolution and remains key with the continued concentration of finance and

business services, as was the case in London with the Crossrail proposal. It was all about the agglomeration effect. The question to ask is: Do we want to achieve the economic benefits of establishing viable cities, the very cities that are presently underperforming owing to the lack of a viable transportation system? In making such choices to invest in our cities, we must demonstrate that this approach is a wise one set against other options such as spreading productive activity around the country largely based on use of the car, or teleworking. Quantifying the benefits of viable cities should not be impossible. Worldwide experience suggests that viable cities are seen as key and yet many struggle with investment in main line rail capacity and mass transit.

We tend to think of mass transit as a rail-based high-capacity operation such as the London Tube or the New York Subway. However, each mode of transport is most operationally efficient at different levels of ridership, from walking and cycling through to buses, light rail and high capacity rail projects such as Crossrail. No one size fits all, even in larger cities such as London and New York. This suggests that the approach, to be successful, needs to be in the context of an integrated plan for the city or conurbation. The whole region must benefit and each component element has to be viable to maximise potential stakeholder support. The stated benefits include the economy, social inclusion (cohesiveness as well as



Manchester wants to integrate National Rail services into its 'Bee Network', as it says on the train – coming soon

access to work), health and environmental factors. Recent experience in other cities, perhaps championed by Paris, is that cities have to compete for population and economic growth. Making the city environmentally attractive as a place to live and work is increasingly recognised as important. The business case for investment in cities must reflect all these benefits, even if many are not easily included in the straightforward business case of a transit project. Transport has to be part of a city's development plan. Indeed greater benefits are often realised outside a transport project's fare box revenue. The requirements for efficient project construction in the form of a continuous programme of investment, retention of skills and

teams of people are well documented and remain critical to the effective delivery of projects. However, the area that remains contentious is project authorisation, which historically can take over half the life of a transit project or more. Railfuture contends that the key to this is devolution of both planning powers and funding to devolved authorities. If the current waste of project development costs is to be reduced, we must focus any available funding on the actual projects. Railfuture does not advocate less financial control of financial project outlays, but that devolved bodies should have funding for all their activities, subject to the normal constraints. Such bodies should have to make choices about where to invest,

including in mass transit schemes. Obviously schemes that have national implications should be subject to adherence to national policy objectives, as should specific additional cases where national implications are involved, for example in changes to the national network. It is clear that Great British Railways needs to be able to embrace devolution with new clients who are enabled to fund rail development as part of their planning and development responsibilities. A change of prime minister, coming from a devolved authority – Manchester – represents a last-minute opportunity to address this. ■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture's policy director

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

COMMENT

Andy Burnham's devolution announcement is a strong start on his priority agenda

Changes on tax, new powers and institutions show Burnham means business.

31 JUL 2026

THOMAS POPE



Prime minister Andy Burnham and mayor of South Yorkshire Oliver Coppard speak at an event following the announcement that English mayors will be able to keep a share of the taxes collected in their area, giving communities greater control.

GBR legislation is relatively weak on devolution with the Department for Transport seeming to prefer the status quo of Westminster control, alongside promises about 'consulting everybody'. With Andy Burnham's appointment as prime minister devolution is likely to be centre-stage



France traditionally had quite sparse regional services outside the Paris region. Sponsorship and financing of regional and city services has now been devolved to regional authorities throughout the country. At Lille, the regional trains are run by the Hauts-de-France region

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Leeds station improvements

Improvements are being made at Leeds station. Railfuture Yorkshire has been concerned about capacity and safety, particularly at platform 17 which becomes very crowded at busy times. Passengers use a steep staircase and a lift from the footbridge to gain access to platforms 16 and 17. In addition, platform 17 can take only two two-car units at one time and is narrow. It serves the increasingly well-used services to Barnsley, Sheffield and Nottingham via Wakefield and the Pontefract line. A proposed improvement scheme will involve lengthening the platform.



David Pennie

Following reductions in costs to £36 million, approval was obtained from the Department for Transport, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the train operating companies. The final design stage has now been reached and rail network expenditure pipeline funding has been agreed. Subject to ministerial signoff, it is hoped that construction will be completed by the middle of 2028, with the extended platform coming into service in May 2029. Network Rail is currently working with the train operators to minimise disruption to passengers while the work takes place. A public consultation on the revised scheme will be organised by the combined authority. Passenger numbers at Leeds station are forecast to rise from the current 36 million to more than 50 million by the 2040s. Complex work on providing new entrances for the station was expected to be finished in September, a year after it was originally scheduled. The £46 million gateway project started four years ago.

Thorpe Park's new station

Railfuture is hoping that work will start next year on a new park and ride station, at Thorpe Park near Garforth on the Leeds-York line. It could open in 2028. The project,



Picture: JONNY WALTON

FAREWELL STOP FOR RAILWAY 200: Railfuture campaigners were among those celebrating 200 years of passenger rail when the Inspiration train made its last stop at Scarborough. The picture includes Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith, Pete Myers (representing Yorkshire Coast Line community rail partnership), Terry French from Selby and District Rail Users Group, as well as Tom Dickson and Barrie Forrest (representing East Lothian community rail partnership)

subject to a full business case, is being developed by Network Rail and the combined authority in consultation with Leeds City Council.

Weaver Network vision for future

Creating a joined-up zero-emission transport network to include trains, buses, bikes and walking was one of the key aims of the local transport plan proposed by regional mayor Tracy Brabin and adopted by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in March. Branding for the Weaver Network will appear this year and buses will begin running under public control next year. Ms Brabin signed a "landmark" agreement in July to ensure that the combined authority, Network Rail, Northern, TransPennine Express and LNER work together ahead of the creation of Great British Railways.

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy said: "This government is backing West Yorkshire with billions in transport investment – from Leeds station to Northern Powerhouse Rail and the TransPennine Route Upgrade – and this agreement will ensure that investment works harder for



passengers." Now the mayor of York and North Yorkshire David Skaith has launched a consultation on his draft local transport plan, which will set out a long-term vision for transport across his region. Consultation ends on 4 November.

Better options for Hull-Halifax Railfuture Yorkshire has asked Northern to consider alternatives to axing the direct Hull-Halifax service which is often heavily delayed and regularly terminated at Bradford or Leeds. Northern is proposing that the Hull services should now terminate at Leeds and no longer serve Bradford and Halifax, requiring passengers to change trains at Leeds. Former chancellor Rachel Reeves, MP for Leeds West and Pudsey, has also contacted Northern.

Northern needs more trains Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith has drawn attention in the

regional press to Northern's train shortage. The operator has been so successful in attracting leisure passengers that weekend loadings on many lines are well above pre-Covid levels. But the train shortage has led to overcrowding if two-car trains are used on the Settle-Carlisle line on busy weekends. Railfuture is calling for more trains to be made available for Northern so that it can improve and extend services. An opportunity arises next year when Transport for Wales will be releasing 27 class 158 trains that are being replaced with new rolling stock. Railfuture Yorkshire will be urging the Department for Transport to ensure that all or most of these trains are transferred from Wales to Northern.

Scarborough station gateway The Scarborough station gateway project has been deferred after concerns about balancing the needs of pedestrians and vehicle drop-offs.

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

step to more improvements. Campaigners are hoping Great British Railways could overcome some problems caused by having separate operation and infrastructure organisations. A members meeting and AGM is planned for Saturday 3 October 2026 at Silkstone Common Methodist Hall (five minutes from Silkstone Common station) from 1415 to 1545. The area has a rich coal-mining heritage and, for railway enthusiasts and historians, there is a 3.5 mile walkway along the historic Silkstone Waggonway, an early railway, to be explored.

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

Mayor Tracy backs rail freight

West Yorkshire mayor Tracy Brabin has stepped forward to show her support for using the railway to deliver new homes, offices and growth in Leeds and to reduce the number of lorries in the region.

On a visit to Tarmac and its rail freight operations at Cross Green in Leeds city centre the mayor was shown a freight train delivering materials by rail from Tarmac's Swinden quarry in North Yorkshire.

She was told how a delivery by just this one freight train can provide the materials to deliver up to 35 new homes, or surface 1.5 kilometres of road, while simultaneously removing around 60 lorry movements from local roads into Leeds.

Each month, on average, 60 freight trains carry construction materials into the terminals at Leeds from quarries in North Yorkshire and further afield.

From the railway, the train's cargo provides materials for new homes, office developments and resurfaced roads. With rail freight reducing emissions by 76% compared to transporting into the city solely by road, the railways are helping to reduce air pollution and road damage as well as cutting congestion.

Ms Brabin said: "Improving our railways does not only boost journeys for passengers, it also gets freight from A to B.

"Transporting freight via rail, rather than heavy goods vehicles is the sustainable way to get materials to construction workers, to build new homes and grow our local economy. As we create a greener and better-connected West Yorkshire, we will work closely with rail and freight experts."

During the visit, the mayor and the teams from Tarmac, Network Rail and the Rail Freight Group discussed the challenges and opportunities of using the railway as a sustainable construction conveyor belt from quarry to city centre growth.

Plans to devolve more rail powers to the mayor were discussed so rail freight can continue to grow.

Huw Merriman, representing the Rail Freight Group, said: "Mayor Brabin, in the years I have known her, has always flown the flag for making the best use of our railway.

"We are pleased that the mayor shares our ambition for rail freight growth."

The mayor and West Yorkshire Combined Authority are working to reduce local carbon emissions, with a target of reaching net zero by 2038. Local emissions have been reduced by 42% since 2005. The government has set a rail freight growth target of at least 75% by 2050.

Key words for Railfuture campaigners: Politeness – Persistence – Patience



West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin, fourth from left, with the team from Tarmac, Network Rail and the Rail Freight Group at Cross Green, Leeds

Rail freight depot for Oxfordshire

A "nationally significant" rail freight depot could be built in Oxfordshire after eight years of preparatory work and two public consultations.

The government is being urged to give the go-ahead to the Oxfordshire Railfreight project after an application was submitted to the planning inspectorate in March.

The development includes warehouses near the Chiltern main line at Ardley and the former Upper Heyford US air force base where a new town is proposed.

Ardley tunnel will be upgraded to the W8 gauge and there will be associated road improvements to provide links to the nearby M40 motorway.

Government policy aims to create a network of strategic intermodal



Picture: DB CARGO

depots to enable more freight to be moved by rail.

Experts expect the depot will be served by container trains from Southampton, Thames Gateway in Essex and Portbury, Bristol.

Barking Eurohub

Work is under way to transform Barking Eurohub in East London into a modern international rail freight hub, to reinstate direct

cross-Channel services via the Channel Tunnel.

Electrification for rail freight

More targeted electrification is needed so rail freight can lower costs and pollution, the Railway Industry Association has told the government in a five-page report. Electrifying a further third of the network for passenger traffic would also electrify 95% of freight traffic.

American giant in £14 billion takeover of rail freight depots

After a £14 billion takeover in August, three strategic rail freight depots in Britain have been taken over by the giant American company ProLogis, which already owns the Daventry international rail freight terminal and is heavily involved with the online retailer Amazon.

The three strategic interchanges were developed in the face of often bitter local campaigns by British company SEGRO, known as the Slough Estates Group until 2007. SEGRO is listed on the London and Paris stock exchanges.

SEGRO Logistics Park Radlett is under construction in Hertfordshire near the M25 and M1 as part of a 1,000-acre site which is expected to handle 24 freight trains a day. The rail connection to the Midland main line was made in May.

SEGRO Logistics Park Northampton opened last year and is a 35-acre interchange south of

Northampton on the loop of the West Coast main line. It can handle 16 daily trains, some from Southampton via the rebuilt East West Rail link between Oxford and Bletchley.

The third SEGRO depot is Logistics Park East Midlands Gateway, a 700-acre site near Castle Donington operated by Maritime Transport, which opened in 2020 and is able to handle 16 freight trains a day.

The ProLogis depot at Daventry, north of Northampton on the West Coast main line loop and known as DIRFT, opened in 1998 as the UK's first private sector rail interchange

It has since expanded and can now accommodate 32 freight trains a day. The site includes a grocery distribution centre for supermarket Tesco.

Both SEGRO and ProLogis have been building data centres to service artificial intelligence businesses.

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Do ticket vending machines have a future?

By Neil Middleton

The short answer to my question is “yes”, but the number of TVMs is already falling as more people buy their tickets online.

My local train operator is Govia Thameslink Railway and it has just implemented a significant reduction in its TVM establishment. My local station at Harpenden has gone from seven to four, highlighting the wider changes in purchasing habits.

It is certainly true that personally, I avoid them if I can. I prefer to use my operator’s Smartcard (KeyGo) or e-tickets, because in both cases I do not need to leave time to purchase or collect a ticket before I get to the platform.

To me there are four main reasons for using a TVM:

- There is no other choice. Some people do not have a suitable mobile phone or access to a computer and printer. Some people do not have a credit or debit card or want to use cash
- Some people worry about their phone going flat during a long trip

so they buy online but pick up a physical ticket at a TVM

- The ticket office is closed or there are long queues at the office
- The ticket type I want is available only in paper form. For me, that most often applies to cross-London journeys.

All of these are reasons for TVMs to continue in existence – the first three to meet personal preference and the last because the only other option is visiting a ticket office. All allow 24/7 ticket purchasing.

Most people in the rail industry know that making it more difficult for people to buy a ticket is a great way to convince intending passengers to use choices other than rail travel. So, I have two seemingly contradictory requests:

- Keep those TVMs for passengers who prefer them or need them when ticket offices are closed
- Do not force passengers to use TVMs if they do not want to, so make more journeys available with e-tickets or with the best price on card.



Picture: NEIL MIDDLETON

THE GREAT BRITISH QUEUE: After years of queueing for a ticket at Harpenden ticket office, passengers now have to queue for a TVM

On the second of those, two key new e-ticket options are necessary for me.

My first need is for cross-London journeys. That will require London Underground to accept QR code tickets.

My second is that contactless payment in the South East allows railcard registration and the consequent discounts.

It would be good to hear of other

examples where tickets are only available in paper form. Finally, just as I was about to send this off to print, I read a BBC News article on how nervous elderly car drivers are about using parking apps, and how they avoid some car parks as a result.

A TVM is just another app – but on a device you do not own.

For many potential rail passengers, there is no substitute for a person selling them a ticket.

New trains and tram-trains boost Wales

By Julian Langston
with help from Richard Wilcock

The train fleet run by Transport for Wales has been almost entirely refreshed over the past few years. Gone are most of the tired British Rail era multiple units. In their place is a mixture of new and refurbished trains. So, what do we think?

Long distance

The workhorse of the TFW fleet for distance working is the new class 197, made by CAF and assembled in Newport. These are similar to other trains on the British network, including those planned to operate on East West Rail.

While it is good that they provide employment in Wales, many people are disappointed by them. The two-car units have only one toilet, which is inadequate for journeys of up to five hours. The three-car units have two toilets, a little better. Doors are at one third and two thirds of the way along the carriage, which is not ideal for a long-distance train.

TfW has argued that they need to be suitable for large numbers of people getting on and off at once, which makes them feel more like commuter trains. Indeed they are used on some local services.

In addition, they are noisy and the ride is lively, to say the least. On the plus side, they accelerate well, they have large windows and the on-train information screens are clear. That said, some of the information provided is confusing, such as the journey time to stations.

For long distance travel, the jewel in the crown is the rakes of refurbished traditional mark IV coaches pulled by a real locomotive.

These trains, mostly used on the Cardiff-Manchester route, really do feel like inter-city trains because that is what they were built for. They are a little slower off the mark than class 197s, but they are comfortable, spacious and also have large windows. Buffet facilities and first class seating enhance the experience.

Wrexham-Bidston

It was intended to operate the standalone Wrexham-Bidston line with former London Underground trains converted for diesel operation. They are spacious and comfortable, in principle ideal for the line, but they have never worked reliably since they were introduced in 2023. Local users report that the problems appear to be never-ending, leading to many cancellations. TfW has found it necessary to supplement their use with class 197 trains. It is not clear what will happen when these trains are needed elsewhere.

Ongoing problems with the former London Underground trains and similar units for other operators contributed to the demise of



Picture: JULIAN LANGSTON

A new class 398 tram-train at Cardiff Bay station in August. These units are powered by overhead line or battery. The station is currently being expanded to include a second platform and track to the left. This part of the line is to be converted to line-of-sight tram operation



Picture: JULIAN LANGSTON

A class 756 Stadler Flirt arrives at Waun-Gron Park in the Fairwater area of Cardiff, taking power from the recently installed overhead wiring



Picture: RAILWATCH

NEW AND OLD: At Machynlleth depot in June, an “assembled in Wales” class 197 (left) is ready for crew training on the lines to Shrewsbury, Aberystwyth and Pwllheli, with a BR-built class 158 (right), which has operated services on the Cambrian line for the past 20 years

Vivarail, which first converted the trains.

Railfuture believes the time has now come to pull the plug on them and replace them with something fit for purpose. Well-proven and well-regarded Stadler FLIRTS (Fast Light Innovative Regional Train) would be ideal, but class 197s would be adequate. Vivarail units on England’s Marston Vale line were withdrawn in 2022.

South Wales Metro

South East Wales is seeing the entire urban fleet renewed, including trains serving the South Wales valleys and Cheltenham. The new fleet is to be made up of

Stadler FLIRTS (classes 231 and 756) and class 398 tram-trains, also made by Stadler. The 756 units are trimode and can be powered from overhead wires, battery or diesel, whereas the 231 fleet is diesel electric. These are to be retrofitted with pantographs and an upgraded electrical system, making them almost identical to the 756s.

Spacious, quiet, with good acceleration and large windows, the Stadler 231 and 756 trains are universally popular. However, on some lines they will be replaced with the tram-trains only now entering service. Passengers may be disappointed with the change as

the tram-trains are spartan in comparison. Unlike the velvet ride of the FLIRTS, that of tram-trains is harsh and highlights every track defect and set of points.

Moreover, they have no toilets, a strategy which TfW may come to regret. It has argued that providing disabled-compliant toilets would greatly reduce passenger capacity. TfW plans to provide more toilets on stations instead.

However, it must be recognised that in a few years tram-trains will run on road as well as rail, and compromises need to be made compared with conventional trains. They certainly have good acceleration.

A plus with all the Stadler units is level boarding, making easy access to the generous spaces for wheelchairs, buggies and bicycles. These are the only new fleets in Wales with level boarding.

In conclusion

Apart from the FLIRTS, where there is little to criticise, there are good and bad points about all the new trains. Not all services in Wales, however, are benefiting. Some rural routes – especially the beautiful Shrewsbury-Swansea Heart of Wales route – have to make do with “legacy” class 153 Sprinter trains, originally built nearly 40 years ago. A few of these have been converted for “active travel” to fit in with UK and Welsh government policies. The trains carry many more bicycles to supplement existing services, but provision of these is currently patchy. As yet, there is no information as to when these legacy units will be replaced.

Railfuture recognises the Welsh vision in deciding on largely new fleets. TfW is hoping to order more trains in the next year or two. We will argue for FLIRT or traditional coaching stock for long distances, rather than more 197s.

North West

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Skipton-Colne rail boost

Reinstatement of the cross-border “missing link” between Skipton in Yorkshire to Colne in Lancashire should be a priority, the new Lancashire Combined County Authority has decided.

The council’s decision is vital to kickstart economic growth across the north of England with the younger generation set to be key beneficiaries, says the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership.

“The decision by the authority to put the Skipton-Colne line at the heart of its transport strategy is great news for people living on both sides of the Pennines, especially students and school leavers without a car,” said Nick Tennant, SELRAP’s vice-chair.

“By reconnecting Pendle with Leeds, the reopening could quickly and cost effectively provide a much-needed shot in the arm for isolated and increasingly deprived communities, whose needs have been ignored by decision makers based far away for decades.”

Reopening the line would vastly improve access to jobs and education opportunities for young people, noting that a quarter of all students at Craven College in Skipton presently commute by road from East Lancashire. Additionally, brownfield sites in East Lancashire suitable for affordable housing would become much more attractive for developers, making it

easier for young people to get on the property ladder within reach of work opportunities in Yorkshire.

Skipton’s fast, frequent train service to Leeds and beyond currently contributes to house values in the town being double those just over the border in Colne.

Another benefit from the Skipton-Colne line’s revival would be easier access to leisure opportunities in the Yorkshire Dales and around Pendle.

Craven’s strong contingent of Burnley FC supporters would be able to get directly to Turf Moor by rail, without having to travel into Leeds. One of the North’s biggest shopping attractions, Boundary Outlet, adjacent to Colne station, would also be much more easily reached by train from Yorkshire.

Railfuture Yorkshire has long had this line at the top of its list for reopenings and congratulates SELRAP for their campaigning

Manchester power cut chaos

An expected 20-minute journey from Manchester Piccadilly to his home in Rochdale on Thursday 6 August took rail campaigner Richard Lysons 150 minutes.

Richard, who is secretary of STORM, the Rochdale area rail user group, was one of many victims of a 90-second power outage at the Manchester rail operating centre in Ashburys. He got home by taking two trams, a bus and finally walking.

The operating centre controls a significant proportion of the North

West rail network. The outage also meant North West trains either could not operate or were terminated short. This caused significant disruption, affecting hundreds of thousands of passengers. Among those affected were trains to Blackpool from Preston, Liverpool Lime Street, Macclesfield and Crewe as well as the area around Central Manchester.

The newly elected Mayor of Greater Manchester, Bev Craig, is calling for an enquiry into the failure and why only 90 seconds of power outage could cause such prolonged chaos.

Salford Crescent new platform

The new third platform at Salford Crescent is on track to open in December after two years of construction. For most of that time the adjacent railway remained open, with only a few short closures. The new platform is on the east side of the station and will offer the chance for simultaneous southbound and eastbound train calls, adding capacity. The station area has bi-directional signalling, so all platforms can accommodate trains running in any direction, except the new platform has no access to the Atherton line.

New life for Hest Bank

The old Hest Bank signal box on the West Coast main line has been converted into a “first of a kind” classroom to help children learn about the railway and the ecology

of nearby Morecambe Bay. The new science, technology, engineering and maths education centre includes a display showing the latest train movements that pupils can follow live.

Golborne’s new station

Preliminary work has started on a new station at Golborne near Wigan aimed at boosting Golborne town centre and reducing commuting time into Manchester by 30 minutes. The new station is part of plans to create an integrated public transport system for the city region of Manchester, with existing rail stations joining the Bee network in two phases in 2028 and 2030.

Crewe-Chester station

Funds to plan for a new £15 million station at Leighton on the Crewe-Chester line may soon be committed by Cheshire East Council, which is hoping to secure a contribution from the Cheshire & Warrington Combined Authority for a business case study.

Merseyrail public control

Merseyrail trains could be brought back into public control. Liverpool mayor Steve Rotheram has delivered a report to Liverpool City Region Combined Authority recommending services currently operated under the Merseyrail concession, held by Transport UK Group and Serco, to be taken back when the existing contract comes to an end in 2028.

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A solution for Ely?

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough mayor Paul Bristow is working on solving the rail bottleneck at Ely by rebranding it as the gateway to economic growth. Ely is a severe bottleneck for both freight and passenger services, and the Ely Area Capacity

Enhancement project has been developed by Network Rail to the point where work could soon begin if the money was there. Despite a strong business case and benefit-cost ratio, Treasury funding has so far been refused.

The case for the project has focused heavily on releasing capacity for additional freight trains, particularly those carrying goods inland from the Port of Felixstowe. Railfuture East Anglia has repeatedly argued that the benefits for passenger services are equally important. More capacity at Ely could allow faster and more frequent services linking King's Lynn, Norwich and Peterborough with Cambridge and the wider Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor.

Mayor Bristow has taken up this argument, proposing that the project is rebranded as the OxCam Eastern Gateway. By linking Ely's strategic importance to the government's substantial investment in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, he aims to attract funding from local and regional sources and escape the constraints of the national rail network enhancements pipeline.

An updated business case could include two trains an hour from King's Lynn, Norwich and Peterborough to Cambridge, alongside the long-promised hourly Ipswich-Peterborough service and potentially an Ely-Soham-Newmarket-Cambridge service. These links would connect East Anglia's technology and life-science centres with the wider growth corridor.

There is also a case for reducing the cost of the Ely project itself. The ageing Cutter and Common Muckhill bridges at Ely are subject to 20 mph restrictions and arguably should be funded as Network Rail renewals. Removing the restrictions would immediately improve capacity. Similarly, separating improvements at Haughley Junction from Ely could make the project more affordable. Ely's future is about much more than freight. Could the OxCam



Picture: GBR ANGLIA

Cambridge South makes strong start
Cambridge South station enjoyed a successful first month, with more than 110,000 journeys recorded since opening in June. The figure demonstrates strong demand for direct rail access to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

Network Rail reported that the £250 million station is helping to reduce journey times and provide a sustainable alternative to car travel.

Local leaders have highlighted the wider benefits of the project. Cambridge City Council leader Katie Thornburrow praised the station's

environmental credentials, reflecting its sustainable construction and integration with the surrounding landscape. South Cambridgeshire MP Pippa Heylings welcomed the impact on local travel, describing the station as providing "easier journeys, less stress, fewer cars on the road".

Cambridge South has quickly established itself as an important new gateway for the region and a strong example of rail investment, supporting both economic growth and sustainable travel.

Eastern Gateway finally unlock its potential as the gateway to the East?

East Coast main line capacity options

Railfuture has backed repeated calls for an East West Rail interchange at Tempsford with long-distance inter-city services. Unfortunately the East Coast main line is already close to capacity, particularly south of Peterborough, so there is little scope for additional stops or services without major investment.

Around 18 passenger trains an hour pass through Hitchin in each direction including services from Yorkshire from Yorkshire, the North East of England and Scotland, as well as trains from Cambridge and East Anglia. Freight services add further pressure. The most severe constraint is the three kilometre section at Welwyn, where the four-track railway narrows to just two tracks across the viaduct and through tunnels. Trains pass roughly every three and a half minutes, while two services an hour stop at Welwyn North. The solution to this bottleneck

requires a second viaduct, two tunnels and a rebuilt station. There are, however, opportunities for more immediate relief. The 10-kilometre section of slow line north of Huntingdon to Woodwalton, lifted when the railway was electrified, could be reinstated. This has previously been identified as a "no regrets" project and would provide valuable additional capacity and resilience. The difficult ground conditions north of Woodwalton across Stilton Fen also need an engineering solution if this important section is to remain reliable. If HS2 East is not revived, government, local authorities and developers must pursue policies that ensure sustainable growth across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, and to match new development with the railway capacity to support it.

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Glastonbury

There was no Glastonbury Festival this year but the nearest station – Castle Cary – has enjoyed an £835,000 makeover to restore many of its original features but also make it more accessible.

Railway Heritage trust director Tim Hedley-Jones said: "We are pleased to have supported GWR with a grant for the restoration of this historic station building." Somerset



County Council is also trial funding a seven-day-a-week bus link from the station to the town of Glastonbury.

Portishead rail reopening

Work is progressing at Pill (pictured right) for the Portishead line reopening. Community drop-ins were taking place in both Pill and Portishead in June to explain what progress is being made in reopening the line from Bristol. A works compound has been set up in Portishead and the route between Portishead and Sheepway has been cleared for the new tracks to be laid. Bridges are being strengthened.



Picture: peter Malipghant

Tavistock reopening campaign

Members of Railfuture's new affiliate TavyRail have met Railfuture's Tim Steer to discuss their campaign to get trains running again to Tavistock. Barnstaple-based Tim made the 50-mile journey south over Dartmoor from north Devon, a year after his election as chair of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall.

TavyRail (formerly the Peninsula Rail Group) wants to see a local rail service reinstated between Tavistock and Bere Alston and onwards to Plymouth. It hopes the reopening would be part of a Plymouth Metro network emerging to boost economic growth. New stations at Plympton and Laira are proposed in a network extending from Liskeard in the west to Ivybridge in the east by Peninsula Transport, a collaborative group of local authorities.

Tavistock lost both its stations in the 1960s. With a population now estimated at over 13,000 it meets Network Rail's 2024 Connecting Communities criteria for reopening.

Devon County Council submitted a strategic outline business case to the Department for Transport in 2022 and is seeking funding for an outline business case study.

That could lead to a Metro network for the wider South West peninsula, to include Plymouth and Exeter, modernisation and extension of the North Devon line and enhancing capacity on the Exeter-Axminster main line.



Picture: KEVIN COOK

ON-TRACK: (left to right)
Railfuture's Tim Steer, Tavistock mayor Anne Johnson and TavyRail's Richard Searight



Picture: GWR

Newquay's Green Party mayor Drew Creen (right) joined rail celebrations in June



Picture: TIM STEER

OPENING CEREMONY: Central Devon MP Sir Mel Stride MP, railway route strategy director Jo Grew, Devon county councillor Jacqui Hodgson, West Devon Borough Council leader Mandy Ewings, West Devon mayor Chris Edmonds and Devon County Council leader Julian Brazil

Newquay + Mid Cornwall Metro

Newquay celebrated in June when timetable changes heralded the start of improved hourly rail services for the town, the first phase of the Mid Cornwall Metro. Railfuture hopes the improvements at Newquay (population 25,000) can be replicated on the North Devon line. Such improvements are advocated by the Railfuture-backed Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance of partners and representative stakeholder organisations. Barnstaple's built-up area has a population of over 32,000 and the station has an annual station usage figure of 609,000 compared to Newquay's 126,000.

Also on the North Devon line, Crediton's usage figures leapt by 40% after the rail service was doubled in 2022.

Exeter Central gets facelift

Railfuture's Tim Steer attended celebrations at Exeter Central station in June to mark the completion of concourse improvements and a larger ticket hall to cope with the nearly three



Picture: ROGER BLAKE

Fighting Fund cheque: Great Western's David Whiteway, Railfuture's Tim Steer and Network Rail's Andrew Robinson

million users estimated in 2024/25. The station has been consistently busier than nearby Exeter St Davids since the Covid pandemic.

Fighting Fund in action

Following *Railwatch* 188's report of the convention of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, Network Rail's Marcus Jones asked to meet Tim Steer. The resultant meeting included alliance convener Roger Blake. The Railfuture team met Marcus and Network Rail's Jo Grew and Bogdan



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

EXETER CENTRAL: Among the guests at the June event to celebrate improvements at the station are Railfuture's Tim Steer with his green lanyard, and Exeter's Labour MP Steve Race with his appropriate red tie, and (to the right) railway route strategy director Jo Grew and Exeter City Council leader Phil Bialyk

Lupu. After publication of Network Rail's *Transforming the North Devon Line: a summary of potential infrastructure enhancements*, a six-figure sum is now needed for a strategic outline business case for the scheme. The alliance subsequently held a workshop in Exeter in July for partner and stakeholder organisations.

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall submitted a successful bid to the national Railfuture board for a grant from the Fighting Fund to kick off the study, which is aimed at encouraging financial support from other bodies. A Railfuture "cheque" was presented to Network Rail and GWR at the July workshop.

Okehampton's new station

The new station of Okehampton Interchange officially opened on Friday 31 July, and passengers started using it on Saturday 1 August. It follows the 2021 reopening of the Dartmoor line to Okehampton, which has seen over half a million journeys within its first two years of operation, far exceeding projections.

Okehampton Interchange station was first envisaged officially 15 years ago with publication of the Devon and Torbay local transport plan for 2011-2026, when GWR's summer Sundays-only services for Okehampton had already been running since 1997. West Devon Borough Council sought funds for the station, known at different times as West Devon Transport Hub, Okehampton East and Okehampton Parkway. Money eventually came from the government's levelling-up fund in 2023. Tim Steer attended the official opening of Okehampton Interchange.

The special train laid on by GWR for invited guests bears the name "Peter West OBE", who is a Railfuture member. The opening of Okehampton Interchange came a decade after he was awarded his OBE "for services to the rail industry." He joined Railfuture after retiring from his role as commercial manager of the Great Western franchise at the Department for Transport. Peter is now independent adviser to the Railfuture-backed Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

Among the various speeches, Central Devon MP Sir Mel Stride paid personal tribute to Michael Ireland as chair of the local OkeRail campaign group which, four years previously, had been presented with Railfuture's Judges' Special Award at the Bristol AGM.

Welcome to Heathfield campaign

Railfuture welcomes Heathfield Rail Link Association as the latest campaign group to affiliate.

<https://heathfieldrail.org>
www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch

peter.walker@railfuture.org.uk

Roving Explorer

Northern Rail has introduced a network-wide travel ticket, with unlimited validity every day of the week and obtainable for up to four consecutive days. It can also be shared by up to four people – though all must travel together. Cost varies from £35 for one person, valid for one day, to £390 for four people travelling together for four consecutive days. Holders cannot use any other train operator's services with these tickets and there are no railcard reductions.

Great loop forward

Buoyed by the continuing success of the reopened Ashington-Newcastle passenger service, rail campaigners have organised a petition in favour of the Northumberland coast loop as a way to enlarge the rail passenger network.

They are campaigning to create a new long-distance rail route, to complement the East Coast main line between Newcastle upon Tyne and Edinburgh via Northumberland Park, Blyth Bebside and Morpeth.

An improved service via this route could also boost the Chathill Rail Action Group, which wants more semi-fast trains serving Chathill, 30 miles north of Morpeth. See *Railwatch* 188.

Finding spare train slots for the service on the East Coast main line north of Morpeth is a challenge for timetable planners and the enthusiasm of the campaigners. Railfuture North East has advocated a regular (possibly hourly) all-stations service between Newcastle and Edinburgh, serving Chathill.

Eaglescliffe expansion

The long-planned enlargement of facilities at Eaglescliffe, at the western edge of the main Teesside conurbation, was opened at the end of June by Tanni Grey-Thompson, the paralympic champion who lives in Eaglescliffe. She found it especially difficult to negotiate the steep ramps from road to island platform, especially to join or alight from Grand Central's London services. So the installation of a full range of lifts, linked by a long footbridge that has also provided access from the previously isolated west side of the town area, is doubly welcome. Passenger train provision has recently been considerably increased by TransPennine Express, all of whose Saltburn/Redcar Central-Manchester Airport hourly services now call here.

Railway Children on shortlist

Tyne Valley community rail partnership was shortlisted for its

20 railwatch October 2026

first-ever entry to the National Rail Awards with a musical account of the early history of Brampton station, near Carlisle, performed by pupils of schools in the area.

Tees Valley conference proposal

Railfuture members and the Coastliners' rail user group welcome news that Tees Valley Combined Authority is organising an autumn get-together of rail operators, users and local authorities. We also welcome a raft of Tees Valley improvements:

BILLINGHAM-on-TEES: New lifts between station forecourt and the island platform seem to work well. The adjacent footbridge has been renewed.

HARTLEPOOL: The "third" platform has been restored, now served by a footbridge and lifts, although the lifts have proved less reliable than hoped. Most Hartlepool rail users accept that, despite the extra distance to get to southbound departures, the advantages outweigh the snags. Previously, all trains in both directions called at platform 2.

DARLINGTON: The remodelling has proved controversial, with a set of buildings leading to a new entrance and two new platforms so southbound trains can call without crossing the path of a northbound train. However, passengers catching long-distance southbound trains now need to negotiate lifts and a footbridge. In the past, their trains left from the long, wide island platform which handled trains in both directions, as well as connections to and from the Bishop Auckland line and Locomotion museum.

MIDDLESBROUGH: Little progress is evident, despite this being a local priority, on using a third platform with lifts and a footbridge, so LNER can operate its long-promised two-hourly service to and from London.

STOCKTON: User group Coastliners were very disappointed by the half-hearted approach to commemorating the Stockton & Darlington 200th anniversary last year, so Railfuture welcomes the eager support now promised by MP Chris MacDonald in persuading Grand Central to add Stockton stops to its Sunderland-London King's Cross services. He, like us, is interested in the example set by the new Cambridge South station, deliberately planned WITHOUT car parks, and would like to see Stockton station follow suit. If only more planners and rail operators around the country thought on similar lines!

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Rail's social value

The value of rail is far greater than most planners believe, a workshop meeting attended by Railfuture members heard in June. Phil Evans, of consultant group VARail, which ran a community rail partnership workshop, said: "Rail's social value goes far beyond simply moving people from A to B. It connects people to jobs, education, healthcare and each other, shapes the places where we live, and can help create healthier, more inclusive and sustainable communities."

Railfuture Thames Valley was invited by the county council to be a participant at the Oxfordshire CRP's workshop in Banbury Town Hall, and was represented by Railfuture director Roger Blake. People from across the rail industry, local government and community organisations agreed to cooperate in identifying practical actions to improve rail services.

Stakeholder conference

Railfuture Thames Valley was represented at Great Western's stakeholder conference in Swindon in July by vice-chairman Nigel Rose and secretary Andrew McCallum. We were able to raise our concerns with CrossCountry's representative about some of the recently reinstated Newcastle-York-Reading trains not stopping at Banbury. We called for the 0733 Birmingham-Reading to call at Banbury at about 0820 during the busy morning commute time for Oxford.

Cowley meeting planned

Railfuture Thames Valley's meeting on 29 September 2026 will be an opportunity to learn more about the reopening to passenger services of the Cowley line, currently in use for car exports. The county council's Simon Lymn and Network Rail's Sarah Cook will outline the plans and the benefits it will bring to Cowley and beyond. The meeting



Railfuture's Roger Blake (right, front) at the CRP workshop at Banbury

will be at Oxford Town Hall at 1730. All are welcome. Work started in August on reopening the Cowley line to passenger trains with vegetation clearance and ecology surveys. Trains are expected to start running in 2029. The project will see two new stations built and the freight-only track brought up to passenger standards, plus capacity and junction improvements on the main line into Oxford station.

Oxfordshire County Council recently pledged a further £14.5 million towards reopening the line, borrowed against business rates from the south of the county. The new Greater Oxford Council will be expected to repay this over 10 years using funds from developments close to the line.



Proposed cycle and footbridge over the Cowley branch

Oxford Green Fair

Railfuture Thames Valley's main engagement with the public is always at the Oxford Green Fair, which this year the organisers have brought forward from its usual pre-Christmas slot to Sunday 25 October, at Oxford Town Hall. We will have a stand as usual and look forward to welcoming you.

And finally

Recently our branch vice-chair Nigel Rose and his wife were on Hanborough station when a Hereford-bound train arrived, and to their surprise a passenger called out to them to ask: "Which station is this?" The few station name signs are difficult to see from on board the train. We are asking Great Western to fit station name boards along the whole length of the platform.

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

X @RailfutureTV

Picture: PHIL EVANS VARail

Pilning pines for its lost footbridge

By Graham Larkbey

Imagine if your local station had just two trains a week, both in the same direction. Then imagine if getting home from a trip to the nearest big city involved being taken past your station into another country altogether, changing trains there and going back again.

Imagine if the return journey took three times longer than your outward journey. That is what faces users of Pilning station on the main line to South Wales, six miles west of Bristol Temple Meads.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of what for Pilning was a railway disaster. In November 2016, the station footbridge was demolished by Network Rail, cutting off access to the westbound platform and rendering the station "one direction only" towards Bristol.

Raising the footbridge was deemed economically unviable when the main line was being electrified with overhead wiring. So the footbridge "had to go" despite vociferous protests from Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (now called the Bristol Rail Campaign) and Pilning Station Group, led by the indefatigable Olga Taylor.

Once a busy junction (and Severn car-ferry terminal until 1966), Pilning's rail service was slashed to a minimal level during the 1970s, ending up with just one train each way Monday-Saturday (usually at inconvenient times), which was cut to one train each way weekly (Saturdays only) in 2006.

The footbridge demolition was sneaked through by Network Rail as a "minor alteration", even though it made westbound travel impossible. Legally the station still had a rail service. There was therefore no formal consultation, which closure of the station would have required. Many local people knew nothing about it until it was all signed and sealed.

The only tiny crumb of comfort was that a second eastbound train was provided in the afternoon, enabling people who had travelled to Bristol on the morning train to get back again. This, however, involves speeding past Pilning, going through the Severn Tunnel into Wales, changing at either Severn Tunnel Junction with a long bleak wait or Newport with an alarmingly tight connection, and going back again through the tunnel.

A day trip from Pilning to Cardiff involves catching the morning train to Filton Abbey Wood, changing there and going back past the platform you started from nearly half an hour ago. Bonus: You can at least catch a direct train home.

Which leads us to another problem. Pilning's platform lighting was decommissioned and removed for



Now you see it
Photo taken 29 Oct 2016



Now you don't
Photo taken 6 November 2016

Pictures: BRISTOL RAIL CAMPAIGN

Cinderella stations in need of love

Pilning is of course not alone in having a barely useable service, or even in being "one direction only". The same fate befell Polesworth on the West Coast main line 21 years ago (again because of a footbridge demolition), despite it serving a sizeable town whose population is now around 10,000. Arguably it is even worse off than Pilning, having only one train daily Monday-Saturday which calls before 0700, with no means of getting back again.

Ascott-under-Wychwood on the Cotswold line has just one train each way daily, Monday-Friday only, despite being in the heart of a village with very poor bus links. Residents therefore have to add to the traffic on narrow roads by driving to Charlbury and putting extra pressure on the car park there. It happens in urban areas too – many Railfuture members will be aware of the infamous Stockport Flyer which provides Denton and Reddish South with a meagre two trains a week.

In north-west London, Sudbury & Harrow Road station has just four morning trains to London and four trains back in the evening, with none in between and nothing at all at weekends, despite its

town-centre location on a busy main road with good bus interchange. All these under-served stations could be providing a useful service to their communities, instead of which they are under-used assets that are going to waste.

One solution might be for the Department for Transport to stipulate that every station must have a minimum service of three trains each way daily – morning, middle-day and late afternoon/early evening. There could be exceptions in special circumstances, for instance for a station serving an industrial site with set start and finish times.

However, this might carry the resulting risk of an increase in closure proposals – and while a station with a skeleton service might not be much use, it is at least still open and can have its service upgraded in the future. Once a station is closed, it is much more difficult – and expensive – to get it back again.

Thank goodness Railfuture campaigners have been able to save the rail services at many stations throughout the country and have been instrumental in getting new stations and lines opened.

"safety reasons" in the late 1970s, after which trains could call there only during daylight hours. If the timetables still changed in May and September each year like they used to, that would at least mean Pilning could have had a late-afternoon or early-evening service in summer, allowing for a full day out, but when the change dates became May and December that was no longer possible.

Because it is dark by 1600 for eight weeks or so around Christmas and New Year, Pilning's "last train" had to be at about 1530 all year round. So a day trip to Cardiff had to end by 1500 and one to Bristol by around 1415.

Against this background, users and campaigners had a nice surprise when the station underwent a major upgrade in late 2025. It included a new shelter and – gasp! – reinstated platform lighting. "Hurrah!" they thought "now we shall be able to have a full day out and come home later even if it's dark". No such luck. Great Western Railway refused to provide an additional late afternoon/early evening service, or even to retime the existing afternoon train, so the last train at Pilning remains the 1531 and the nice new lights come on each evening to shine down on a deserted platform where nothing

is scheduled to call. What a waste, to quote the great Ian Dury.

Could things get any worse? Yes, they could. Though it is the nearest station to Pilning itself and neighbouring Redwick, there is no bus link, pedestrians face a hike along dangerous roads with no pavements, there is no secure bike storage so for many, a car is essential. It was therefore a major blow when earlier this year the station car park was closed and vehicular access shut off. Again, there was no proper consultation and local people did not know until it happened.

Reasons given by GWR included the poor condition of the surface, flytipping and misuse of adjacent leased land. GWR claimed that the closure decision was taken in consultation with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the Department for Transport, but replies to freedom of information enquiries show otherwise.

Pilning Station Group are a resilient bunch, however, and do not take such scurvy treatment lying down. Their efforts following the footbridge demolition raised awareness of the station locally and saw usage increase by a remarkable 400%. Despite its unsatisfactory service and Covid, Pilning has

stayed out of the "bottom ten" in the annual Office of Rail and Road station usage figures ever since. The group is pressing for the car park to be reopened as soon as possible, also for improvements to the service and eventual reinstatement of the footbridge, though realistically the footbridge will have to wait until much-mooted development takes place on adjacent land.

To date the whole saga is an extreme example of how rules can be bent and common sense defied to make life unduly difficult for people who just want to use their local station.

Killer car bloat

More than 400 non-drivers could die annually as a side effect of cars becoming 1.2 cm longer, 0.5 cm taller and 0.5 cm wider on average each year since 2000.

The increase in size makes it more likely that people will be killed in a crash. It also increases emissions, says the campaign group Transport and Environment which analysed the statistics.

Source: Original Guardian story on 25.06.2026 corrected on 7.07.2026

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Manifesto action

After the Scottish Parliament election in May, when the SNP again emerged as the largest party albeit with fewer seats, hopes were if not high among rail campaigners, at least slightly raised. The governing party promised in its manifesto to:

- Reopen Winchburgh station
- Support the next stage of the Clyde metro feasibility study
- Investigate the case for Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh

- Investigate tram-trains on the Edinburgh South Suburban line

The party also said it would explore the possibility of direct trains from Scotland to mainland Europe.

Word is that there is no money at all for any transport scheme ... apart from dualling part of the A9 road.

There was a brief flicker of hope that the *Rail & Sail* combined train and ferry tickets on the Clyde might be restored, now that ScotRail tickets include a QR code, the previous lack of which had been cited as a reason for withdrawing this option. However, it appears that the ScotRail and CalMac ticketing systems are still incompatible.

Beattock Station Action Group

Notwithstanding the apparent indifference of the Scottish Government, campaigning continues. The Beattock Station Action Group has requested a meeting with Scottish transport minister Stephen Flynn, with help from Dumfriesshire MSP Craig Hoy.

Alloa and Dunfermline

Further east, the newly launched *Bring Back The Line* campaign aims to restore passenger services between Alloa and Dunfermline. The line is currently used by freight



Jane Ann Liston

and charter trains but clearly has the potential for more usage, enabling passenger services to run between west Fife and Glasgow avoiding the Forth Bridge.

Edinburgh South Sub

Transport Scotland announced in August that it is working with Network Rail Scotland on a high-level feasibility study for the potential use of tram-trains on the South Suburban line in Edinburgh.

The study will identify practical challenges and opportunities for reintroducing passenger services.

Analysis of the business case will be carried out by the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership.

Newburgh hopes

Before the election, hopes were high that a station at Newburgh on the Ladybank-Perth line might soon get the go-ahead. After all, the detailed options appraisal which had recommended that the station be built had been submitted to Transport Scotland back in December 2024, and the then Scottish transport minister Fiona Hyslop had visited the town.

The project was also mentioned in the most recent Scottish budget. However, since then things have gone very quiet. There has been no response from Transport Scotland on the business cases and Ms Hyslop did not stand in the May election. It has been said that when the business case modelling gave a positive result, Transport Scotland changed the modelling! Then it asked for more modelling to be carried out. It has since been claimed that Transport Scotland has instructed that no further work relating to Newburgh railway station is to be carried out.

St Andrews 'delay and nay'

One must beware of conspiracy theories but there are similarities between the experience of the Newburgh campaigners and that of StARLink, which is campaigning for

the return of rail services to St Andrews. After accepting StARLink's *Case for Change* and the preliminary options appraisal, Transport Scotland changed the transport planning objectives.

They said that the sifted-out options should have been re-tested against the new transport planning objectives, effectively repeating the preliminary options appraisal (for which there was no money). Not doing so, they claimed, invalidated the detailed options appraisal.

Transport Scotland is continuing to delay and obfuscate, taking five months to reply to an email from StARLink, for instance, and only then after the intervention of Willie Rennie, MSP for North East Fife.

One could believe that Transport Scotland's motto is "delay, delay, change the rules, then say nay".

However, StARLink is not going away and has just had a useful meeting with Wendy Chamberlain, the MP for North East Fife.

The emphasis of the campaign is being widened to include attracting those who presently drive the whole way to St Andrews from the likes of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. That accounts for far more of the 7,000,000 annual visitors than the 584,000 already using the train as far as Leuchars.

Considering that the University of St Andrews and golf combined contribute £800 million to the Scottish economy annually, it makes sense to ensure that the town's connectivity is optimised to ensure that it continues to grow and support the economy.

A recent article in *The Herald* newspaper envisaged an east of Scotland economic arc based around the universities in Aberdeen, Dundee and St Andrews, but with such poor connectivity it is hard to see how Scotland's oldest university town could participate.

Sad farewell to veteran Martin

By Nigel Rose

Railfuture veteran Martin Smith (pictured right) died in July after a proud 65-year record of campaigning for rail. Many members got to know Martin, who joined Railfuture's forerunner, the Railway Development Society.

Martin, who had a 35-year career at Oxford's Bodleian Law Library, had suffered from cancer for some years. He was 92.

When Thames Valley branch was founded he became its secretary. He remained on the branch committee until last year.

Martin attended many meetings with official transport bodies, demonstrating his impressive knowledge of vital local issues during the busy period before the rebuilding of Reading station.

He joined regular Railfuture discussions with Oxfordshire County Council, stressing the priority needs for local transport improvements such as rail calling patterns and bus-train connections south of Oxford, always expressed in a quiet but forceful manner. As no individual came forward to replace Chris, the board agreed that we would "job share" between me as chair and Neil Middleton as vice-chair. I will draw on past experiences in the commercial and charity sectors to chair the board and oversee normal governance, strategy and process responsibilities. The aim is to ensure we are working within the resources and skills available and to focus on fewer but more manageable policies. Neil, with help from other board members and volunteers, will lead on national policy and campaigning. We will share dealing with local branch concerns and liaison. We are looking at some structural tweaks to make responsibilities clearer and processes simpler.

As always, our ability to succeed depends on having more help to assist the existing talented board. I am delighted to welcome David Buchan and Kevin Swift as directors and Peter Small as our board secretary. You do not need to be a director to help.

I am continuing in my role as chair of Railfuture Wessex branch while seeking a replacement. I am also continuing in my role as chair of the Friends of the London Transport Museum. Full details of my career exist elsewhere but in summary I was a chief executive officer and chair in broadcast television for 30 years, ran my own consultancy business, spent four years as a city councillor with responsibility for transport and have been involved with about a dozen charities in the health, museum and cultural sectors.

price. The Department for Transport (which is calling the shots) still wants a premium-priced Gatwick Express and so is planning to double train frequency (and offer other airport benefits), in the hope of attracting more passengers.

With price an ever-important consideration in hard economic times, it is difficult to see how this will result in anything but more empty trains. Railfuture is suggesting long-term solutions such as dealing with the Croydon bottleneck and medium-term such as track upgrades at Redhill station.

Congestion busting ideas
Capacity on the Brighton main line is a major campaign issue. We note that Gatwick Express runs largely empty trains twice per hour between Victoria and Gatwick Airport, while passengers in the know crowd on to alternative services that get to London at about the same time for half the

www.railfuture.org.uk/
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Picture: DAVID SMITH

All change for the chairs



Chris Page at Euston, Neil Middleton at Levenmouth and Mike Southgate at Waterloo

Railfuture's new chair Mike Southgate:

On behalf of the board and all members, I would like to thank Chris Page for all his hard efforts as chair since 2016 (and before that, vice-chair from 2013). He has been Railfuture! I am delighted he has agreed to continue as a board member and look after IT and whatever projects we can steer in his direction. I would also like to extend the same thanks to Jerry Alderson who is standing down as finance and IT director after 21 years on the Board. Jerry has also agreed to carry on in a consultancy role.

As no individual came forward to replace Chris, the board agreed that we would "job share" between me as chair and Neil Middleton as vice-chair. I will draw on past experiences in the commercial and charity sectors to chair the board and oversee normal governance, strategy and process responsibilities. The aim is to ensure we are working within the resources and skills available and to focus on fewer but more manageable policies. Neil, with help from other board members and volunteers, will lead on national policy and campaigning. We will share dealing with local branch concerns and liaison. We are looking at some structural tweaks to make responsibilities clearer and processes simpler.

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Railfuture vice-chair Neil Middleton:

As I write, I look at a railway that it seems very hard to be a friend to and to encourage new customers to try out. For instance, CrossCountry has failed to run virtually all their services for 36 hours following a power failure in the building where its control centre is located. While the reviews and inquiries are yet to report, Mike and I know from our professional lives that with planning and investment, recovery should be a lot quicker than that. Meeting that recovery time objective is not a choice, it is an expectation of customers and of

regulators. Unfortunately CrossCountry is not al in its performance woes. For example, East Midland Railway's introduction of its new bimode class 810 trains has been beset by problems, and Northern regularly fails to deliver a meaningful Sunday service. The list of reasons for the railway's service issues goes on and on. So, what do I think we should do about it? Well, within Railfuture's vision of a "Bigger and Better Railway", the "Better" element needs plenty of attention to detail. As a set of campaigners with knowledge and contacts, let us focus on three things:

- ■ Calling for the essential improvements

- ■ Making sure we are targeting the real decision makers, not just the struggling teams who may not have the resources to deliver service effectively

- ■ Being clear that it is often the structure that needs to change or needs to be resolved nationally

As the creation of GBR proceeds, it is going to be essential that with responsibility comes power and authority. That needs to be another focus area for us.

Andy Burnham, our new prime minister, is pursuing a devolution agenda with a lot more vigour than his predecessors, so it does seem that mayors and strategic authorities will continue to be important, perhaps much more important, to the railway.

We will be talking about that devolution agenda and other hot topics at Railfuture's planned parliamentary reception on Wednesday 25 November. If you know your MP and they show any interest in rail, why not encourage them to come along? Chris Page and myself have a template letter you can use. Please contact us by email.

Meanwhile, the mayors and authorities are at very different stages of evolution. Where I live, it is proposed that the existing two-tier system of 11 councils (Hertfordshire County Council plus 10 districts and boroughs) will be completely abolished and reduced to four new unitary authorities. It may take years to happen though. By contrast, localities such as Manchester and Birmingham have well established organisations based on city and regional mayors and authorities. They also have railways they can influence.

For the new mayors and councils, sharing responsibility for the railway will be key.

Away from Railfuture, I am working two days a week for my local council (in finance), volunteer at the Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway and am on the steering group of my local community rail partnership. During my full-time career, I worked for chartered accountancy firms and banks, focusing on risk management.

railwatch

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Yes for rail

Railfuture is aiming to use recent changes to the national planning rules to help our campaigning to improve the railway. The UK government has introduced a planning policy overhaul with a "default yes" approach to building houses near well-connected railway stations. This update to the National Planning Policy Framework makes it more difficult for local councils to block housing schemes near transport hubs, even opening up



Richard Bowry

nearby Green Belt land for development. Within days of "default yes" coming into force in August, a development of up to 300 homes was announced near Ewell East station on the London-Surrey border. Railfuture is expecting similar initiatives and will be vigilant to ensure developments facilitate rail improvements.

The London Mayor has published a draft of a new London Plan which covers an extended period to 2050. Railfuture is responding to the consultation.

Staking the claims for rail

Over the long hot summer, Railfuture volunteers have been busy attending stakeholder

meetings with train operators, as well as meeting MPs on specific local issues. Railfuture is responding to public consultations relating to Euston station and the Docklands Light Railway extension. We joined other Railfuture branches in responding to the East West Rail consultation earlier this year.

Congestion busting ideas

Capacity on the Brighton main line is a major campaign issue. We note that Gatwick Express runs largely empty trains twice per hour between Victoria and Gatwick Airport, while passengers in the know crowd on to alternative services that get to London at about the same time for half the

price. The Department for Transport (which is calling the shots) still wants a premium-priced Gatwick Express and so is planning to double train frequency (and offer other airport benefits), in the hope of attracting more passengers.

With price an ever-important consideration in hard economic times, it is difficult to see how this will result in anything but more empty trains. Railfuture is suggesting long-term solutions such as dealing with the Croydon bottleneck and medium-term such as track upgrades at Redhill station.

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Bridge over the Calder drops in



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

West Yorkshire Combined Authority Councillor Eleanor Thomson (in the flowery shirt), who is responsible for introducing the region's proposed Weaver public transport network, with other representatives from the combined authority and Kirklees Council joined the construction team for the final Baker Viaduct "drop-in" in July

A crucial step in the multi-billion pound project to upgrade the TransPennine rail route across Northern England was achieved in July.

Central steelwork beams were carefully lowered into place – to connect up the new Baker viaduct over the River Calder near Dewsbury, West Yorkshire.

The 350 metre long viaduct is near the project's Ravensthorpe site, one of the biggest civil engineering sites in the country.

The viaduct will be connected to a newly built grade-separated flyover to accommodate four new tracks that will allow direct services to overtake stopping services and reduce journey times across the 70-mile route between Manchester and York via Huddersfield and Leeds.

A new Ravensthorpe station 200 metres west of the original location, will give future passengers the opportunity to travel to both Leeds and Wakefield.

"Baker viaduct is an impressive feat of engineering and we are really proud of everyone across our teams who have made it possible," said senior project manager Adam Bunce.

Work is also progressing on the new Ravensthorpe station which, when

opened in 2028, will have a footbridge with lifts for step-free access, a new forecourt area and drop-off facilities, as well as extended island platforms so longer trains can stop.

Overhead line equipment will also be installed throughout the area to power greener, electrified services.

The delivery team includes BAM Nuttall and Severfield. The installation of the steel beams marks nearly two years of planning and engineering to fabricate,

deliver and install the 2,400 tonne viaduct. To mark the occasion, the construction team hosted representatives from Kirklees Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

"It was fantastic to see this feat of engineering slot into place," said Councillor Eleanor Thomson. "It will lead to quicker, more reliable journeys, as well as boosting our economy. Better rail services will play a key role in our Weaver Network, the new, joined-up transport network for West

Yorkshire." About 25% of the TransPennine route is now electrified, with electric services running on two sections: Manchester-Stalybridge and York-Church Fenton.

There are currently 70 work sites, which will deliver electrification of the whole route. Digital signalling will increase speed and capacity, while all 23 stations on the route will have improved accessibility.

More than 5,000 people are working on the project, which provides 15 extra freight paths. Tunnels will be widened so shipping containers can travel between ports on the east and west coasts via rail, removing over 1,000 lorries a day from the busy roads across the Pennines.

New stations have already been built at Mirfield and Morley and £100 million was spent on diversionary routes ahead of the major works on the TransPennine route.

Railfuture in the News

Railfuture spokesman Bruce Williamson appeared on the BBC One evening news on 23 August to comment on CrossCountry's near total shutdown as a result of a power failure at its control centre. He said: "There are legitimate questions to be asked about why contingencies and plan Bs and backup generators did not work on this occasion. Why was it not possible to transfer control to maybe another switching centre?" The answer came three days later when RAIL magazine reported that the operator does not have a ready back-up location or working back-up power at its HQ and that it was "mayhem" for staff and there was "no plan B"! Railfuture has also commented in the national media about the effects of heatwaves, the impact of renationalisation, fare reductions, uncomfortable seats, railcards and wifi on trains. Regionally, branches have succeeded in getting into the *Yorkshire Post*, BBC One East Midlands, BBC News websites for North East & Cumbria and Oxfordshire, and BBC Radio Lincolnshire. Devon & Cornwall branch seems to own every media outlet in the South West, appearing on average once every three days. All this and more on our webpage:

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

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