

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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East West Rail

An ambitious rail scheme is under way, with the aim of creating a 2,000 mile long East West rail link through Europe from Spain to Ukraine. The picture, at Schwanau, Germany, shows the first of seven machines which will bore the 35 mile Turin-Lyon base tunnel under Mount Cenis, a key part of the freight and passenger project. Celebrating are German engineer

Martin Herrenknecht, Maurizio Bufalini and Daniel Boursaux of Tunnel Euralpin Lyon Turin and European Union official Wojciech Sopinski. The tunnel boring machine was designed, manufactured and assembled at Herrenknecht's plant in Schwanau, Baden-Württemberg, and involved numerous European

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PAGE ONE PICTURE

Europe's Mediterranean rail corridor

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companies, including a dozen in Italy and France.

The tunnel boring machine will be disassembled and transported with 130 special convoys from the Herrenknecht factory to Saint-Martin-la-Porte, where it will be reassembled in the heart of the mountain and start its excavation towards Italy.

There are 10 operational underground and above-ground construction sites on both sides of the Alps.

More than 20% of the 162 kilometres of tunnels planned for the project have been excavated so far, with 4,000 people at work.

The Mont Cenis base tunnel constitutes the central link in the Mediterranean Corridor, one of the nine axes of the trans-European railway network under construction throughout Europe.

The new tunnel will allow trains to cross the Alps, making transport more



The impressive Mediterranean rail corridor from Spain to Hungary

energy-efficient and economical for both freight and passengers. It will become the most sustainable alternative to lorries and air.

The Mediterranean Corridor links the ports of Algeciras, Cartagena, Valencia, Tarragona and Barcelona in the Iberian Peninsula with Hungary and the Ukrainian border.

Elsewhere in Europe, progress is being made on rail electrification.

Poland has decided to electrify 1,400 kilometres of rail within the next seven years. €18 billion will be invested to allow the rail network to develop "dynamically".

One aim is to provide new 150mph passenger services. But

several new sections of railway will also be built to cope with "transport exclusion". Central Europe's largest private railway operator, the Czech RegioJet, plans to expand its services into Ukraine and German cities from 2024, in cooperation with Ukrainian Railways, Ukrzaliznytsia.

Morale has collapsed on our crisis-hit railway

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

In the columns I write for *RAIL* magazine, I have developed the concept of the *Nobody Gives a Damn* railway. The idea has taken off and my inbox is full of examples sent in by disgruntled passengers.

The idea for NGAD emerged when I discovered that the government was pressing train operators to save a few bob by scrapping wi-fi for passengers. This was clearly ridiculous, a way seemingly of chasing people off the railways if they needed an internet connection. Then, this bad idea was compounded by the more far-reaching plan to close nearly 1,000 ticket offices across the country. The arguments are well-rehearsed and excellently set out by Railfuture in its 101 questions about the plan. All this is so random. There may well be an argument about closing some offices and putting more staff in front of the glass, but only once the unbelievably complex fares system has been sorted out and, most importantly, an easy and single website for buying all tickets and dealing with complex enquiries has

been set up. We are a long way from that.

Now there is another threat to train travel. I was on a Lumo train from Glasgow to London in early September when, while waiting to leave, there was an announcement that if you did not have a reservation you should get off the train. As it was a strike day, the train was pretty full, though there were seats left empty all the way to London. The announcement clearly went against the terms and conditions that bind Lumo and other operators. There was something of a Twitter storm and eventually Lumo's boss Martijn Gilbert came on the site to admit that the guard should not have made that announcement. But this is part of a trend towards reservation-only long-distance travel that goes against the long-established principle of a walk-on railway. Let me stress that the railway still has

plenty of dedicated employees and managers who go out of their way to make lives better for passengers.

There is no shortage of examples, notably and ironically in booking offices, where the personnel are invariably helpful and positive. What I worry about, however, is the overall feel of the railway, its lack of welcome and at times even hostility to those using it.

That culture does not necessarily need huge dollops of cash to change. It is about attitude. A good example is my beloved football club QPR. A succession of managerial departures together with a bunch of players who seemed uninterested nearly saw the team

relegated last year. There was no money to buy any but a few free agents and rejects, and yet within a few weeks manager Gareth Ainsworth has instilled a completely different culture. QPR may not be winning every game

but one can see from the efforts on the pitch that the team is trying its damndest and the fans have responded, cheering where they once booed.

That is what we need to see from the railways. Yes, we know there is shortage of money for investment, the infrastructure is creaking and ministers are tinkering with the network in a totally incoherent way. But if every time there is a delay or a mishap, the staff give clear explanations, help people who are confused and work to make sure everyone gets to their destination, then the fact that the industry is in crisis can be forgotten.

So train operators need to stop making up ridiculous rules, the unions should do everything in their power to try to resolve disputes, and ministers should stop making daft decisions that clearly do not make sense. And there should never be a NGAD attitude.

My new podcast, *Calling All Stations*, is now available. Go to <https://markwalkerg.podbean.com/> to listen to the latest episode and "follow" to ensure you get notification of future episodes



Christian Wolmar

Why Belper has railway blues

By Ian Clark

The rail timetable introduced in May this year was the cause of celebration in the Derbyshire town of Belper, as a full train service to Nottingham was reinstated.

Back in June 2021, a calamitous decision was implemented that curtailed the Matlock-Nottingham service at Derby in order to remove one train diagram. Only Sunday services remained unaffected.

Poor connections at Derby made travel much more difficult. The status quo, although restored, leaves a situation that is far from satisfactory.

It is now necessary to explain why Belper, only eight miles north of Derby, has been badly served by the rail network for many decades.

The route

Belper lies in Derbyshire's Derwent Valley on the railway line between Derby and Sheffield. Two trains per hour pass through on East Midland Railway's London St Pancras International to Sheffield service – without stopping.

One or two trains per hour pass through on CrossCountry's Birmingham-Sheffield axis – without stopping.

Belper has hourly calls on EMR's Nottingham-Derby-Matlock regional service, which turns off the main line at Ambergate on to a single-track branch line.

This was formerly the Midland Railway's main line via Bakewell and Chinley to Manchester, which is the subject of MEMRAP's Peaks & Dales reinstatement scheme.

[See article on page 4]

What is the problem?

There is no northbound service to Chesterfield and Sheffield. Travel via Derby is required each way, flashing through Belper non-stop both to and from Sheffield.

Northbound interchange at Derby involves a wait of 24 minutes.

Southbound interchange is only eight minutes (off a busy train from Scotland) on to a different platform, with an hour to wait if you miss the Matlock service.

The only through train northbound to Sheffield departs Belper just after 0700 (Mon-Sat).

Southbound the 1732 Sheffield to London St Pancras calls at Belper (Mon-Fri) with a late Sheffield-Derby service at 2229 (Mon-Fri) and 2200 (Saturday). That is all!

How did this come about?

The Derby-Sheffield stopping service was withdrawn in 1967. There is no regional service between Derby and Sheffield similar to that operated between Derby and Birmingham by CrossCountry's Nottingham service.



The Railway pub at Belper

Picture: Love Belper

Inter-city operators have resisted requests to stop trains at Belper.

Comparing Belper with Alfreton

East of Belper in the Erewash Valley, Alfreton is served by two trains per hour between Nottingham and Sheffield. They are the Norwich-Liverpool (EMR) and Nottingham-Leeds (Northern) hourly services.

The main complaint at Alfreton is that there are no longer through services to London.

However, Alfreton's rail service is significantly better than Belper's both in terms of frequency and in having a northbound service.

Both towns have similar catchment areas, with Belper's population about 1,000 fewer at 21,000.

The wide variation in rail services is reflected in official station footfall: In 2019-20, the footfall at Alfreton was 311,000 compared to Belper's 236,000.

By 2021-22, the difference had grown to 100,000 even though the overall numbers were down. Alfreton recorded 246,000, compared to Belper's 146,000.

These figures indicate a colossal gulf in footfall that increased during Covid-restricted services, reflecting inequities in Belper's rail service provision with significant potential for future growth.

What can be done?

Given the pressure on resources both financial and physical, it would be fruitless to propose new service provision at this time. What is needed is a quick fix that can be implemented and incurs only

a round trip from Derby calls at Belper in one direction only, the turnaround time would reduce to 14 minutes. Under the current service pattern, it is accepted that trains could only call at Belper every two hours maximum.

More custom for Miles

For those living away from the Midland main line, *Miles* is an M-shaped cartoon-like figure that is advertising MML services on TV for EMR.

These advertisements appear at regular intervals. Another way of attracting more patronage to the MML would be to stop more trains at Belper and generate extra high-value London revenue from a through service.

Current and proposed situation compared:

Belper-London now: 2hr 04 min – safe, same-platform interchange at Derby.

Belper-London proposed: 1 hr 47 min through service

London-Belper 1 now: 2hr 13 min. Safe connection at Derby off xx32 from London.

London-Belper 2 now: 1hr 43 min. Unsafe connection at Derby off xx02 from London.

London-Belper 3 now: 2hr 43 min. Missed connection at Derby off xx02 from London.

London-Belper proposed: 1 hr 47 min through service.

The unsafe connection at Derby of six minutes, although cross-platform, is too tight for a long-distance train.

Without manual intervention, Matlock services have been known to depart promptly when there is late running and be held at Breadsall signals for the ex-London train to overtake them.

If the Matlock service followed the inter-city out of Derby, a connection would be made, and people would not be left on the platform.

Who are the winners?

The government would gain. Less support for the railways would be needed as additional revenue would be generated from ticket sales at minimal cost.

EMR would be able to improve its financial performance and enhance its reputation with the community.

Belper would gain because rail users would see the beginnings of a proper rail service developing.

The general community would gain from the wider economic benefits generated by improved rail services at Belper.

Everyone would gain. Reducing car dependency would help mitigate against the climate emergency.

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Rail plus Trail for Monsal



Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership chose Bakewell as the venue for the fourth in a series of public meetings to discuss plans to reinstate the Peaks and Dales line (Ambergate to Buxton and Chinley via Matlock). After a lively debate, a vote revealed an encouraging majority in favour of proposals that include a new Monsal Trail for walkers and cyclists. MEMRAP's chief executive Stephen Chaytow commented afterwards that even the vocal minority contesting the proposals offered useful feedback and ideas. Following the meeting, a resident in Great Longstone wrote a parish magazine article supporting MEMRAP's proposals and pointed out that neither residents nor visitors have an alternative to the car for most journeys. A new Trail would benefit from being accessible by rail. The initiative continues with two "drop-ins" for villagers to discuss the proposals.

Midlands Connect priorities
Guest speaker at an open meeting following Railfuture East Midlands AGM in Leicester in May was Andy Clark from Midlands Connect, with a presentation over Zoom because of the RMT strike on the day. He discussed four priorities in the Midlands Engine Rail programme.

1 The Midlands Rail Hub, to maximise the benefits of HS2 by providing connections between Curzon Street, Moor Street and New Street stations, with two new chords and new platforms at Moor Street. Of particular interest to us in the East Midlands is that it would allow four trains per hour between Birmingham and Leicester

2 Direct services between Coventry and Leicester, where the rail journey requires a change at Nuneaton and has an average speed of 32 mph, so that only 3% of journeys between the cities are made by rail. A dive-under beneath the West Coast main line will be required at Nuneaton

3 Direct services from Leicester to Leeds; the Integrated Rail Plan means that options no longer include use of HS2's eastern leg

4 Improving line speed to 75mph for Nottingham-Lincoln services

Midlands Connect is concerned with freight as well as passenger services. A Nuneaton dive-under would be useful for freight between the East Midlands and the South Coast. Improvements in the Leicester area are also vital for both



More than 100 people attended the meeting in Bakewell on 27 June to hear about reinstatement proposals for the 36-mile Peaks and Dales line. The project would involve 13 miles of entirely new track, with 23 miles of upgrade to the north and south of the central section. Stations printed in blue on the map below are open today, with the rest subject to business case assessment, alongside the re-provisioned Monsal Trail for cyclists and walkers

freight and passengers, and could include 4-tracking between Syston South and Wigston North junctions. Also important is increasing the size of the tunnels south of Leicester station, which may be required in any case for electrification.

Rail's potential to boost economy

Railfuture responded to an enquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group for the East Midlands into the social and economic benefits and opportunities for major infrastructure investment in our area. Our evidence highlighted the following issues:

Problems caused by continuing uncertainty over electrification of the Midland main line

Need for good rail access to various regeneration and development projects in the region

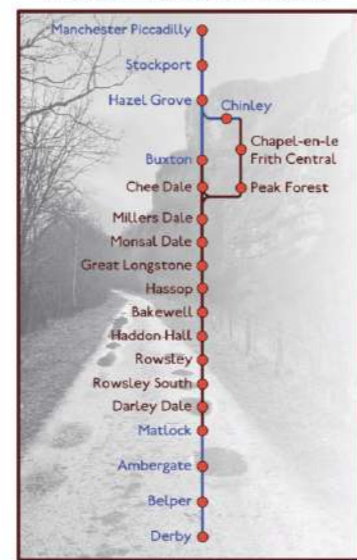
Need for improvements around Leicester, particularly because of the current constraints on the Felixstowe-Nuneaton freight corridor

Benefits that would accrue from improvements in connectivity and speed on routes such as Leicester-Coventry, Birmingham-Nottingham and Nottingham-Lincoln, and from reopening Leicester-Burton

We highlighted the irony that, despite having a pivotal role in the nation's transport by virtue of its central location, the East Midlands has the lowest per capita investment in infrastructure of all the UK regions.

Railfuture and TfEM head of rail
Members of the East Midlands branch committee met Kyle

Peaks and Dales Line
Proposal to reopen the line



Butterworth, head of rail improvement at Transport for the East Midlands, in Nottingham in July. TfEM brings together ten local transport authorities and provides collective leadership on strategic issues in the region, agrees major investment priorities and provides collective input into the work of Midlands Connect, the Department for Transport and its delivery bodies, including East Midlands Railway.

The meeting was part of our regular general liaison with TfEM. It covered numerous topics including EMR's medium and long-term strategies, rolling stock, timetable aspirations, Midland main line electrification and decarbonisation generally, and possible changes in

the political environment including the proposed East Midlands Combined Authority. The context of the discussion was how Railfuture can best direct its campaigning efforts, including being realistic with rail service aspirations and their respective priorities, and providing valuable local information. We are grateful to Kyle for his willingness to meet and discuss things openly with us.

Railfuture targets heritage rail
Railfuture East Midlands chair Phil Thomas and outreach officer Ariadne Tampion took a publicity stall to Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre on Sunday 6 August. They were made welcome and given a pitch right outside the cafe. They had to work hard to attract attention but did discover considerable interest in Railfuture. They look forward to returning.

The heritage centre in Ruddington, south of Nottingham, is the headquarters of the East Midlands Railway Trust, which owns the freehold of the Nottinghamshire section of the preserved Great Central Railway. Railfuture has maintained a relationship with the trust since its chair, Professor David Rae, gave a *Reconnecting South Nottinghamshire* presentation at a Railfuture East Midlands meeting, explaining the trust's Restoring Your Railway bid. Railfuture is keen to encourage initiatives to reintegrate heritage railways into the national network, and we found the ideas in this bid inspiring and imaginative.

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

£1 backers key to Ebbw Vale reopening

Passenger trains are expected to start running between Ebbw Vale and Newport by the end of this year, following an investment of £70 million in additional infrastructure on the branch line by Blaenau Gwent council and the Welsh Government.

It is 15 years since an hourly Ebbw Vale-Cardiff service started. The campaign offers many pointers and ideas for rail campaigners today.

The Railway Development Society, as Railfuture was known, had been calling for the Ebbw Vale branch to reopen for many years.

Mid Glamorgan County Council's successful reopening of the Aberdare branch in 1988 demonstrated the benefits of restoring passenger services in Welsh valleys, where deprivation was commonplace after the closure of collieries and other industrial employers.

The Ebbw Vale line was entirely in Gwent, where the county council remained convinced that road building was the key to economic growth and regeneration.

RDS Wales spotted an opportunity when plans were put in place for the 1996 local government reorganisation, which replaced all county and district councils with unitary authorities.

Our hope was that the three new authorities covering the area of the Ebbw Vale branch would not continue the anti-rail bias of Gwent, and would welcome the achievable policy of reopening the railway as a way of demonstrating that they would make a positive difference to people's lives.

Elections for the unitary authorities took place in May 1995. RDS Wales sent a questionnaire to 80 candidates asking four questions. They included "Do you believe that improving public transport is more equitable in an area of high unemployment and low car ownership than investing only in better facilities for motorists?" and "If elected, will you press for a rail link between Ebbw Vale and Newport/Cardiff to be started as soon as possible?"

We received responses from 28 candidates, all of whom answered Yes to all questions. Twelve of them were elected or returned unopposed in the May elections. They were distributed through all three unitary authorities. Five newspapers reported on this before, during and after the exercise. RDS Wales committee member Malcolm Parker was elected to Caerphilly council, the authority for the central part of the Ebbw Vale line.

Three of our committee members met councillors and officers from Blaenau Gwent council, operating in shadow form, to provide information and to correct misconceptions, such as that Mid Glamorgan was paying high



Green Transport Week in 1996: The Ebbw Vale display stand at Newbridge. RDS Wales committee member Malcolm Parker, left, and Don Touhig, who was the MP for Islwyn

subsidies for the reopened Aberdare and Maesteg lines.

RDS Wales set up an Ebbw Vale sub-committee. A supportive graphic designer supplied an EbbwRail Campaign logo free of charge, and a display stand was created which explained the opportunity and benefits of reopening the railway in simple terms, with illustrations, a map and a leaflet holder.

The stand was taken to events and libraries throughout the valley. Local MPs and the MEP expressed their support, and there was media coverage on television as well as in newspapers. Another clear sign of change was the attendance by a delegation from Blaenau Gwent council at a conference in Derby on railways and local authorities.

In the meantime, the EbbwRail Campaign had built up its own base of supporters. We recognised that asking local residents to become RDS members before they had a train service to use would achieve little. Instead, we asked them to subscribe for just £1, which covered the cost of producing and mailing newsletters (postage was much cheaper in the 1990s than now!).

This approach was a roaring success. On one occasion, 120 people subscribed in a single day. When the stand visited the library at Risca, so many leaflets were taken that an emergency reprint was needed before the stand moved to Ebbw Vale, where the librarian had requested it.

The newsletter, issued several times a year, was a simple A4 sheet with information on how the campaign was progressing. It suggested actions which members could take, such as writing to councillors or other representatives or election candidates in support of the campaign and to make certain points.

By the time the National Assembly of Wales came into being in 1999, reopening the Ebbw Vale line had so much momentum that it became an early priority for the devolved government.

Unfortunately, the UK government would not contribute any funding (railway infrastructure was not, and still is not, a devolved subject for which Cardiff Bay receives funding from London). As the reopening project suffered the usual unexpected cost increases, it was cut back by shortening the two-track dynamic loop on the branch to just three miles, to keep costs closer to budget. We argued strongly against this and said that adding the double track when the branch had reopened would be much more expensive – as we are witnessing this year.

The reopening in 2008 vindicated RDS Wales. In the first year, the trains were used by twice as many people as the official forecasts had predicted after years of studies. There were shortages of capacity at peak times, and Newport councillors were dissatisfied that the trains ran to Cardiff but not Newport. The Welsh Assembly Government soon committed to starting a second hourly service, to Newport, but was hamstrung by the minimalistic infrastructure on the branch.

The launch of the Ebbw Vale to Newport service this year will be another cause for celebration. The Welsh Government (as it is now known) also aspires to a frequency of four trains per hour on the branch, to build a short new line from Aberbeeg to Abertillery and to electrify.

New Stadler Class 231 trains, currently in use on the Rhymney line, are expected to start working the branch in 2025.

Postscript: In April 2023, Railfuture Wales chair Peter Kingsbury delivered the printed sheets from the EbbwRail display stand to the Gwent Archives for safekeeping. Railfuture has donated other information relating to the campaign to the archives.

Railfuture reaching for the stars

Railfuture is planning to launch a hunt for the railway's star customer-facing staff.

The idea is inspired by the many reports from Railfuture members and the public who praise rail staff for going the extra mile. Dedicated staff are an asset to the rail industry and, with Great British Railways on the government's shelf for the foreseeable future and a general malaise creeping over the industry, Railfuture wants to accentuate the positives in an industry that is close

to many people's hearts. Railfuture already runs the Rail User Groups Awards which recognise volunteer campaigners. Former Northern manager Pete Myers, now a Railfuture board member, is hoping to base a new *Railfuture Rail Stars* award on a successful Northern Stars scheme, which the train operator founded and operated with great success. Railfuture policy director Ian Brown said: "Railfuture has the interests of the rail industry as a whole at heart and good

people in this industry should be celebrated. Many staff in customer-facing roles go way beyond their brief and the stories are inspiring and heartwarming.

"Railfuture will be celebrating the rail industry people who enhance and change lives daily."

Former railway stakeholder and community manager Fay Easton told the Railfuture board that, over the five years she worked in the rail industry, she was overwhelmed not

only by the numbers of volunteers who work tirelessly to benefit the rail industry, but also by the many rail industry staff, both in train operation and at Network Rail, who go beyond the call of duty to support customers, communities and colleagues.

To help plan for the launch of Railfuture Stars, please send a brief email if you have a possible candidate in mind to:

Pete.Myers@railfuture.org.uk



Pass it on

There are many ways to promote Railfuture and encourage people to join our campaign for a bigger and better railway. With a few exceptions, every member receives a copy of *Railwatch* which can be read and then passed on to friends and relatives who may be potential members. Some members volunteer to receive bulk supplies of *Railwatch* which they distribute in schools, colleges, doctors' and dentists' surgeries and local libraries. Please ensure you get permission. If you would like to join this simple campaign to get Railfuture's name known more widely, please contact Ray King at editor@railwatch.org.uk and say how many extra copies of *Railwatch* you would like to have posted to you.

Eco-friendly

Railwatch has in the past been delivered in a see-through wrapper made of starch film, which was 100% compostable and biodegradable. Our despatchers now advise that it is cheaper to use a paper envelope which, of course, is easily recycled.

Join the Lottery

Lottery winners

May: D Brady, C Fox, G Smith, T Davies

June: J Bannister, L Butler, B Connolly, K Green, A McFie, G Smith

July: D Brady, C Fox, R White, G Wood, M Edgell, T Davies
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!

Yorkshire



Representatives of Railfuture Yorkshire and Railfuture North East had a constructive meeting with Sean English, chief operating officer of Grand Central, to discuss future developments and Grand Central's plans to expand services. This class 221 Super Voyager train, pictured at Leeds Holbeck depot, is central to the company's post-Covid recovery plans. See page 17 for Graham Collett's report Picture by Grand Central

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Hopes for a bigger, better railway

The plan to reinstate passenger services on the line from Sheffield to Chesterfield via Barrow Hill is the subject of continuing work on an outline business case by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. The potential for reducing costs and increasing revenue is currently being addressed. Work is also progressing on the outline business case for a new station on the main line at Rotherham, to be sited near the Parkgate retail centre. This new station would re-establish through journey opportunities for Rotherham that were lost when the station at Rotherham Masborough closed in 1988.

A decision is still awaited on the *Restoring Your Railway* application for a new station at Waverley on the Sheffield-Lincoln line, to serve new housing development and an adjacent technology park. In the absence of government commitment, the combined authority is funding an outline business case study.

Another study has recently been completed by SLC Rail into the feasibility of providing a second train per hour on the Penistone line between Sheffield and Huddersfield. Several options have been developed, but the overall benefit-cost ratio is relatively weak.

A decision is expected shortly on whether to go ahead with an outline business case study into plans for a passenger service on the Don Valley line between Sheffield and Stocksbridge, and on the Askern line between Doncaster and Knottingley. As well as providing a much-needed service in itself, the

Don Valley line project could potentially enhance the prospects for improved services between Sheffield and Huddersfield. Similarly, the Askern line would provide new journey opportunities for communities on the route between Doncaster and Leeds and would require relatively little infrastructure investment as the tracks are already in situ.

Hope Valley expansion

Work is progressing on the Hope Valley capacity improvement scheme. Construction of the second platform at Dore and Topley has begun in earnest and a new footbridge, with lifts, is expected. Soil nailing in the West View Lane area has proved problematic, and it is now expected that a retaining wall will be constructed beside the line. It is not anticipated that this will significantly delay the project, scheduled for completion in time for next year's May timetable change.

The combined authority continues to lobby for a third fast train per hour between Sheffield and Manchester as a benefit of this work, as originally promised.

Sheffield improvements

Network Rail is continuing to work on its proposals for short and longer-term capacity enhancements at Sheffield Midland station and in the surrounding area. Funding has been agreed to take the short-term package to a full business case study while the long-term "Sheffield single rail strategy" will be subject to a strategic outline business case study.

The combined authority is starting work on a new Rail Vision which will refresh its 2019 Integrated Rail Plan. It is also starting to develop a new

transport strategy. Public consultation is expected to follow.

Hull help hub for the vulnerable

The train operator TransPennine Express has opened a new multi-agency safeguarding hub at Hull Paragon Interchange. The Safer Hull Paragon Hub involves the city council, British Transport Police, Humberside Police and community groups, to provide help to those in need, especially the vulnerable. TPE has invested £100,000 to convert an empty retail unit at the station into a welcoming space for the two million rail users and 10 million bus users who use the interchange each year. The multi-agency hub is thought to be the first of its kind in the country, said Kathryn O'Brien, TPE's operations and customer experience director. Charities involved include Samaritans and Railway Children.

Rail's crucial role for the future

Railfuture Yorkshire's committee has been involved recently in compiling responses to various consultations, in addition to the ticket office consultation. They include Transport for the North's draft strategic transport plan and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority draft rail strategy. These have provided opportunities to make the case for a bigger and better railway, with new stations on existing lines, increased frequencies on many lines, reopenings and new chords which will lead to new and enhanced services, and the need to provide for an increase in freight, all underpinned by rail's vital role in reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a liveable future for our planet.

www.railfuture.org.uk/yorkshire-branch
Twitter: @RailfutureYorks

Post-Covid battle for a healthy Crewe-Newark rail service

By Michael Willmot

Chair of North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership

The line from Crewe to Newark has become one of the big casualties of the Covid epidemic.

But thanks to action by Railfuture members and others, campaigners are celebrating a partial victory.

Four of six services which were cut will be reinstated in December.

East Midlands Railway announced in late August that it would bring back the following weekly trains:

- 0553 Nottingham-Crewe
- 1616 Nottingham-Crewe
- 0810 Crewe-Nottingham
- 1810 Crewe-Nottingham

The North Staffordshire CRP has expressed its delight on hearing this news from EMR.

"The return of these four peak time services will help a lot of passengers, particularly commuters and students," it said in a press release.

The partnership will continue to campaign for reinstatement of the remaining two weekday and six Saturday trains.

Despite the return of the peak services, Derby, Stoke, Crewe and all communities in between, will still be left with fewer trains than they have had for decades.

Intermediate stations along the line are: Longton, Blythe Bridge, Uttoxeter, Tutbury & Hatton, Longport, Kildgrove and Alsager.

The line lost its regular service



STOKE-ON-TRENT: An EMR service at the impressive station
Picture: North Staffordshire community rail partnership

pattern of trains, and passengers have been left waiting, with two-hour gaps between some trains.

A campaign continues with the aim of restoring the full service.

Will Rogers, managing director of EMR, said: "Being able to deliver these services on Saturdays, as well as the previously provided 1036 towards Crewe and 1310 from Crewe, remains an aspiration that we will continue to work on in collaboration with the Department for Transport."

The campaign started with a dozen or so letters from concerned councils and businesses along the line. MPs, the rail user group and the community rail partnership have all joined in the struggle.

Even with the partial victory, users are being urged to sign the petition at <https://tinyurl.com/CreweNewark>. Passengers are now asking how such a state of affairs came about, with neither the Department for Transport nor the train operator

seemingly able to solve the problem. Originally owned by Abellio, East Midlands Railway took over the franchise from East Midlands Trains in August 2019. At the time it was set to last for eight years.

Seven months later, passenger numbers and ticket revenues collapsed following the onset of Covid, leading to the franchise agreement being initially suspended before being replaced entirely.

Under the new National Rail Contract signed in 2022, the arrangement is expected to last until 2030.

Meanwhile, in February 2023, the Transport UK Group concluded a management buyout of Abellio's United Kingdom business, which included EMR.

Problems with the EMR Crewe service started in September 2020, under the guise of "Build Back Better", the call at Alsager – the first stop after Crewe – was suspended.

It was supposed to "improve the service's reliability and robustness overall".

Alsager was still served by the West Midlands Trains Crewe-Stoke-Birmingham service, but for those returning from the Derby route a 30-minute wait at Stoke for a homeward connection was a considerable inconvenience.

After much local protest, the stop was reinstated in May 2021.

However, the celebration was short-lived and the cuts returned.

The missing services remained throughout 2022 and into 2023.

In May this year, we were warned that the December timetable was in preparation and would once again have six services missing. The "temporary" was now apparently lasting three years.

Passengers were unhappy to say the least, knowing that the full service was restored on the neighbouring Matlock-Derby line in December 2022, giving it 18 services a day in each direction compared with the meagre 12 services on the Stoke-Derby line.

It was surprising because the footfall on the Derby-Crewe line was 27% greater in 2021/22 than on the Matlock line and it serves a population ten times greater, including the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation of half a million with its high levels of multiple deprivation.

It became clear that only a concerted campaign could hope to bring back the full Crewe service.

By Richard Lysons

I was attracted to this book as freight is an aspect of rail about which I have scant knowledge. When I attend Railfuture meetings, I tend to keep silent when this subject comes up on the agenda and listen carefully to try to understand how rail freight traffic works on the network in the UK.

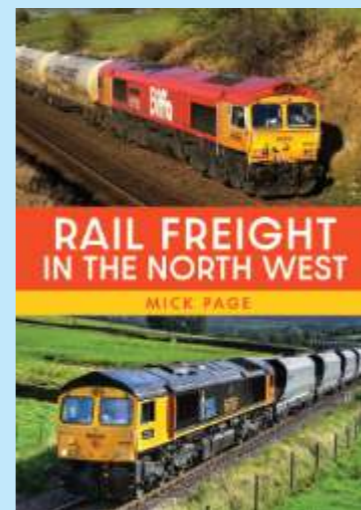
I live very near the Calder Valley line and see the Drax biomass trains going up and down, but have not really got my head around how freight fits in with this busy passenger route, apart from keeping the local level crossing barriers down!

From an environmentalist's and rail campaigner's point of view, I am obviously delighted that rail freight takes thousands of lorry journeys off our congested roads and helps air quality.

Mick Page focuses on rail freight traffic in the North West in recent times, and his high-quality colour photographs show the large variety of workings in the region.

The book is helpfully divided into five sections: the Calder Valley line (as already mentioned), the East Lancashire line from Preston to

Protecting our environment



Rail Freight in the North West by Mick Page
Amberley Publishing 2023. £15.99
www.amberley-books.com
ISBN: 9781398116405

Hall Royd Junction, the Ribble Valley line from Blackburn to Settle Junction, Skipton to Settle and Arcow quarry, and finally the Grassington branch to Rylstone

Quarry. The first two photographs in the Calder Valley line section show empty biomass trains returning to Liverpool, and the shots are taken just minutes away from where I live in Rochdale.

The variety of different materials carried by the freight trains interested me – bitumen, cement, gypsum, logs, refuse, stone. I wondered what else could be usefully transported around the North West region by freight train. Page provides precise descriptions of each train, cargo, location and date with each photograph.

I would have liked to have read a little more about the routes, either through summaries or maps. This would save me – and other readers – having to refer to another book or rail atlas or (worse) having to Google some of the less familiar locations.

Page's introduction is a little short and unnecessarily modest. He mentions his younger days "bashing" loco sheds collecting numbers but stops at any more autobiographical detail. Page mentions his cameras, but

provides little other information. As someone who does not often photograph trains, I would have liked to have known a little about how Mick Page gained his knowledge and takes such excellent photographs.

I remember, decades ago, a famous photographer saying that he generally succeeded in getting one usable picture out of a reel of 36 images. This was, of course, pre-digital. Nowadays, there is no cost in making dozens of attempts for the same shot, but there is still a distinct gap between the likes of Mick Page's first-rate photographs and what most of us manage to achieve.

Amberley has a deserved reputation for high-quality books. I have several of the publisher's *Through Time* titles and canal books. *Rail Freight in the North West* is well presented and attractive. If you live in the area – like me – or are a visitor to the region, or are a fellow campaigner, Page's book is worth adding to your bookshelves.

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

The wrong choice

Although it is reasonable for government ministers to want a cost-effective railway, it is also important that they consider how to maximise usage and do not take a narrow view that railways are only for regular rail travellers such as commuters.

My experience of train operator websites is that there is an assumption that I want to buy a ticket, whereas it is usually a timetable query. Timetables on some sites can be difficult to access. Staff at travel centres and ticket offices have the personal touch and are particularly valuable now that paper timetables are rarely available. Ticket offices can give extensive information for non-smartphone users, as well as travel to more distant places.

An analogy can be drawn with postal services where the privatised industry proposes cuts. Many people without internet access find Royal Mail essential.

It is important that ways are found to attract car drivers to see railways as an alternative to our increasingly dangerous and congested roads. Unfortunately we have politicians who do not regard railways as a service, as seems to be the case with most other countries, but as a means of raising revenue.

The Department for Transport should take a comprehensive view of potential rail travellers and not see anyone who does not use a smartphone as a dinosaur.

Thomas E Rookes, Ruskin Avenue, St Giles, Lincoln LN2 4DE
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Technology fails

One of the nice things about being retired is that you have time to do things. Following the note in

High speed Indonesia



Indonesia now has more high speed railway than Britain. The 88-mile Jakarta to Bandung line opened for test running in May with Chinese-built trains, ready for services to start in August. Indonesia is also planning to extend its first high speed railway by 400 miles. This test train is being cleaned, shortly before completing a 215mph run in June. Picture: Xinhua/Xu Qin

Railwatch 176 about delays at Waterloo ticket gates because the machines failed to recognise valid tickets, I carried out a one-hour survey at my local station - Egham.

South Western Railway has cut back on ticket office staff resulting in long queues, despite the four ticket machines outside Egham station. There used to be two windows open at times, but with the cutbacks there is now only one. The ticket office clerk told me that he spends a lot of time giving route advice to passengers, as well as selling tickets.

My survey showed that tickets frequently do not work the barriers, resulting in queues waiting for the ticket barrier person to intervene.

The types of ticket which randomly did not work the ticket barriers included the cardboard ones, the new paper ones, and the e-tickets on smart phones, despite two having QR codes on them.

I also found that the down side barriers at Egham were unstaffed, resulting in people just pushing through the wide, double gates to leave the station.

In early 2022, I travelled to London on a Travelcard printed on the usual cardboard ticket. This trip involved eight ticket gates, four on SWR and four on Transport for London. The ticket worked once - when I left Egham. The queue at the gates at Waterloo delayed me and I only just made my appointment. The ticket did not work at all on TfL.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
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Return tickets

While the announcement that, from 11 June 2023, all super off-peak singles priced by LNER were to cost half the return fare is to be welcomed, the removal from sale of all return tickets represents a significant downside for the thousands of passengers who have enjoyed the flexibility that return tickets have offered.

Instead of being able to buy one return ticket, valid for return within one calendar month of the issue date, valid via any permitted route and for multiple breaks of journey on route, the singles are more expensive and offer nothing like the same flexibility.

Take the example of a super off-peak return from Elgin to West

Ham. Before 11 June, the return cost £137 with a senior railcard. Now, it is necessary to buy two single tickets priced at £71. Right away, LNER has increased the cost of that journey by around 4%, despite the fact that the fare was increased by 5.9% as recently as March 2023.

Given the distance from Elgin to London or beyond, with a journey time of around 11 or 12 hours, I have often broken my journey northward to visit my brother in Stafford, or friends in Leeds or Edinburgh. To do that in future will require the purchase of three single tickets, costing up to £190, instead of £137. How does this so-called fares simplification benefit the tens of thousands of passengers who have always purchased a return ticket?

By all means introduce cheaper single tickets, but there was no need to scrap return fares in the process. I would like to see Railfuture fighting for the reinstatement of return tickets and the flexibility they offered passengers.

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Smart railcard

Nothing I have heard so far on fares reform seems to go anywhere far enough in tackling the problem.

We have a truly byzantine fares system which is discouraging to rail travellers, with sky-high peak fares that make headlines, and a bewildering array of railcards, each with its own restrictions.

I propose that all railcards should be replaced by ONE single smart railcard used for all ticket purchase transactions with an annual fee.

As it would have data on the holder, bonus offers and text alerts could be targeted.

Peak rail fares are a nightmare and are less justified as the economy moves to more flexible working.

As a first move, Railfuture should push for abandonment of all evening peak fares, and no peak fares for trains boarded after 0900.

The government should reward train companies that attract more customers, including by reducing and removing peak fares.

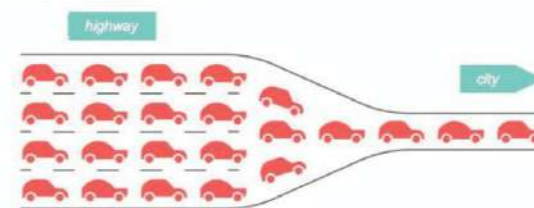
Peter Solomon, Great Barford MK44 3HA
botrosess@googlemail.com

HS2 >>>> Eurostar

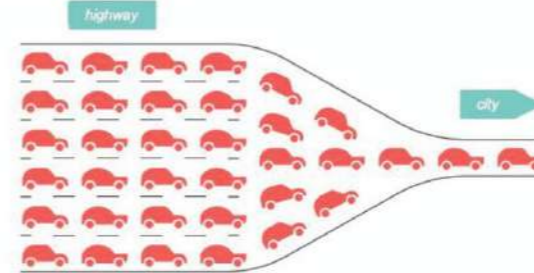
Christian Wolmar (*Railwatch* April 2023) provides a typically perceptive analysis of the current situation regarding HS2. Like him, I have always had reservations about the project. The money would have been much better spent upgrading the existing

The Bottleneck

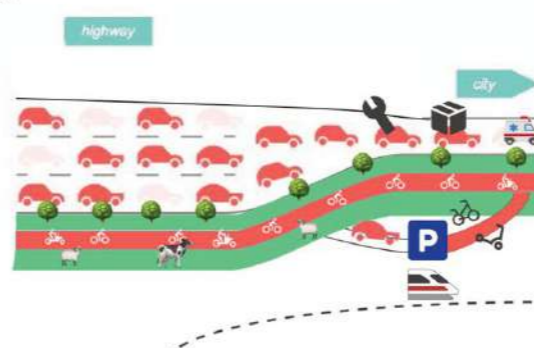
If this is your problem...



...then this isn't your solution



...this is!



TRAIN + BIKE: Graphic adapted for Twitter by @philwornath from the 2022 book Movement - How to Take Back Our Streets and Transform Our Lives

Sadly this obvious way to use trains and bikes to combat road traffic congestion is unlikely to go down well with some ministers at the Department for Transport.

They have axed funding for low traffic neighbourhoods and cut by two-thirds funding for active travel - walking and cycling.

Local transport minister Richard Holden told a parliamentary transport committee in July that he did not want to make life more difficult for the motorist.

He said: "There is a war on motorists in some parts of the

country." Defending road building from research that proves it encourages more drivers on to congested roads, he said: "We can argue all day about predict and provide."

He conceded that many journeys start with walking and cycling and that many natural walking routes were blocked by "1960s road building".

He assured his audience of MPs that he had travelled on Lumo trains from his constituency in north west Durham but added: "I see lorries regularly when I am driving up and down the A1."

network, but I agree with him that cancelling it now would be "terrible politics".

He is also right that stopping the line at Old Oak Common makes no sense. However, there might be a silver lining if it enabled reconsideration of the absurdity of not joining HS2 to HS1. Spending billions to shave a few minutes off

the journey time between London and Birmingham is appalling value for money, but to be able to travel direct from Birmingham and cities further north direct to Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam looks much more attractive.

Furthermore, this would enable Stratford to recover its "international" status and relieve

pressure on St Pancras. The congestion in the terminal created by the post-Brexit checks is dreadful.

Christopher Benson, Thorndon Gardens, Epsom, Surrey KT19 0QW
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Less than 100mph

Re your article in *Railwatch* on EWR, the line speed on the Marston Vale section will not be capped at 100mph. It will be "below the 100mph originally proposed, but above the current speed of 60mph".

The lower line speed means that some level crossings - for example at Woburn Sands and Lidlington - could still meet the appropriate safety standards and so could be retained.

Roger Smith, Editor Rail User Express
ruglink@railfuture.org.uk

Noisy children

I can understand the desire of people like Abby Taylor who is campaigning to make trains more family friendly (*Railwatch* 176), but some passengers find young children noisy and disruptive.

If you encourage more with offspring to take to the tracks, it is vital that quiet coaches are on every service.

Please listen to the views of travellers who believe they are subsidising journeys of other people's children.

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

Family face

I welcome the campaign for family friendly trains and congratulate the organisers. However, I am surprised that no mention was made of family friendly social seating: that is two seats facing two seats, ideally with a table in between and an aligned window for the view a family group can enjoy.

From the days of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and before, travel was recognised as a social occasion. Sharing the trials and tribulations of a journey and the sights of a passing landscape has the capacity to stimulate conversation between family members - as it does also between strangers. The stage coach and the classic railway carriage seating arrangement recognised this by placing seats facing each other. It is always so much easier to converse when you can see the body language of your companions and

exchange smiles with those opposite.

Yet this social seating is fast disappearing from British trains in favour of airline seating for the sake of a few extra seats - but with the loss of close-by luggage space between and under the back-to-back seats. With the increase in leisure travel and the reduction in commuting, could this campaign join with others by also pressing for at least 50% social seating aligned with windows in all longer distance railway carriages?

Michael Willmot, chair, North Staffs Community Rail Partnership secretary, Far North Line Community Rail Partnership
mwillmot@talktalk.net

Arbitration

It is difficult to campaign for a better, bigger railway when it suddenly disappears for three days, and it seems as if the strikes are set to continue indefinitely. The only way out is for both sides to agree to independent arbitration. I believe that Railfuture and all the other national transport and environmental organisations should be campaigning for that.

John Henderson, Frome, Somerset
johnvhen@hotmail.co.uk



Signs of success

About 200 people had a chance to admire the signs (*Railwatch* 176) provided by Teign Valley when they visited the TavyRail stand at the EcoFest at Plymouth in July. Most were enthusiastic about the return of a Plymouth-Tavistock rail service.

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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



Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove took this picture of a lovely agapanthus at North Berwick station in August. North Berwick in Bloom, the group that does all the floral displays in the town, won the gold award in the Scotland in Bloom national awards, as well as Best Coastal Town award from Visit Scotland



Remodelling of Ryde Esplanade station, promised more than a decade ago, has at last been completed and includes this spacious new ticket office ... just in time for it to be closed and boarded up under the latest proposals! Picture by Alan Mayes

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Waterside line study

The outline business case for restoring a passenger service on the Totton-Hythe branch line is expected in the autumn to show a positive benefit to cost ratio. The local MP who originally supported the *Restoring your Railway* application is now suggesting the railway will not be financially viable, against evidence from previous rail reopenings that have proved extremely successful. For example, the Okehampton reopening led to higher than forecast number of passengers travelling and has transformed travel to the Devon town and beyond. Bus-rail integration around Okehampton has led to a 40% growth in bus use. Similar results can be expected from Waterside. Railfuture Wessex has pledged support for Hampshire community rail partnership's revamped campaign to highlight the line's potential to revitalise public transport for the 45,000 inhabitants on the peninsula. Please look out for website updates.

Buyer beware with SWR's Tap2Go smartcard

South Western Railway has been rolling out its Tap2Go smartcard across the network, and promises that if you tap in at the start of your journey then tap out at the end you will be charged the cheapest fare for your journey. Users, however, need to be careful. If they use Tap2Go for a journey from Fareham to Southampton they risk being fined for not having a valid ticket if they then hop on a Southern or Great Western train by mistake. Railfuture raised this problem with SWR, but were advised that passengers would have agreed to all the various terms and conditions before signing up for Tap2Go. As with all single-operator ticket offers, it is a case of buyer beware.

Crunch time for Island line

Island line managers have been drawing up a new timetable to resolve reliability problems affecting the service between Ryde and Shanklin since the introduction of the new class 484 stock. A minor incident, such as a wheelchair passenger joining the train, results in an unrecoverable delay. All options are on the table, including abandoning the clockface timetable in the short term in favour of a 35-minute interval service, or reverting to a 20-40 minute interval service. Railfuture has been assured that work needed to upgrade a level crossing just outside Ryde should be completed by the end of this year. The resultant lifting of a long-standing speed restriction could provide a modest improvement in end-to-end journey times.

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

bruce.williamson@railfuture.org.uk

Rail route should be protected for metro

The Callington Road scheme has reared its ugly head again. This is a proposal to build a road or busway on the path of a disused rail line in Bristol. The West of England Combined Authority is currently running a consultation on the future of the A4 corridor between Bath and Bristol, and one of the proposed aspects of the scheme is to divert most of the traffic through Brislington on to the former trackbed of the Bristol-Radstock line. This trackbed would of course be better used for some sort of rail-based transport, particularly as Bristol is developing plans for a metro system, popularly known as mayor Marvin Rees's underground. It would be spectacularly short-sighted to use this for a road instead and limit future public transport options. There are also objections based on the fact that it is a valuable wildlife corridor which would be ruined by a road or busway scheme. Railfuture Severnside branch will be formally objecting to this. The consultation can be found at haveyoursaywest.co.uk and closes on 1 October. We hope you will have received *Railwatch* in time.

Bristol Rail Campaign

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways has become the Bristol Rail Campaign. The campaign emerged in 1995 as Friends of Severn Beach Railway, to protest against the potential demise of the Severn Beach Line, a single-track branch line in Bristol. Many services from Bristol Temple Meads to Severn Beach had been replaced by buses. The first FoSBR action was when a group of protestors met at Avonmouth station with buggies and bicycles, to show that buses were not a suitable replacement for trains. The Railfuture-affiliated group later changed its name to Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways, allowing it to keep the FoSBR acronym.

bristolrailcampaign.org.uk

Langport and Somerton

Railfuture-affiliated Langport Transport Group has been working hard with partners, including Somerset county council and the new unitary authority, to make the case for a reopened station on the London Paddington to Penzance main line. The group, whose secretary is Railfuture life member Simon Taylor, was awarded £50,000 by the Department for Transport under the *Restoring Your Railway* fund. Along with support from other local councils, this allowed specialist transport consultancy WSP to be commissioned to undertake a study and produce an outline strategic business case. This business case was submitted in March 2022, along with all other national bids, and is awaiting a decision. Enquiries about progress to the DfT are met with news of further delays. More about the business case which has been described as compelling, can be found at LTG's website. The study



anticipates around 230,000 rail journeys a year being made from a new station. About two thirds of those would be by "new to rail" passengers. The economic, social, financial, management and environmental cases stack up strongly for this catchment area in southern Somerset. It has a population of 50,000 and straddles the longest stretch of operational railway in southern England of over 27 miles with no station. The group can be contacted at

langporttransportgroup@gmail.com
<https://langporttransportgroup.org/>

Pilning station protest

Pilning station has only two trains a week, but people cannot even rely on those trains stopping at the station!

Users of the station in South Gloucestershire are at the end of their tether. There was confusion when the summer timetable started in May, after train operator Great Western discovered at the last minute that new electric trains scheduled to call at Pilning could not actually do so because of a technical oversight. This meant that the afternoon service had to be hastily revised using alternative diesel trains, calling at different times from those published. Then Pilning had no trains at all for several weeks, thanks to a combination of strikes and engineering works. On Saturday 1 July, the guard of the scheduled afternoon train from Cardiff announced at departure time that it would not be stopping at Pilning despite being advertised to do so. Furious passengers demanded that alternative arrangements be made and, after much discussion between train crew and Control, GWR agreed to stop the following train at Pilning specially, even though it was not advertised to do so. Just as well, as otherwise people would have been left stranded, including those waiting for the train at Pilning itself, which has no other transport alternatives nearby. The last straw came on Saturday 15 July, when the 1528 Cardiff to Portsmouth train that was advertised to stop at Pilning flew past the platform. A Pilning passenger on the train used the emergency alarm to stop the train before it reached the next signal, so the driver could get permission to reverse it back to the station.

Olga Taylor, chair of the station's user group, said: "This apparently endless display of rank incompetence by GWR week after week is totally unacceptable. Our service is bad enough already. Only two trains a week, both in the same direction. If GWR cannot even manage to provide those with any degree of reliability, you have to ask whether they are sufficiently competent to be in charge of running a railway at all. Or are they just trying to drive all our station's users away so that they can close it altogether?"

www.pilningstation.uk

Go-op plans under examination

The European Research Council is supporting Elisa Schramm from Spain's University of Vigo to investigate proposals by Go-op to run a new open-access train service from Taunton to Swindon, via Frome, Westbury, Melksham and Chippenham. She is also studying the Railcoop initiative in France which wants to re-establish a service between Lyon and Bordeaux.

Severnside branch contact:
severnside@railfuture.org.uk
Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide

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

Take the train for a safari day out

By Alex Fox

Ten minutes from Cambridge by rail, you can discover unexpected treasures in the village of Shepreth.

Travellers alighting at the station after a one-hour-ten-minute train journey from London King's Cross may be surprised to hear the announcement: "Alight here for the Wildlife park".

The park's driveway is shared with the station car park and passengers can walk seamlessly from the platform to the zoo in minutes.

From its tigers and tarantulas to its aardvarks and meerkats, Shepreth Wildlife Park is centred on the care, conservation and rehabilitation of animals.

The arrival of the tiger retirees gave rise to a new and exciting chapter in its narrative.

Having taken on zoo status, the organisation participated in European Endangered Breeding Programmes to encourage conservation of species in the wild.

Committed to global conservation, the park has raised over £600,000 for conservation projects worldwide while working alongside its sister organisation, Shepreth Wildlife Conservation Charity.

It also hosts the Hedgehog Hospital, which has rescued and rehabilitated over 5,400 hedgehogs in 10 years.

The park hosts an award-winning educational facility for schools and students from all over the world.

The park is also a local champion in green tourism, with a Gold Star Award for environmental awareness and practices.

Fifteen minutes walk from the park is the Crossing House Garden, a quarter-acre site adjacent to the railway line that boasts more than 5,000 plant species.

This almost secret garden was started in the 1950s by the then resident level-crossing keeper, who spent time tending to flora and greenhouses between trains.

Fashioned from raised beds built from railway sleepers, the garden has been open to visitors for decades. Due to the care and attention it enjoyed for years it is continuing its cycle of colour and texture through self-seeding along the line.

Five minutes walk from the zoo are the celebrated gardens of Docwra's Manor, established in the 1950s by John and Faith Raven.

Fifteen minutes walk away is the local wildlife trust's "L-Moor".

Shepreth Wildlife Park was started as a family-run animal sanctuary in 1984 by master builder Terry Willers and Gill Willers. The aim was rehabilitation and care of all manner of rescued species.

With no aspirations to create a zoo,

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



Capuchin monkey



Shepreth Wildlife Park's tiger, now retired to a life by the trackside



Aardvark



Black and white ruff lemur

PICTURES BY SHEPRETH WILDLIFE PARK

the park evolved almost like magic. Next year it celebrates its fortieth anniversary.

Still run by the family, with Terry Willers at the helm, children Rebecca and Nicholas have taken over day-to-day running as its directors, with daughter-in-law and grandchildren also involved.

As a member of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, the wildlife park is committed to conservation and educating the next generation of conservationists.

The village of Shepreth was named after the bygone activity of washing sheep on their way to market in Cambridge.

Its station, opened in 1851 by the Royston and Hitchin Railway, was the northern terminus of an extension of the original route from Royston.

The Great Northern Railway amalgamated it into the London-Cambridge line in 1866.

Although the ticket office closed decades ago, the station is very much the focus for the local communities to get to work, college and school, as well as welcoming visitors.

Platform 2 was extended in 2017 to accommodate eight-car trains without straddling the crossing.

The footfall through the station was 117,102 for the year 2019-2020, up 10.7% since 2015 and still rising.

Bonus: Show a valid rail ticket for your visit and enjoy a reduced admission rate of £10 per person at the zoo.

Shepreth village's **Teacake Cafe** offers a range of daily specials and homemade cakes. It is open Thursday to Saturday 1000-1600 (Sunday 1100-1600).

www.sheprethwildlifepark.co.uk



Red pandas

Campaign now to make sure rail has a rosy future

By Ian Brown

September and October are traditionally months to prepare for the coming year, cutting out the dead wood and planting the garden for spring.

2023 has been a poor year for growth in the garden and optimism on the railway, but next year can bring new opportunities and challenges.

The autumn is also a good time to think about planting new roses.

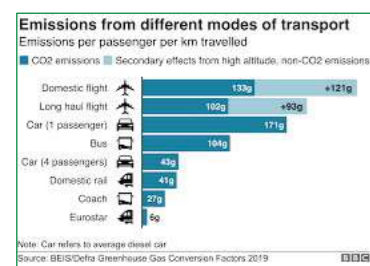
The railways did start to recover from Covid but positive initiatives such as Great British Railways and fares simplification have stalled or been watered down to essentially branding exercises.

We have seen strikes continuously throughout the year, to the point where the government appears to have lost interest in the railways.

Rail staff and passengers feel like pawns in a silly trial of strength for control between the government and the trade unions. If it was just a pay dispute, it would have been settled months ago.

We all know that rail is capital intensive and so needs volume. Rail also needs to see significant modal shift if it is to address seriously the three issues that support the case for investment in rail. These are the environment, the economy and social inclusion, the latter including issues such as the north-south divide.

Who dares wins on the environment



Rail is losing its environmental credentials. A full bus scores well against a half empty train. Note however that a full Eurostar with high capacity scores better than a coach Graph: DFT

While rail tears itself apart, other modes are moving in to claim that they are the answer to addressing these issues. Coach travel has boomed as passengers have been forced off the rails week by week.

Railfuture members will have noticed a distinct change in approach by coach operators, away from the emphasis on cheap fares.

The emphasis is now on the environment and reliability. National Express goes as far as saying that coach travel is the most environmentally sustainable

method of transport. Coach operators stress reliability, unlike rail. Would you book a train trip to Manchester Airport and risk your holiday?

Similarly air travel is booming, domestic and European short haul, at a time when Eurostar is closing down services to focus on its two high-priced core routes: Paris particularly, and Brussels-Amsterdam.

This is typical monopoly supplier behaviour which shows no allegiance to the huge British public capital that went into the Channel Tunnel.

Why should they? The British government did not even help Eurostar over Covid as it did for domestic railways. Another great opportunity for coach travel.

Electrification of the whole of our rail network is the key to rail being the transport investment of choice.

Current electrification is minimal. Have we forgotten how to do it? Our friends in China and India for example have not. Both these countries were the world's worst polluters. They are now implementing vast programmes of electrification, not just for fun, probably not just for environmental reasons either, but because it makes good economic sense. We must do this for environmental and economic reasons, to increase capacity and permit modal shift to rail.

The economy

The economy, moreover rail's potential contribution to the economy, is the staple diet for investment in railways, and in terms of continuing to subsidise operating deficits.

Crossrail was justified on this basis and it paid off, despite being a few billion pounds over budget.

HS2 was billed to do likewise. Indeed, building it has stimulated the economy, as would have building something else such as a new road. The key question is what benefits will it bring.

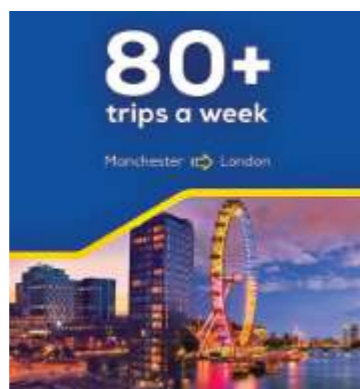
An independent observer could easily conclude that the client side management (the government), has been one of the worst examples of government mismanagement of a big project in history.

Some of us may know that this is par for the course, for example in defence. The result is maximum spend, minimal delivery, minimal benefits.

Railfuture has campaigned long and hard, with some success, for HS2 to be a project to upgrade the capacity of our rail network, not a self-contained point-to-point route



ENTHUSIASTS: Rail minister Huw Merriman (centre in black shirt) visited Ribbleshead station in August and met rail campaigners and volunteers, including Allison Cosgrove, who is a Railfuture director and also chair of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line. Also in the picture are Ribbleshead volunteers Marigold Carter, Sarah Spencer-Viney, Cliff Jones, Jon Tomlinson and cake maker Janet Benzie. Others present are from Network Rail, Community Rail Network and Northern Rail Picture by Chris Leech



Mega bus, National Express and now FlixBus are well established players in the inter-city market. This is a Megabus advert

not integrated into our transport network. Network Rail understands this, as do the many stakeholders who do not live on top of Birmingham's Curzon Street HS2 station for example.

It is abundantly clear that rail investment must bring benefits to whole regions, so we need to see rail as the backbone of an integrated transport system including light rail and metro systems, as well as other modes.

An integrated rail-coach network for the UK is much preferable to two services competing on core routes.

Social inclusion

The third and sometimes overlooked justification for railways is potential contribution to the social inclusion agenda. It includes the ability to get to work for the

people who sustain our economy from areas where they can afford to live. The finance and business services sector is often quoted as sustaining the UK economy.

However, for every job in this sector, it is said that there are four jobs needed to sustain it: office management, maintenance, IT services etc. That is why cities need good transport as they are not sustainable otherwise.

There are also massive regional divides. The north-south economic divide is the most glaring case, with the north's sub-standard, poor value for money, underperforming rail system in direct contrast to what exists in London.

The Northern Powerhouse Rail development so far rivals HS2 for stakeholder incompetence, to the point where Network Rail has just got on with it and started to upgrade the existing railway from Manchester to Leeds. Years have been wasted.

The North of England is not alone. South West England, Wales, even the outer reaches of Kent display similar inequality. All this cries out for a national, consistent rail system, with devolution to regions to implement integrated transport systems.

Jobs for the weekend Our role in Railfuture

So as winter approaches, we in Railfuture need to plan our "jobs for the weekend". We cannot just act as if nothing has happened as the financial constraints, some self-inflicted, start to bite on the rail industry. Many of us like the idea of

perpetuating the "full service railway" but for good or not so good reasons this is unlikely to happen. We can see this in every other sector. The social media sector replacing just about everything has probably peaked, as has working from home, so travel is back in business, increasingly so.

Let's have Ashford-Lille trains via Channel Tunnel

By Charlotte Mbali

Kent residents are furious that Eurostar no longer stops at Ashford International or Ebbsfleet. Over 25,000 of them have signed a petition for services to resume.

Earlier this year, I linked up with some others disadvantaged by Eurostar's reluctance to stop.

One who had bought a flat in Ashford so that he could travel easily to clients in London or Paris had lost his job.

Another, a tour guide, bemoaned fewer inbound tourists, while visits from my own Brussels family members are being curtailed.

I announced at the AGM of East Kent for Europe (a branch of the European movement) that we were setting up an action group to campaign for cross-channel trains to serve Kent again.

In the months since, we have been investigating whether it would be possible to find another train company (not Eurostar) to provide LOCAL services between Ashford and Lille (one hour). We would aim to do this first for the leisure market



We desperately need new operators on international rail services via the Channel Tunnel to open up other destinations. Note Eurostar has just announced the SkiTrain is back - starting from Lille, not London. Hardly a game changer! Lille is in France! Picture: David Longworth

The key challenge for our railways is the need to be more efficient, so that rail can take its place as the solution in a wider series of transport projects to address the three issues quoted. We need to widen and embrace the full range of rail technology too, from properly integrated high speed rail, freight corridors, main line to regional rail, light rail and also ultra light rail. These are all degrees of the same thing, a sustainable transport system.

Importantly, in fact critically, the fundamental reasons to invest and develop our railways are still there. The problem is that others have been allowed to move in on these issues. So what is the problem?

at the weekends, by excursion trains.

We would market these to groups on both sides of the Channel (for example, local choirs, sports teams, school trips, battlefield tours etc).

So far we have met with Visit Kent and Kent County Council economic advisers.

All are keen, but it is a matter of identifying the rail operator and working through the hurdles of the costs of tunnel fees, safety regulations, and making the political and economic case for local-to-local rail services.

Meanwhile, some Ashford residents followed up the petition by arranging a local meeting, which included local press, councillors and borough staff. They have now set up a website.

An action group has been formed combining the activists from the two groups. One of its strengths is good links to French activists from the Calais area who are also furious that they have to go via Lille for cross-Channel travel.

We have identified four possibilities

The problem is that our railways have bowed out and left the stage. Without effective leadership this will continue to be the case. The industrial strife, now an occupation in itself as on French Railways, is fairly and squarely a problem of leadership, or lack of it.

The industry desperately needs effective direction from the government, and leadership within the industry as well, including the rail unions, aimed at creating a growing, healthy railway with clear benefits to customers and rail staff, and focused on addressing problems. A smaller, inefficient high-cost railway does not stack up if we are to achieve this.

Jobs for us as Railfuture members

It is perhaps alarming, given the current fragmented state of our railways, that few people campaign for the big picture. A market economy works only when most parties in it interact in a way that simultaneously promotes their own interests and profit, and the whole is better than the sum of the parts.

On our railways the reverse is true. Some parts flourish but the whole does not. We have to reverse this. Strife is about the power play on who gets most. The problem is that the whole bleeds, and customers and staff are the pawns in the game, to be sacrificed without consideration. We must focus on initiatives to develop our railways

set against the big picture. Otherwise business cases are difficult to make and other solutions become rivals for cost-effectiveness. Rail is expensive but the benefits can outweigh the extra cost. This applies, as I learned with Crossrail, only if these benefits are understood and properly quantified. A key job for us is for stakeholders to understand these benefits. In a political world many people do not, but then come across hard reality when investment is not forthcoming.

There was never a better time nor greater need to make our voices heard, with our railways yet again at a turning point. We are organised across the whole of Britain through Railfuture branches that have established contacts with stakeholders and industry players.

This is the way to get across why our railways are so important against national, regional and local objectives. Our branches are therefore very well placed to put forward well-formulated, sustainable cases for investment in our railways. Soundbites and shrill voices are fun, but we need more than that, stakeholders and industry players are increasingly looking to us for advice.

We are actually in a good place, probably better than we realise. Let's go for it!

■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture's policy director



IT IS POSSIBLE: A class 319 worked through the tunnel back in 1993 Picture: Matt Black

(five SNCF and the Southeastern Javelins) and have the required cab signalling.

We do not underestimate the challenges, but where there's a will there's a way. Any reader of Railwatch with expert advice to offer would be welcome to comment on any of the above to the group working for more cross-channel trains to and from Ashford International.

Lonely Peartree is ripe for growth

By Ian Clark

Peartree is a very unusual station. Passengers can gain access only by using an intercom to ask for the magnetically locked gates to be released.

The station is in the city of Derby but there are no station buildings, with shelter for passengers on one side only.

The Network Rail-owned station is in a deep cutting on the line to Birmingham.

Access is restricted with the aim of cutting vandalism and to deter suicide attempts.

The station opened in 1890 as Pear Tree & Normanton. It is on the A5111 Derby ring road about 1.5 miles from Derby Midland station.

Adjacent to Peartree station are Sinfín, the Rolls Royce industrial quarter and Osmaston, with Allenton, Littleover and Normanton also within the catchment area.

Peartree is also unusual in that it was shut down in 1968 but reopened in 1976 as part of the ill-fated Sinfín branch scheme.

Although listed in Railfuture's *Britain's Growing Railway* (which began life as an *A-Z of Rail Reopenings*), Peartree is a prime candidate for the least successful station reopening.

This follows the official closure of associated stations Sinfín North and Sinfín Central in 1997.

Under privatisation, Peartree came under the aegis of Central Trains. The station's peak-hour calls were gradually incorporated into the North Staffordshire line (Crewe-

Nottingham) service that was extended to Manchester Airport, Skegness and Lincoln.

Because of unreliability, this service was cut back in 2005 to Crewe-Derby, and became a Cinderella service operated by single-car class 153s.

The service at Peartree grew from two to five calls per day, one each way in both morning and afternoon peaks, plus a second Derby-Crewe train in the afternoon peak.

Campaigning by the North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership identified a desire to reinstate the link between Crewe and Nottingham.

This eventually worked into plans by East Midlands Railway, which was finally able in May 2021 (after Covid delays) to reconfigure the service as part of a genuine cross-country route between Crewe and Newark Castle.

A further call was introduced in December 2021 at 0812 SX to improve the peak service from Peartree to Nottingham.

The implications of Crewe-Newark Castle to Peartree were such that a useful eastbound service beyond Derby to Nottingham could now be offered.

There is strong demand for public transport between Derby and Nottingham.

In addition to three trains per hour between the two cities, there is also Trent Barton's competitive Red Arrow express coach service operating every 10 minutes.

Buses serving districts around

Peartree station are operated by the Arriva group.

In order to get from south Derby to Nottingham, a change of operator is needed, plus two lots of fares and in some instances a walk across Derby centre.

This obstacle to travel would make a potential off-peak rail service between Peartree and Nottingham very attractive in terms of time and cost.

The current weekday rail service at Peartree is:

0718 to Newark Castle (0608 ex-Crewe)

0748 to Crewe (0627 ex-Newark Castle)

0813 SX to Newark Castle (0705 ex-Crewe)

1655 SX to Stoke-on-Trent (1645 ex-Derby rail replacement bus) until December 2023

1650 SX to Crewe (1616 ex-Nottingham) from December 2023

1717 to Newark Castle (1610 ex-Crewe)

1749 to Crewe (1639 ex-Newark Castle)

The addition of calls, say at 1249 westbound and 1317 eastbound (plus the 0813 on Saturdays), would enable Peartree to cater for leisure travellers.

Morning or afternoon return journeys could be undertaken to Nottingham, Uttoxeter or Stoke-on-Trent, for instance.

Footfall at Peartree in 2021/2022 was a meagre 4,052, something that could be increased by stopping more trains and adjusting station dwell times to achieve this. The

potential for growth is definitely there.

The station has been much improved from its semi-derelict state in the late 2000s, especially in the EMR era and thanks to interest taken by the community rail partnership, despite being based 35 miles away in Stoke-on-Trent.

On the Crewe platform, an otherwise redundant shelter has been installed and many diseased trees felled.

Around the entrances, notice boards and signage have been added, while on the Derby platform, two planters have been renovated with the addition of two pear trees!

Joint working parties between EMR, the community rail partnership, station adopters and rail industry volunteers have been held and a local school has contributed to a nature project.

Further evidence of resources being dedicated to Peartree is the recent addition of yellow tactile platform edge tiles to both platforms.

Also a scheme to install a shelter on the Derby-side platform is currently being worked-up. There needs to be a match-up on the operating side, with more trains stopping at Peartree to utilise the resources dedicated to infrastructure.

Would anyone wish to travel to Peartree? Well, the Moorways Sports Village and Water Park opened in 2022 and is within walking distance of the station.

Unfortunately, the current timetable does not encourage travel by train.

Prepare to celebrate a run of new stations and lines

By Roger Blake

Railfuture members are cheered when our campaign for a "bigger better railway" can report success, with more stations and lines.

Already this year we have seen five new stations opened – at Inverness Airport, at Reading Green Park on the Basingstoke line, at south Exeter's Marsh Barton and east Kent's Thanet Parkway, and at Portway Park and Ride on Bristol's Severn Beach line.

By the end of this year, we may see five more. Among the leading candidates are Brent Cross West in north London, Headbolt Lane on Merseyside, Kings Heath, Moseley Village and Pineapple Road on Birmingham's Camp Hill line, and White Rose, Leeds.

The first half of 2024 could see yet another five. Scotland should gain Cameron Bridge and Leven in Fife and East Linton in East Lothian. England will celebrate Darlaston and Willenhall.

A total of 16 stations opening in 18 months is extraordinary in view of the bleak climate on the railway. It is also a huge credit to Railfuture and other campaigners who lobbied for them over many years. By this time next year we should see the re-birth of two lines and the prospect of a third. In Scotland, Cameron Bridge and Leven



Dennis Fancett being presented with the Railfuture 2021 Campaigner of the Year award by Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove
Photo by Dave Shaw

stations are on the reopened Levenmouth line which is expected "in the spring".

Six new stations on the freight-only Northumberland line are scheduled for a summer opening – the Northumberland Park

interchange with Tyne & Wear Metro, Seaton Delavel, Newsham, Blyth Bebside, Bedlington and Ashington.

Opening later in 2024, in December, is the Bletchley to Oxford section of East West Rail. There will be a new Bletchley high-level station and a new station at Winslow, Buckinghamshire. The opening may be delayed into early 2025 and Milton Keynes may have to wait some time for East West services to be extended.

What makes for a successful infrastructure development campaign? It needs a committed, credible and constructive rail development campaign group. Ashington Blyth and Tyne (as it was known until the local authority re-named it the Northumberland Line) has had Railfuture-affiliated South East Northumberland Rail User Group. SENRUG points out that it is a rail user group for the whole area, not just a single-issue rail reopening campaign.

Railfuture's national directory of all known rail reopening campaign groups currently runs to about 150 entries. Fifty are affiliated to Railfuture. The list can be found in the rail user groups web page www.railfuture.org.uk/Rail-User-Groups

■ Roger Blake is head of Railfuture's infrastructure & networks group

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

Electric car factory to supercharge rail freight

By Peter Wakefield

A huge West Country factory, designed to boost electric car production in Britain, may give railfreight just the boost it needs.

The potential for railfreight comes from industrial conglomerate Tata's decision to build a battery plant for future generations of road vehicles alongside the Bristol-Exeter main line at Puriton near Bridgwater.

Tata already operates large high-end car manufacturing plants in the West Midlands and Merseyside under the name of Jaguar-Land Rover. It makes extensive use of the rail network.

The £4 billion-plus new factory is one of the largest-ever investments in the UK automotive sector, according to the Department of Business and Trade.

The DBT says it will create up to 4,000 new direct jobs and thousands more in the wider supply chain, and is set to provide almost half of the battery production needed by 2030.

That will "turbocharge" the UK's switch to zero emissions vehicles.

"This investment will be crucial to boosting the UK's battery manufacturing capacity needed to support the electric vehicle industry in the long term," said the DBT.

"With an initial output of 40GWh, it will also provide almost half of the battery production that the Faraday Institution estimates the UK will need by 2030."

The government is thought to have promised up to £500 million in subsidies to Tata for the Puriton plant.

It is only the second such plant in the UK. Work started last year on a 12GWh battery plant near the Nissan factory in Sunderland.

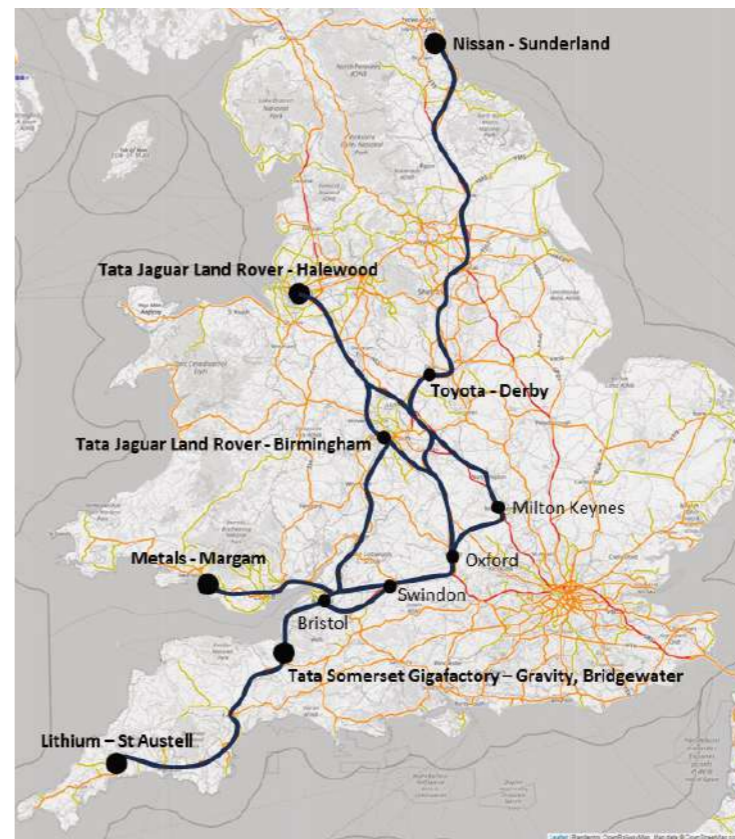
But why Puriton?

The new plant will be on an existing huge brownfield site formerly developed as a government-owned munitions factory, known as Puriton Royal Ordnance Factory, bought later by BAE Systems.

Its railway connection became disused when BAE took over. This connecting railway linked to the main line at milepost 147.04 at Huntspill Junction. Fortunately its formation is still intact, including a bridge that takes it over the adjacent M5 motorway.

The redevelopment plans for the site have been nursed through a long gestation by Sedgemoor District Council and the South West local enterprise partnership to the present announcement. The site has since been renamed *Gravity Smart Campus*.

The council employed Stantec Consultants to produce the Gravity Local Development Order, which is



The rail network will be crucial in developing fast, economic sustainable transport for supplies to the factory near Bridgwater and delivering the finished articles
Map: Stantec Gravity Local Development Order Environmental Statement

a streamlined form of planning consent. It requires the reinstatement of the "redundant" rail line.

Detail from Stantec's report illustrates the welcome thought now being given to the sustainability the railway brings to projects by allocating space in the development for both freight and passenger facilities.

It is anticipated that sidings will be provided, along with associated infrastructure including mobile gantry cranes and roads.

There is also the possibility that the rail bridge over the M5 motorway will require replacement to facilitate the restoration of passenger and freight rail provision to the site.

The reintroduction of the railhead is considered important in creating sustainable transport choice and to reduce the reliance on road-based

transport into the site. It was safeguarded within the 2017 planning application along the western edge.

The proposed development comprises a split between the passenger and freight spurs so that the passenger spur retains the western alignment and enjoys close proximity to Puriton and the smart community in the south of the site.

The proposed development also includes the potential for an additional spur to the north of the site. This allows the freight to be repositioned away from the sensitive south of the site.

A number of rail alignments within the site were considered during the design development process in discussion with Network Rail, to ensure that corridors were in compliance with NR track standards. The rail corridor has been retained to ensure that there

is sufficient scale and flexibility to accommodate both occupier and Network Rail requirements.

The site's situation

The site is well away from the established car manufacturing sites. But the excellent rail links by way of Bristol then Cheltenham or Swindon and Oxford to the JLR Birmingham-Coventry and Liverpool assembly lines mitigate this disadvantage.

Other car plants at Oxford, Derby and Sunderland are strung along the same railway network with several routing variations available, including via East West Rail, vital in case of any perturbation and it goes nowhere near the congested London network. Other siting advantages include the proximity of the new nuclear power station at Hinckley Point, just 7.4 miles to the west. Some sources note that the supply of cheap power from that facility has been agreed. No doubt a lot of water will be required and the nearby Parrett and Huntspill river catchments will provide much of that.

Most metals important in the creation of batteries could be sourced from the South Wales furnaces. These include aluminium, copper and iron, and precious metals such as cobalt, nickel and manganese.

Very important too are elements such as graphite and lithium, the latter a particularly vital ingredient of battery manufacture, with a scramble worldwide taking place to source it. The same main line connects directly to Cornwall, where considerable deposits are located at Imerys' china clay mines near St Austell.

Here Imerys and British Lithium is preparing to produce 20,000+ tonnes of lithium carbonate a year by the end of the decade – enough for the batteries in 500,000 electric cars, or two thirds of British vehicle production.

The Gravity site may attract other intermodal rail services which could use its rail terminals, for example supermarket services for distribution across that part of England.

Gravity (and St Austell-St Blazey) will be on a direct line from Daventry Distribution Centre, just to the north of Milton Keynes, when East West Rail's western section opens shortly.

The Gravity environmental statement can be found online at <https://thisisgravity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ES-Volume-1-Main-Text.pdf>

■ Cornish Lithium has landed a package of £168 million from the Treasury-funded UK Infrastructure Bank and other investors, to speed up mining of lithium compounds at Trelavour, near St Austell.



PROGRESS: Network Rail chairman Lord Hendy (centre) with Transport for Greater Manchester chief executive Eamonn Boylan (left) and TfGM managing director Steve Warrenner. Peter Hendy visited Manchester in August to announce a partnership with TfGM to improve stations in Manchester and Salford and make them more accessible. Six stations – Manchester Piccadilly, Manchester Victoria, Manchester Oxford Road, Deansgate, Salford Central and Salford Crescent – are set to benefit from the new-style agreement. Network Rail owns 90 stations in Greater Manchester, which is the fastest growing metropolitan area in Britain. The Bee Network is a planned integrated transport network for Greater Manchester (backed by the UK government) composed of bus, tram, cycling and walking routes. TfGM is expected to have the network operational by 2024, with commuter rail services expected to be joining the network in 2030

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East Lancashire shunted aside

Communities in East Lancashire, especially Pendle, Burnley, Accrington and Blackburn, have been shunted aside in Transport for the North's strategic plan. The £29 billion plan, which was out for public consultation until August, offers nothing for these hard-pressed communities. They suffer the worst levels of economic and social deprivation anywhere in England and since the pandemic, the situation has worsened. The campaigning Skipton and East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership is calling on TfN to make reopening the Skipton-Colne 12-mile "missing link" its top priority, to keep the promise made by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt when they relaunched the Conservatives' levelling-up manifesto in Accrington in February. SELRAP says TfN's plan has nothing to improve the region's dire transport connections into Leeds and Bradford. Today's train journey from Pendle or central Burnley into Leeds takes over two hours. The reinstated link would deliver journey times of about an hour to Leeds.

Buxton suffers 50% cut

Northern is planning to cut the off-peak four-car Manchester Piccadilly-Buxton service to two-car trains in its December timetable. Some six-car Blackpool North-Manchester Airport services will be cut to four. Some four-car Liverpool-Wigan trains will be reduced to three. However, some trains on the Liverpool to Newton-le-Willows and Manchester Airport services will be increased to four.

TfW to Liverpool Lime Street

Transport for Wales had to reduce frequencies on its new (2019) service from Chester to Liverpool via the Halton curve because of

rolling stock problems. Now the North Cheshire Rail User Group is looking forward to the full service returning with the December timetable, thanks to lobbying by Cheshire West and Chester Council and MPs. The improvement will come at the expense of commitments to extend Manchester Airport services to Bangor, and Liverpool services to Llandudno. NCRUG believes train operators are missing an opportunity to meet the demand for services for early morning flights at both Manchester and Liverpool airports.

Manchester Victoria gates

Northern is upgrading ticket gates at Manchester Victoria to accept concessionary passes.

Northern onboard messages

A recent visit to Southport by rail campaigner Frank Salt, who is blind, uncovered a problem with onboard announcements. The train stopped at stations not mentioned and skip-stopped others. Train operator Northern promised checks on the system after approaches from Railfuture. Faults in the computer location system are suspected. Northern stressed that train guards could help in many situations. Frank is a member of STORM (Support The Rochdale Oldham Manchester) rail lines group. Northern has re-recorded 34 station announcements to comply with local pronunciations.

Backing for Rochdale station

STORM has agreed to support plans for a new station near Rochdale at Slattocks, south of Castleton on the Calder Valley line. It would serve Hopwood College and an industrial estate, as well as a planned housing estate.

www.railfuture.org.uk/
[North+West+Branch](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNWest)
 Twitter @RailfutureNWest



Educational initiative: Railfuture's Peter Kingsbury at the Welsh Youth Parliament's sustainable travel event
 Picture: Jessika Venn

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

Informing future leaders

Railfuture Wales ran a stall at a sustainable travel briefing day for schools in May, arranged by members of the Welsh Youth Parliament's climate and environment committee. It was attended by more than 50 students from secondary schools across South Wales and hosted by Transport for Wales in its new Pontypridd headquarters. Peter Kingsbury and Jessika Venn represented Railfuture and answered a variety of questions about the incoming TfW trains, potential new stations and even opportunities for solar power generation in the railway ecosystem. TfW, Great Western Railway and Sustrans also had stalls. The day included a speech by TfW chief executive James Price.

Rail upgrades recommended

Railfuture grasped the opportunity to respond to the interim report of the North Wales Transport Commission. This was set up to evaluate what improvements are needed without expanding road capacity or encouraging car use. We support enhancing rail services for Llandudno. TfW should reinstate the pre-Covid half-hourly service as soon as possible. The commission fails to recognise the importance of through services between London and North Wales, another casualty of Covid. Even now there are large gaps, such as between 0902 and 1502 from Euston to North Wales. Railfuture is worried that these services may be cut further, if there is pressure to force passengers on to HS2 trains in due course. Unless the North Wales main line is electrified, HS2 trains will not run in North Wales. Existing through services may be withdrawn, forcing passengers to change for HS2 trains at Crewe.

The commission mentions reopening Bangor-Caernarfon, combined with reopening south of Caernarfon to join the Cambrian coast line near Afon Wen. Railfuture

believes the commission should concentrate on promoting Bangor to Caernarfon as its priority.

Online get-together for members

Two topics dominated the Wales branch's online members' meeting on 8 June. The impact of the sudden withdrawal of the class 175 units concerned people, and the resulting poor service on long distance TfW rail routes was analysed. Too much time is being taken to introduce the class 197 trains. TfW seemed unable to obtain replacement trains from other operators and has been plagued by unacceptable staff shortages, resulting in cancellations and short trains.

Railfuture Wales chairman Peter Kingsbury explained that, in a joint approach with Railfuture West Midlands, TfW Rail chief operating officer Jan Chaudhry-Van der Velde was asked to explain what had gone wrong and name a firm date for a reliable service on Shrewsbury-Newport (Marches line) to resume. Railfuture also enquired about the proposed half-hour frequency on the Cardiff-Liverpool service. We protested that passengers will have to wait 13 years for Network Rail to resignal the line.

Railfuture members reported poor service on the Heart of Wales line, lines west of Swansea and Wrexham-Bidston.

The South Wales metro also generated discussion. Topics covered included the layout of the new tram-train depot at Taffs Well, opportunities for new stations and routes to take advantage of the lower cost of tram infrastructure, and the design of the class 398 tram-trains.

Other issues included the high cost of Network Rail's infrastructure upgrade work and the challenge facing Welsh bus services.

The meeting was deemed well worth repeating.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
 Twitter @RailfutureWales

Station that never should have closed

By Andy Holding

Wantage Road, Oxfordshire, was one of 2,363 stations set to close when many British stations were threatened by Dr Beeching's axe.

Although 5,000 miles of track were also at risk, the Great Western Railway's main line from London Paddington to Didcot and Swindon survived – and now thrives.

What Dr Beeching did not know was that the combined population of Wantage and Grove would increase from 7,794 in 1964 to 34,797 now.

The 27,003 growth (up 346%) has been matched in many parts of the UK, but especially in Oxfordshire.

There are many reasons for this, but high technology jobs in the Science Vale area have been crucial.

There are 6,000 plus jobs at Harwell Campus, 3,000 plus at Culham Science Park, and there is now a proposal for 2,000 extra jobs at Grove Science Park.

In addition, many people commute into Oxford for academic-related employment and there are thousands of other jobs in the city. Many commute to BMW's Mini factory in Oxford, and there are the 6,000 plus jobs at Milton Park.

The high employment is welcome, but there is a lack of sustainable transport options such as rail travel in some areas.

The Vale of White Horse council area is poorly served, with only two stations, Appleford and Radley.

The area's 139,100 population is expected to rise further to 174,000 by 2030. Where does this leave us



REALITY PAST: Wantage Road station before it was closed in 1964
 Picture: BBC



FUTURE POTENTIAL: A possible plan for a new station at Grove
 Graphic: SLC Rail

£2.48 return for every £1 invested

Oxfordshire County Council says it is working with the Vale of the White Horse to develop plans for a station at Grove.

Investment in a station would give an economic return of £2.48 for every £1 spent. The Council wants an initial Oxford-Bristol service, and hopes this could be extended eastwards to Cambridge via East West Rai. It has identified two possible station sites at Grove.

currently? Well, it leaves many with little choice but to travel by car or bus if they are lucky enough to have a car or a bus service. Some have neither.

A bus for the 14-mile journey from Wantage to Oxford takes around an hour, but can take longer during peak hours.

The buses are as frequent as every 20 minutes, but not everyone lives in Wantage or Grove, and some travel by bicycle or other modes to catch the bus.

If Wantage and Grove gained a station after nearly 60 years of being without one, journey times

could be cut significantly. To Oxford, the train would take 32 minutes, according to a 2018 SLC Rail study.

Eastbound trains could serve Reading, London, Didcot and Culham Science Park.

Westbound, Bristol and Swindon are among possible destinations.

Since 1964, there have been multiple attempts to reopen the Wantage Road station at Grove but sadly without success so far.

However, in recent times, the various local MPs have campaigned to have the station reopened, as have Oxfordshire County Council,

Vale of White Horse District Council, Wantage Parish Council, Grove Parish Council and Railfuture.

To drum up more support, a local Facebook campaign and a petition have been set up to keep the pressure on Oxfordshire County Council and the Department for Transport, which ultimately holds the purse strings.

In nine months, our Facebook group has grown to 1,200 members. The change.org petition has nearly 1,700 signatures. We hope that with this clear evidence of support the county council and DfT will listen and reopen the station. Reopening is long overdue. If you would like to support the Wantage and Grove parkway station web petition, please go to: chng.it/ky6NMyPT5B Or visit the website wantagegrovestationsupportersgroup.com/

■ Andy Holding is a member of Wantage Grove Station Supporters Group which is affiliated to Railfuture.

Super Voyagers to the rescue of Grand Central

By Graham Collett

Arriva-owned open access operator Grand Central has outlined its recovery plan, using Super Voyager trains. An encouraging preview of the plan was given to Railfuture Yorkshire and Railfuture North East at York, in August.

Fleet issues

Chief operating officer Sean English gave a full description of the company's fleet issues and how Grand Central expects to address these. The company had suffered badly as a result of Covid, dropping plans to run a Blackpool-London Euston service and making significant staff reductions.

Since then, serious maintenance issues have unfortunately forced the company to make a 25% reduction in West Yorkshire services as a "firebreak" to enable the company to address problems.

Solutions

GC has recently signed a 12 month lease for two class 221 Super

Voyagers, which had been stored after being sent off lease by Avanti West Coast. They will be used solely on West Yorkshire services to reduce staff training costs/time and are expected to be in service shortly. GC has also taken an eight-week lease on two class 180s from East Midlands Railway. This will enable GC to catch up with maintenance on its other 180s.

Ticketing

Tickets are still sold on the trains, and this is much welcomed. The agreement with LNER to take GC passengers when a GC train is cancelled continues, but it is subject to LNER's decision on the day, taking into account capacity on LNER services. However, if the reason for the GC service being cancelled is a Network Rail issue, then ticket acceptance on LNER and other operators will definitely apply.

Longer term plans

The current lease with Angel Trains runs until December 2026, and

there is a contractual commitment for bogie overhaul of all units next year. Grand Central expects to have a better understanding of how it might proceed in the future in the forthcoming months. Options under evaluation are:

A Longer term prospects for class 180s. Invest further and extend the lease with Angel Trains and maintenance agreements with Alstom

B Review the possibility of more 221 units to replace the class 180s ahead of 2026.

C Beyond 2030, review options for acquiring bimode new build trains.

Grand Central has had a class 180 fitted with the European Train Control System. Class 221 trains will also need ETCS to comply with the East Coast digital upgrade.

GC access rights end in 2026, so it will need a new agreement. While the Office of Rail and Road's policy is based on offering 10 year rights, the fleet strategy needs to dovetail

into what the Regulator would be likely to agree. New trains on a shorter extension of access rights would be a problem in terms of return on investment.

Extra stops and expansion

GC is considering extra stops on existing services. Stockton and Elland are expected in 2025, followed by Pontefract. However, these would be impacted by the delayed recast of the East Coast main line timetable, Northern's Durham Coast services and LNER's Middlesbrough aspirations. Additional stops on existing services are unlikely to pass the ORR's test on not abstracting other operators' passengers. GC is currently awaiting a response to its bid for a stop at Peterborough.

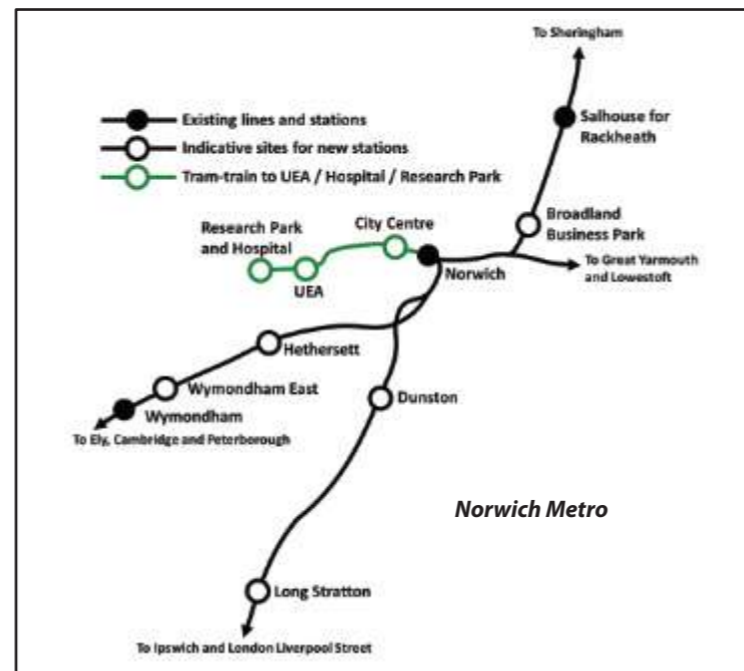
GC hopes to grow the market, strengthening services by adding an extra unit as needed. An extra path on West Yorkshire services is possible. Arriva's bidding teams are also looking at other routes.

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Norwich Metro
 Railfuture East Anglia has been very impressed with the way the Devon Metro has been developing, centred around Exeter, and is keen to develop a similar concept for Norwich. There is potentially much in common between the two cities, with a good network of lines radiating from each and with both cities growing at a rapid rate. However, unlike Exeter, Norwich has only one station, poorly located on the edge of the old city and served by lines that only skirt the built up area.

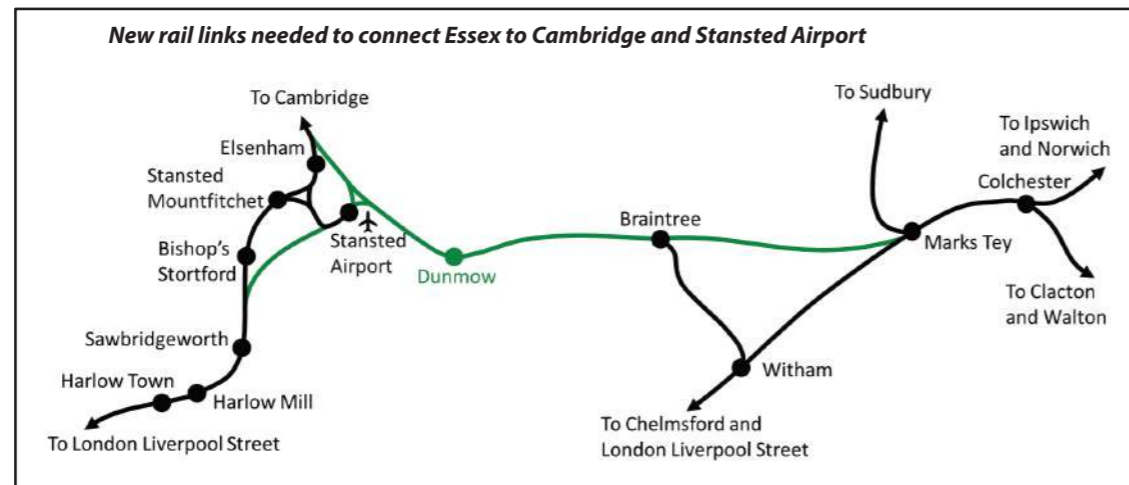
Despite this handicap, we are convinced a Norwich Metro is worth campaigning for. Railfuture has long advocated half-hourly local services into Norwich, in common cause with the local authorities and communities they serve. While one new station at Broadland Business Park is already planned, Railfuture advocates further new stations at Hethersett on the Cambridge line, and Dunston and Long Stratton on the Great Eastern mainline. These would give far greater options to residents living in the west and south west of the city and in south Norfolk generally. We also envisage the heritage line to Dereham being part of the metro network, opening up rail options for communities further afield, in the same way Okehampton is achieving in Devon. In the long run, more radical action is needed to improve rail access for Norwich residents and visitors alike. This would mean the introduction of tram-trains and the laying of tramlines from Norwich station to the city centre as a first step. A likely next stage would see an extension of the tramlines westwards to the university, hospital and research park. Tram-trains would transform local travel options by rail and allow a Norwich

Metro to be delivered to its full potential.
Essex Rail Link Proposed
 Railfuture East Anglia says that a new rail link parallel to the A120 road connecting Stansted Airport to Colchester would provide better connections between major towns and new developments in Essex and Cambridge, as well as making best use of existing routes to London. The existing single-track rail tunnel into the airport is a constraint to developing new rail services. Rather than build a new tunnel, Railfuture suggests turning Stansted Airport into a through station, with new links north and south on the West Anglia main line. This would allow some existing Stansted Express services to continue to Cambridge, avoiding the need for separate services and freeing up train paths.

Later stages would see a new rail link east of the airport via Braintree towards Colchester. This would allow other Stansted Express services to continue to Ipswich and Norwich, as well as direct trains from Cambridge to Chelmsford, Colchester and beyond. This is a long-term project to foster economic growth in an area



targeted for significant housing development. Railfuture is calling for suitable routes to be identified and protected from other development. These studies are needed to develop plans for a new railway that can be built as funding becomes available. Rail must be part of a sustainable solution for this rapidly changing area.
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News of Northumberland impresses Barcelona 2023

By Dennis Fancett

Railfuture is a member of the European Passengers' Federation, a Europe-wide affiliation of consumer groups looking after the interests of not just rail but also air, ferry, coach and bus passengers throughout Europe. Most, though not all, European countries have at least one passenger or campaign organisation affiliated. EPF's annual conference this year took place in Barcelona and I, as Railfuture's delegate to EPF, was invited to give a presentation on the 18-year campaign to restore services on the Northumberland line, now opening in 2024. The campaign is led by Railfuture-affiliated local group South East

Northumberland Rail User Group, of which I am chair. I gave a brief history of the campaign, focusing on two pivotal events in achieving success, namely the SENRUG charter train in 2008 and the schools DVD competition in 2014, which marked the 50th anniversary of the line's closure. I showed the BBC TV report of the 2008 charter, and the winning school's video, both of which went down well. I also briefly mentioned that the line passes over the site of the former Bedlington ironworks, which is where malleable rail was invented and patented, allowing the development of railways worldwide, as well as being the place where both Italy's and the Netherlands' first steam

locomotives were built. Other speakers included Freek Bos of Rover in The Netherlands, who recounted his role in averting a national rail strike by offering to mediate between management and unions, Jon Worth (independent commentator) who gave an in-depth and somewhat painfully hilarious overview of missing rail border crossings throughout Europe. Elmer von Buuren reported on European Sleeper, which is launching a new sleeper service from Berlin to Brussels, widely reported in the UK press as continuing to London, though in fact a change on to Eurostar at least for now. European Sleeper already has plans for new routes, south to

Barcelona and north to Scandinavia. There were also workshops on good campaigning experiences and how to make public transport safer, and plenty of opportunity to mingle with other delegates from across Europe. One delegate from Pro Bahn in Germany has asked me if she can write up an interview with me on the Northumberland line campaign to be reproduced in the Pro Bahn magazine (in German). All in all, the conference was worthwhile and enjoyable. Railfuture members get a discount on the conference fee, so look out for details of the 2024 conference on the Railfuture website or in one of our publications, and make a point of being there.

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New members, new stations
 Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has a modest membership but it is quality, not quantity which matters. Devon continues to be the agenda-setting hub of rail development campaigning activity. A warm welcome then to newly affiliated Torbay Rail User Group, and also to the chair of Heathfield Rail Link Association.

The new station at Marsh Barton opened on 4 July, more than six weeks later than *Railwatch* 176 predicted. There was also an official opening by transport secretary Mark Harper, accompanied by Andrea Davis (Devon County's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport) and Great Western's managing director Mark Hopwood. Marsh Barton is the third new station in the Devon Metro network, launched in 2011 as part of the county council's 15-year local transport plan. Newcourt and Cranbrook opened in 2015.

Less encouraging are reports that there is a funding shortfall for the new station at Edginswell, on the Riviera line between Newton Abbot and Paignton. Part-supported by the Department for Transport's New Stations Fund, it is to be named Torquay Gateway and is quite close to Torbay hospital.

New campaign banner
 A well-attended coffee morning in Okehampton's Charter Hall was hosted for local rail groups by award-winning OkeRail. Among the groups was Tavistock-based TavyRail, which is campaigning for reconnecting Tavistock with Bere Alston for services to and from Plymouth.

The Tarka Rail Association unveiled for the first time its new Railfuture-funded free-standing roller banner for the ACE Rail campaign. ACE recalls the glory days of the Atlantic Coast Express. There are plans for



MARSH BARTON OFFICIAL OPENING: The front row line-up includes transport secretary Mark Harper (second left), GWR's Mark Hopwood (right) and Devon's Andrea Davis
 Picture: Great Western Railway

future such events to include newcomers such as the Heathfield Rail Link Association – which wants a mothballed freight line to Newton Abbot to be used for passenger services – and the now Railfuture-affiliated Torbay Rail User Group.

Okehampton station was shortlisted in the latest annual World Cup of Stations, held during May's community rail week, and it was the clear winner of the four in the South West Group. It lost out to a London station in the semi-finals.

Boost for Barnstaple
 GW managing director Mark Hopwood made a second visit to Barnstaple to meet representatives of Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association, discuss common concerns and chart ways to fix

them. The top priority is extra capacity in some key weekday peak period trains, as growth in ridership continues unabated. In June, the Department for Transport published an updated National Rail contract for GWR, confirming its expiry in June 2028, so giving stakeholders five more years of working to secure improvements within a known framework.

Initial business case
 National fortnightly *RAIL* magazine has had a recent six-page feature on the South West which included mention of GWR's contribution to an initial business case for the Tarka line upgrade and its extension to Bideford. The business case report, enabled by grants from Railfuture's fighting fund as well as GWR's customer and communities improvement fund, has been received by the client, the Tarka Rail Association. Its recommendations are under active consideration by the TRA chair and close advisers.

At the request of the Mayor of Bideford, and in the presence of Torridge and West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox, the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer presented an initial summary of some of the key findings and recommendations emerging from the initial business case. The timing was especially topical since Torridge is one of just 20 districts in the country identified by government to establish a levelling-up partnership and bid for a share of the total £400 million allocated. Railfuture is taking part in discussions about suitable bids.

A hat-trick for Devon
 Railfuture's 2023 Awards for Rail User Groups saw three groups take

home half of this year's awards. The coveted Judges' Special Award went for the first time to a local authority, Devon County Council, for its leadership and record of achievement in rail development at both county and regional levels. The Tarka Rail Association scored its own mini-hat-trick, winning gold for best social media, a joint gold for best campaigner to its ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer, and a bronze in the best campaign category. After last year's judges' special award went to Okehampton-based OkeRail, neighbouring Dartmoor Railway Association took home a joint gold for best website this year.

In the days following the RUG Awards presentations, the local press and other coverage achieved for the trio of Devon winners was gratifyingly extensive. The county council's press release was picked up by local media in Exeter and a comprehensive *Crediton Courier* article was syndicated around four other local newspapers. Even a town council in Torrington, well away from the winners, celebrated their success. The Mayor of Barnstaple mentioned the awards in her official announcements at the start of a meeting of the full council. A liberally illustrated and extensive article appeared in the online *Devon Live* in August, and the news was spread to every one of the Tarka line's 12 stations via the TRA's station notice-boards. Details at www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards

Mid-Cornwall Metro
 Railfuture Devon and Cornwall welcomes progress on the Mid-Cornwall Metro project, which is supported by the government's levelling-up fund. Specialists have been appointed to design improved pedestrian and cycle links between Penryn station (with its unique bi-directional platform and passing loop), the prestigious university campus and the picturesque town centre. Work to improve rail links between Newquay, St Austell, Truro and Falmouth will see the installation of longer platforms at the Falmouth stations. There will also be reinstatement of a second platform at Newquay and a new crossing place on the Newquay branch, bringing improved connectivity from through services and some increased service frequencies.

Under new management
 Alan Clark from near Crediton is now acting as Railfuture branch secretary and is convening a virtual extraordinary general meeting on Saturday 30 September. Details of this meeting were sent out to branch members. More information in the branch website:
www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch



RUG AWARD WINNERS: Sue Baxter, chair of Dartmoor Railway Association, left, Tarka Rail Association ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer and Andrea Davis, Devon Council's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport
 Picture: Paul Bromley

Wales needs world-class railway

By Angus Eickhoff and Gareth Marston

The Senedd's promise to create a world class transport network has failed to meet expectations and some stakeholders feel their contributions have been wasted.

Thus far, there has been no discussion on reviving the Welsh rail network, which was shattered following the 1960s Beeching plan.

Although the Welsh Government is theoretically in charge of rail services in Wales, it tasked not-for-profit Transport for Wales to operate the trains from 2021.

Welsh Labour were to some extent responsible for this, in that they themselves declined to have rail fully devolved.

Of course, the Westminster government retains its vice-like grip on rail infrastructure spending, and is not playing fair by claiming Wales must share the funding cuts resulting from HS2 investment.

At arm's length from daily political pressures, TfW was following in the tradition of British Railways, which effectively ran UK railways for 45 years while being kept short of money by successive governments.

BR was composed of railway professionals with a wide range of experience and a straightforward career structure.

By contrast, TfW brought in new management from outside the railway. Those of us who have had dealings with TfW have been less than impressed. Some TfW people seem confused by how railways actually work. This has coincided with increased overcrowding, cancelled and curtailed services and lots of passenger inconvenience. The situation seems worse than even the Arriva Trains Wales years (up to 2018).

TfW always seems to be on the defensive, with a reluctance to engage with stakeholders and seems unwilling to attend out-of-office-hours meetings with stakeholders (including ourselves) who give their time voluntarily.

The Senedd's climate change, environment and infrastructure committee wants cheaper public transport throughout the country, but this is not going to happen unless TfW improves service delivery.

Plaid Cymru is more ambitious, calling for the creation of an all-Wales rail network, connecting the north with the south and enabling rail traffic between the major centres of population, including reopening Carmarthen-Aberystwyth as part of a north-south link in west Wales.

TfW's shiny new CAF class 197 Civity trains – with limited toilet facilities – look unlikely to silence



The first Stadler tram train (class 398) for the South Wales Metro was delivered to TfW's depot in Taff's Well in March. Stadler is also delivering FLIRTs which will be used elsewhere in Wales Picture: Transport for Wales

people who say they are unsuitable for many journeys. A single toilet for a two-car train carrying over 100 people is unacceptable.

There was no proper consultation with stakeholders about the design of the trains, which will be used on the three-hours-plus journey from Birmingham International to Aberystwyth.

The five-hour journey to Pwllheli takes slightly longer than that from London Euston to Glasgow.

To run a quality Swansea-Manchester service, TfW has now acquired ex-BR mark 4 coaches, rather than using class 197s.

Sadly, the Cambrian lines will not benefit from the quality of comfort provided by the mark 4s.

We were astonished to learn that the new 197 trains cannot couple with anything else. This ignores lessons learnt at the dawn of the railway age. Common coupling is essential for smooth operation and allows for mixed train formations.

This is important on the Cambrian lines because freight units carrying palletised loads could work to Aberystwyth as part of a passenger train and detach.

Freight could be unloaded and the units work back towards Shrewsbury as part of a later passenger train.

We need imaginative solutions if we are to have any chance of fighting climate change. The Welsh Government makes all the correct noises but is somewhat light on the radical changes necessary.

TfW has ordered what are widely regarded as the "best in class" regional trains in Europe from Swiss manufacturer Stadler. But

some of the trains, a version of Stadler's successful Flexible Lightweight InterCity Regional Trains (FLIRT) will trundle 10 miles across Cardiff from Penarth to Coryton, less than the 14 miles from Newtown to Welshpool.

Greater Anglia bought these trains for inter-city and regional services in East Anglia, and Bombardier commuter trains for services closer to London. TfW is "back to front" ,with regional trains on commuter runs and commuter trains on regional duty.

Beyond 2025

Once the South Wales Metro has been completed, TfW have produced sketchy diagrams for a North Wales Metro and a Swansea Bay Wales Metro, but there are no firm plans for Welsh railways beyond 2025 when the current investment cycle ends.

What are TfW's plans? There is a vacuum as far as stakeholders are concerned. Its five-year strategy states: "We need fewer people travelling by car and more taking public transport."

There is no mention of a revived internal rail network, or of freight.

The current brief burst of investment is inevitably patchy and, after decades of neglect, is not going to solve current problems, let alone be adequate for a world of climate change. Given their track record, TfW officials are unlikely to come up with the correct solutions if left to their own devices.

A genuine partnership approach with the people of Wales is needed, but TfW took on too many bad habits from the Welsh Government, foremost being its culture of

pretending it knows best. European countries whose networks are rated best (France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, for instance) all spend the equivalent of 1.5% of their GDP or more.

The UK is spending only 1.1% this year including HS2 construction costs, and Westminster is keen to reduce that even further.

We calculate that Wales' baseline spend has been around 0.9% of Welsh GDP, with the current work on the South Wales Metro and new rolling stock temporarily increasing it to 1.25% for a few years.

If we are serious about having a top tier rail network, we have to spend a lot more – and consistently. The Welsh Government's road review may provide a source of extra funding later this decade once the legacy projects already started have been completed.

But to attain the objectives set out in the TfW five-year strategy, attitudes need to change.

We need to think how things could be achieved, rather than finding excuses why they cannot. We need to move away from the glacial pace of rail development within the UK over the past 50+ years.

We see public transport as being of increasing importance. The age profile of people with driving licences indicates that younger people of working age will need to rely on public transport more.

Good connectivity is crucial to the sustainability of communities if they are not to decay.

■ Angus Eickhoff and Gareth Marston are key members of the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA).

North East

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How Tall were the Ships?

Extra trains during Hartlepool's Tall Ships event were not as numerous as had been hoped. Grand Central, sadly, was unable to field anything additional. Northern Rail did manage an extra two-hourly two-car diesel train to link Hartlepool with main stations to Darlington. Reasonable numbers seem to have been using the trains to get to the Ships, but rail information could have been better. Hopes that station enhancements at Hartlepool and at Billingham (new footbridges and lifts to platforms) would be opened in time proved too optimistic. Opening dates at each station are now mid-October for Billingham's step-free access, and probably not before December for the restoration of (and step-free access to) Hartlepool's second platform.

HS2 to Hartlepool?

Well no, not quite. Instead, news of a new and unusual traffic flow to Willesden Euroterminal in London. A contract to manufacture 30,000 sections of concrete tunnel rings for HS2 construction in London has been won by the Austrian company STRABAG, which started production at a factory in Hartlepool in July. Six trains a week are expected to run.

Bedlington rebuilding

On the soon-to-be-reopened Northumberland line, Bedlington station is to be enhanced by a new building on its south side to replace the existing one. Its north side building will remain. Some campaigners have called for the existing south side building to be preserved.

Sunderland progress

Amid the national furore over ticket offices, it is reassuring to find that the new south entrance to Sunderland station has a ticket office, although work goes on with the £27 million two-year project for some years yet.

The way to the existing north entrance is, however, difficult to find, with no signposting. Once the city's more intrepid visitors find it, however, there is an example for the future. Although now closed, its travel centre was able to deal efficiently with enquiries about Grand Central, Northern, and Tyne and Wear Metro services, as well as being able to sell tickets.

The local media are predicting that the new ticket office may



GRAND ENTRANCE: Sunderland's new station as envisaged by Network Rail in 2021. The building, which was expected to house a ticket office as part of the £27 million two-year project, is now nearing completion, but there is speculation locally whether the ticket office will ever open in the light of government-backed plans to close most ticket offices throughout Britain Picture: Network Rail

never open. Perhaps a more cost-effective and user-friendly solution could be the opening of a travel centre which could incorporate a ticket-sales counter.

Leamside warning

Most rail experts and politicians, as well as Transport for the North, are united in their support for reopening the Leamside line. Some see it as a panacea for every difficulty in operating the East Coast main line. However, much of the track was lifted

when the line ceased to act as a diversionary route between Pelaw and Ferryhill. If and when Nexus extends the Metro network westward from South Hylton, via Washington, to Pelaw on the coast line, Leamside's northern section will host at least six Metro services an hour. This will limit the time available for main line trains of whatever type.

Powerhouse dilemma

Transport for the North and Northern Powerhouse Rail may struggle to reconcile how to serve Railfuture North East's area. TfN's strategic transport plan is full of imaginative projection into the future, but ignores some basic facts. Railfuture has pointed out many times that trains between Stockton and Newcastle avoid the shortest rail route. They could go straight to Durham, en route to Tyneside.

Ferryhill station backing

Both TfN and the Metro strategies align in their backing for a new station at Ferryhill on



The Leamside line (in purple) in this Transport North East map with some possible new stations shown

the East Coast main line, as part of providing much faster train links directly to and from Teesside.

Coast line's importance

The map in Northern Powerhouse Rail's strategic transport plan fails to show the coast line between Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland as an existing link. This is important in its own right but also as a link to Whitby, Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Carlisle. It serves many areas of low car ownership and social deprivation. Railfuture members and user groups will continue to respond to these and other transport proposals with determination. It is good to see that the threat to ticket offices is being vigorously challenged across the length and breadth of the country.

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Bedwyn Trains success

Railfuture Thames Valley congratulates Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group for winning the inaugural Adrian Shooter Award for best website at the Rail User Groups presentation at Railfuture's AGM. BTPG made it a double achievement by also winning the silver award for best campaign.

Witney-Oxford feasibility study

We are pleased that Oxfordshire County Council has published its feasibility study into the rail link between Carterton, Witney, Eynsham and Oxford. It gave credit to Railfuture affiliate, Witney Oxford Transport Group. The study said: "The preliminary strategic outline case for the Carterton-Witney-Oxford Rail Corridor was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, following proposals from the Witney Oxford Transport Group.

The aim was to establish if there is a strategic need for the proposed railway line and to give an indication of the likely investment required. The study has shown that building a rail link would be feasible and could be justified in transport strategy terms but identifies a number of planning and environmental issues. It also warns about the high financial cost and difficulty involved in undertaking such a project. However, if it went ahead, it would be predicted to be profitable."

Councillor Duncan Enright, the council's cabinet member for travel and development strategy, said: "We are delighted to see the publication of this study exploring future sustainable options for transport between West Oxfordshire and Oxford."

Funding crucial for reopening

Building on this, a deputation from Railfuture's Thames Valley committee is meeting the council's officers to press the case for funding, as well as for a new station at Wantage/Grove and progress on the Cowley branch reopening.

CrossCountry performance worries

Railfuture Thames Valley is monitoring the performance of train operator CrossCountry in the Thames Valley. We are concerned about overcrowding and cancellations being at unacceptable levels, with the majority of services now single Voyager units, despite the frequency going back to half hourly for only four or five hours per day.

Level crossing closures

Railfuture Thames Valley has responded to a recent Network Rail consultation on closing three level crossings north of Oxford and was pleased to receive a positive reply broadly agreeing with the position we took. We did not go into detail about the designs for the planned replacement bridges.

We support the closures, not just on safety grounds. One of them is a particularly high risk crossing. The increased capacity would also allow extra freight trains on the busy Southampton-Midlands-North route, additional passenger services between the Midlands and Thames Valley, and the much-needed increase in provision for the Banbury-Oxford local traffic.

Oxford Mail reports Railfuture action

Following his several recent media successes, Railfuture Thames Valley media officer Dave Richardson scored again when he was quoted at length and photographed for an article in the Oxford Mail on 24 August, encouraging readers to respond to the ticket office closure consultation before the 1 September deadline.

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Airport station opens

Inverness Airport station was opened in February by the then transport minister Jenny Gilruth. Along with Prestwick that makes two of Scotland's airports with a rail link and one (Edinburgh) with a tram interchange. We await with interest any new proposals for connecting Glasgow Airport with the railway.

More stations on the way

Work should start next year on the new £18.3 million station at Barrhead South. It should open the following year with a half-hourly service running between Glasgow Central and Neilston.

East Linton railway station is now on Google Maps, even although it is not due to open until next spring.

Also due to open next spring are Leven and Cameron Bridge. New transport minister Fiona Hyslop installed the final pandrol clip. Not as impressive as hammering in a golden spike, but it signifies that the line is complete. There has been controversy over the closure of five pedestrian level crossings. In response, Network Rail has agreed to build three new bridges. Peter Grant MP is still pressing for a fourth bridge at Doubledykes. Still in Fife, nearly 100 people including

Willie Rennie MSP attended a public meeting held at the Lindores Distillery in Newburgh. Several who attended offered to publicise the campaign for a reinstated passenger station at Newburgh where there is tremendous support from residents. Campaigner Nigel Mullan reported that the Newburgh Transport Appraisal (STAG) had been revised to accommodate some comments from Transport Scotland and that the ball is now in their court. The preferred option that emerged from the exercise is for a railway station at Abernethy Road, which would have a positive impact on the town's future development.

St Andrews progress

Following a marked improvement in Transport Scotland's communications with the StARLink campaign, the money allocated for the final section has been found to enable the St Andrews Transport Study evaluation to be completed by March. StARLink is obliged also to SEStran, which has agreed to help bring this exercise to a conclusion.

Beattock fight goes on

Beattock Station Action Group will continue to fight for the reopening of the station, after Transport Scotland rejected it going into the business case. The SWestrans board



Inverness Airport station
Picture by Roderick Cromar

as well as Dumfries and Galloway council are 100% supportive of the reopening of stations at Beattock, Thornhill and Eastriggs.

All change at Ardrossan

Finally, Ardrossan ferry port is to undergo a long overdue upgrade, part of which is needed to accommodate the Arran ferries, currently under construction on the Clyde. The mainland port for Arran will be temporarily moved to Troon. Ardrossan Harbour station is about 200 metres away from the ferry berth but the Troon terminal is two miles from the rail station. Railfuture will call for adequate luggage capacity to be provided on the bus for passengers bound for Scotland's holiday island. The bus will also need to wait for late-

running trains, and the ferry ought to wait for the bus at Troon. The buses on Arran will need to be retimed to meet the boat at Brodick.

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines
www.westhighlandline.org.uk

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

Friends of the Far North Line
<http://www.fofnl.org.uk>

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

Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG)
www.capitalrail.org.uk/

Thornhill Station Action Group
[facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/](https://www.facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/)

A vision for rail

As the railway's tribulations continue to mount, here is a vision of what things COULD be like.

When it enacted the law reforming the structure of the rail industry, the government finally answered the question "What is rail for?"

Yes, it must provide a passenger and freight transport service, but it is also required to enable economic development, reduce transport pollution overall and promote social inclusion.

Reformation of the rail industry empowered its leaders and gave them a clear statement of direction. After that, we all knew where the buck stops. This in itself helped to resolve the industrial disputes, which had made rail part of the problem not the solution, and to create an industry culture in which there is a common understanding that continual change is essential to develop the industry, grow the market and secure jobs. A severe accident caused by excessive rest-day working brought about acceptance of seven-day working and flexible rostering, improving reliability. "The train was delayed" is no longer accepted as an excuse for being late for work or an appointment, because trains run when the timetable says they do. Service is now genuinely focused on the needs of the customer. Stations and trains are comfortable and secure, and passengers who want a seat can generally get one. Major stations are being reconfigured as transport interchanges, integrating journeys by rail and bus, and some minor stations are becoming community hubs or retail opportunities. Developments to enable level boarding are reducing the requirement for staff to be available to support accessibility, incidentally enabling driver-only operation.

To support economic development across the country, orbital, cross-country and trans-Pennine services between cities have been separated from stopping services and accelerated.

Rail fares are competitive with other means of transport. Smart ticketing enables fares to be set to manage demand more accurately. This improves capacity utilisation. For example, Monday and Friday mornings are cheaper than Tuesday-Thursday, equalising commuter traffic. Zonal fares and pay as you go ticketing are the norm in city regions, covering all modes of public transport, so that only one purchase is required for a journey comprising both rail and for example bus or tram segments.

The use of contactless and smartcards is reducing in favour of mobile phone ticketing. There is one common software platform used across all ticket-buying applications, from mobile phones to home computers, ticket vending machines (TVMS) and devices used by train and station staff to sell tickets, so users only have to learn

how to use it once. However, protests are under way against proposals to withdraw TVMs from some stations. Staff can sell tickets either at the welcome point in busy stations or on rural train services and, on the rare occasions when things go wrong, give passengers meaningful information on their alternatives.

The reliability and comfort of the train service, the welcome that passengers feel and the perception that fares are value for money has created a virtuous circle, attracting more passengers and increased revenue. Smarter ways of working have reduced unit costs so the railways are once more self-funding at the operational level. This gave the government confidence to invest in rail, with committed funding to extend HS2 and complete a high speed route between Liverpool and Leeds. Light rail schemes are in progress in cities such as Cardiff, Leeds and Bristol, and existing systems are being extended by conversion of suburban heavy rail services. Significant population centres without a rail service such as Skelmersdale are being connected to the network. Although the transition from internal combustion power to electric vehicles is well advanced, the loss of fuel-duty revenue has driven the introduction of road pricing. This became politically acceptable with the public realisation that electric vehicles, being heavier, emit more particulates, which cause respiratory issues for many people, particularly children.

The enforcement technology for Ultra Low Emission Zones and the police number plate recognition cameras on motorways and major roads have been adapted to charge all road users, including those with electric vehicles.

The increased cost of road travel has encouraged more people to switch to rail, for both leisure and business travel.

However, freight is where rail offers the greatest opportunity to reduce carbon emissions overall. The limitations of range and payload of electric lorries prompted a target of tripling rail freight, supported by infrastructure investment to relieve freight pinch-points. A rolling programme of electrification, focused first on short infills, maximises electric freight haulage. Movement of freight by rail into city centre stations for onward distribution by sustainable local transport options has reduced city centre congestion.

Modal shift to rail has led the government to realise that rail is a serious option, allowing road investment to be redirected to rail and triggering other policy changes, such as requiring land-use planning to prioritise housing and distribution site developments which can be rail served.

The above is a vision, not a prediction. It is possible in my lifetime, but requires political will, so Railfuture will continue campaigning.



London & South East

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Trains come back in campaign victory

An all-day train service was restored to two stations in Sussex after an 18-year campaign led by Railfuture member John Spencer. Winchelsea (where John lives) and Three Oaks on the Marshlink line in East Sussex now have an hourly service provided by train operator Southern. The service was restored on a step-by-step basis, starting in 2010 and a full all-day every-day hourly Southern service at the two stations returned in May. The service was reduced when services were extended from Ashford through to Brighton in 2005. From being hourly, they were cut to just three each way per day. Alternate hourly services were introduced at the two stations from 2010 and Sunday services restored from 2015. Railfuture has supported the campaign throughout, including evidence gathering, with station counts at Rye in 2009 and at Winchelsea and Three Oaks in 2011.

Publicity initiative in Kent and Sussex

Railfuture provided publicity stalls at Faversham Festival of Transport in May, in conjunction with Southeastern and Kent Community Rail Partnership. At the Lewes Societies Fair in September Railfuture promoted the Uckfield-Lewes rail reopening campaign.

Railfuture honours for rail campaigners

Three groups in our area shared honours in Railfuture's national awards and commendations for rail user groups, station friends and community rail partnerships. Barbara Mine of Friends of Bishopstone Station took home the joint gold award for Best Campaigner. The Friends also won



Passengers from Winchelsea travelled to Three Oaks in May to celebrate the first hourly Sunday services. John Spencer is third from left
Photo: Cindi Cogswell

commendations for website and social media. Commendations also went to Rail CargoLiner for its website and to Tonbridge Line Commuters for their newsletter. Full details in www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards

Taste of success at station Tea Room

Railfuture contributed £150 six years ago to help create the Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust. The station restoration on the Watford-St Albans Abbey line is now complete. The Tea Room opened in August.
<https://bricketwoodstationtrust.org.uk/>

Travelcard and ticket office challenges

Railfuture has lobbied against the planned withdrawal of London's one-day travelcard, planned for January 2024. The branch has also highlighted problems if station ticket offices are closed.

Keep up to date with Railfuture L&SE branch

All Railfuture members can subscribe free to the branch's monthly newsletter *inter-railse*. The newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from:

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Twitter: @RailfutureLSE

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Railwatch abides by the National Union of Journalists' code of conduct

Rail staff star in revolt against cuts

By Ray King

Rail staff were joined by passengers, volunteers and the public in an outraged reaction to the plan to cull ticket offices in England.

Even national newspapers normally hostile to the railways recognised the overwhelming thumbs-down that was given to the plan.

Rail staff and volunteers organised petitions and protests which were taken up enthusiastically by regional and local media.

The daily *Western Morning News* launched its "save our railway ticket offices" campaign and methodically undermined the always dubious claims that only 12% of passengers used ticket offices.

It reported that station ticket offices in Devon and Cornwall sell more than a third of tickets through staffed counters.

At Barnstaple, 45% of passengers buy tickets at the ticket office, at Paignton 41%, Dawlish 34%, Penzance 34%, Torquay 29%, Exmouth 28%, Redruth 26% and Plymouth 16%.

The paper concluded: "There can be no justification for sweeping away well-used ticket offices with this broad brush-stroke approach across the network."

One 95-year-old, Mary Truell of Lypstone, Devon, wrote: "I am very naïve about doing things online on an iPad but I love to travel if I can physically buy a ticket."

"Please do not deny me and thousands of others this simple pleasure."

There were few MPs or railway executives who were prepared to come out in the open and defend the "modernisation" policy. Most MPs supported the protests. Luke

Western Morning News

£1.70 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2023

TRUSTED NEWS SINCE 1860

InYourArea.co.uk

The image shows the front page of the Western Morning News newspaper. The main headline is "Say NO to front counter closures" in large, bold, white letters on a dark background. Below the headline is a sub-headline: "Train station ticket desks threat – final day of consultation". To the right of the main headline is a green box with the text "SAVE OUR RAILWAY TICKET OFFICES" and an illustration of a train. Above the main headline is a photograph of a ticket office counter with the word "Tickets" written in large letters. To the right of the main headline are three smaller article teasers: "DOCTORS TO LAUNCH NEW WAVE OF STRIKES PAGE 10", "SCHOOL CLOSURES OVER CONCRETE FEARS PAGE 11", and "CITY STRIKER REUNITED WITH MANAGER SEE SPORT". At the top right, there is a small article snippet: "Great Western Railway figures show more than 154,000 tickets were sold through front counters at Plymouth station last year".

FRONT PAGE CAMPAIGN: The Western Morning News on 1 September 2023, in tune with the outrage felt throughout the West Country

Pollard said: "This proposal is bad for passengers and bad for the South West. It is why I will be fighting tooth and nail to save my own ticket office in Plymouth from closure."

Mr Pollard, Labour MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, said: "The case for keeping our ticket office open is overwhelming."

He also pointed out that Great Western Railway expected that 43% of staff at Plymouth station would lose their jobs as a result of the cuts.

Mr Pollard added: "It is time to do things differently on the railways. The government has got this wrong."

Just where the impetus for the policy came from is not clear. Insiders say the rail companies have been agitating for ways to slash the number of staff. The government is widely seen to be waging a war of attrition against rail workers, who are desperate to preserve reasonable conditions. Bonnie Craven of the TSSA union said: "The

staff, the way they work, the service they offer and the safety workers and passengers expect, are all under attack."

Redundancy notices were issued to rail staff before the consultation began, despite claims that there would be no job cuts.

What role the Rail Delivery Group is playing is uncertain. Even the mere 12% of passengers which RDG claims use ticket offices represents 1.4 billion journeys, according to Michael Willmot of North Staffordshire community rail partnership.

"How many prudently run businesses can afford to neglect the needs and preferences of 100 million customers?" he asks in an open letter to Jacqueline Starr, chief executive officer of the Rail Delivery Group.

"You leave it to train operators to reveal the hushed aspect of your agenda, the need to make savings and staff cuts. Your own rendering of this part of the message is extremely muted.

"How much more open and honest is the Transport Scotland approach, in which the ticket sales at every ticket office during every hour in the day have been recorded (<https://bit.ly/ScotTicOff>), with proposals for reduced hours at times when business is lightest. Here is a more candid, frank and nuanced approach.

"RDG, by contrast, gives a false positive spin to the ticket office closure plan through announcing 'more staff on concourses and ticket halls'.

"RDG now has much work to do to restore its reputation as an agency whose words and actions can be trusted as honest, even-handed and dispassionate."

Railfuture's response to the crisis over ticket offices

By Neil Middleton

So, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have had over 680,000 responses to the ticket office closure consultation – apparently the largest number ever to what is effectively a government consultation.

That included submissions from Railfuture nationally and regionally – you can read them at www.railfuture.org.uk/Ticket-Offices.

We have also included our press releases. I and many other Railfuture members made our own personal responses as well.

As author of the national responses, my first point is to say a big thank you to all the members who contributed, whether it was content I borrowed from members' emails, the more detailed commentaries provided or the help

on the ticket vending machine response.

The Railfuture national response and two late August supplementary submissions ran to 36 pages to address the myriad concerns, and on top of that there was a 25-page ticket vending machine assessment. Like almost everyone else, we did not like the proposals, commenting:

1 The proposed alternatives are not fit for purpose, and this will still be the case once already-identified improvements are delivered

2 In-person ticket selling remains an essential option for some intending travellers

When this edition of *Railwatch* is published, we will be in the calm before the next storm!

Transport Focus and London TravelWatch will still be digesting

the responses and their reports expected on 31 October.

Campaigners should not rest on the basis of the number of responses.

So far, we have all been saying: "We don't like that idea because ..."

We need to turn our attention to three key topics:

First: What do we like? We need to look at that through two lenses. One is that, in the drive from the government for cost reductions, how do we think scarce resources are best used? As part of a vision for a bigger, better railway it makes sense to spend to earn.

Second: We need to be campaigning for a sane approach to railway management and organisation, without the current split within government for revenue and costs.

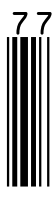
Third: We need to continue to campaign on fares and ticketing reform.

While in-person ticket selling will continue to be needed for some, a simpler fares and ticketing system should encourage more online and pay-as-you-go use. However good that proves to be, we still want those staff on the station.

With these thoughts in mind, we will be ready for a possible storm.

■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture communications director

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