



New freight
depot link to
West Coast
main line

See page 2

Picture: NETWORK RAIL

railwatch

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PAGE ONE PICTURE

Rail freight boosts its green credentials

A huge new rail freight interchange was linked to the West Coast main line in September.

It will allow freight trains from one of Europe's busiest rail routes into the new SEGRO logistics park at Northampton from next year.

Track, points and signalling systems were installed when the West Coast main line was closed for eight days in September.

"Connecting this new freight interchange to the main line network is a huge milestone and shows our commitment to working with freight operators to move more goods in the most environmentally friendly way possible – by rail," said James Dean of Network Rail.

"This important work will benefit both the environment and the economy in future."

SEGRO Northampton, which will be used by freight company Maritime, is near Junction 15 of the M1 motorway. Once operational, four freight



Aerial view of work to connect to main line

Picture: Network Rail

trains will serve the new Northampton interchange each day – with the capacity for more in future.

Each freight train takes up to 76 lorries off the road, around 300 a day.

Maritime executive chairman John Williams said: "These developments are important long-term commitments for Maritime to reduce our environmental footprint by developing a network of low carbon,

strategic freight connections across the country to promote modal shift from road to rail for container transport and for domestic distribution, with local distribution by electric-powered trucks.

"Building and operating modern, inland rail freight interchanges, supported by the largest dedicated fleet of vehicles in the country, enables us to deliver terminal to

terminal rail solutions and efficient rail-to-door and door-to-rail services for customers, who are looking for long-term supply chain protection and sustainable transport solutions."

SEGRO and Maritime will also double the capacity of another logistics park 55 miles north of Northampton – East Midlands Gateway near Castle Donington, designated as the UK's only inland freepoint.

Demise of flawed HS2 no cause for celebration

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

I have never been a supporter of HS2 but nevertheless cannot cheer at its demise, given the circumstances of the announcement and the false nature of the claims made for the money that this supposedly saved.

HS2 became a pawn in a contest between various factions in the Tory party, and as a consequence was doomed once its greatest supporter, Boris Johnson, was ousted from the premiership.

This is especially true given he was replaced – after a brief interlude – by the most anti-rail prime minister to enter Downing Street, and that includes a certain Mrs T.

There are, however, lessons for rail campaigners here. I could see the weak points of the case for HS2 right from the outset but its supporters steadfastly refused to address them. They were messianic in their confidence that the scheme was the best way to deliver massive rail investment and would not be drawn into any debate about its shortcomings. Yet these were all too apparent. The business case

was based on the dubious concept of time savings. To reinforce the advantages, therefore, the line had to be fast, indeed super fast. At 300 kph, the journey time savings would be far less than a theoretical 400 kph, which is why the latter was adopted. Not only was this far more expensive but it was also meaningless. The actual speed was 360 kph, but even this speed could not be maintained for long periods because there were so many tunnels with lower speed limits. The project's original chief engineer, Andrew McNaughton, claimed repeatedly that this added only around 10 per cent of the cost, a figure questioned by most other engineers. Supporters could have tried to move the project away from the strictures created by the methodology that underpinned this business case. But take another weakness, the lack of a station between Old Oak Common and

Birmingham. Again, this was dictated by the business case as it would have slowed down journeys and reduced time savings. However, a station where East West Railway crosses HS2 would have been reasonably easy to build and would have offered travel opportunities to many rail

passengers. But even more significantly, having such a station would have reduced opposition to the line in the Chilterns. This local campaigning by opponents has led to huge cost increases as HS2 Ltd has had to adapt the line at great expense with unnecessary tunnels. Perhaps the most fundamental overall weakness was the lack

of a clear environmental case. In a world working towards net zero, spending tens of billions on a scheme which did nothing to reduce the carbon footprint of transport meant that environmental campaigners joined

the ranks of the opposition when they might have been expected to support the project. Campaigners for the project, and indeed HS2 Ltd, did little to try to improve the environmental case.

Finally, there was money. Again, as costs soared the total bill for the scheme began to be spoken about in tens of billions, which then began to look unsustainable given that it represents several years of investment in hospitals, education or even defence. Instead of recognising the weaknesses of their case, the project's supporters blithely repeated their narrow arguments about the importance of the project and its supposed benefits without recognising the problems. The fundamental lesson, therefore, is to ensure campaigns adapt to circumstances, are based on solid grounds and are able to address legitimate concerns of opponents. HS2 is now all but dead because nobody recognised this.

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



Christian Wolmar



Light future for the Marches?

By Steve Boulding

For years, the Cambrian Railways Company, the Great Western and the London & North Western fought for passenger and freight traffic in the Marches and mid Wales.

But since the 1960s, large areas have been without train services. One of the worst hit places is Oswestry, once the proud headquarters of the Cambrian Railways which operated over 300 miles of track.

Until the devastating withdrawal of passenger and most freight services in 1960-65, robbing Oswestry of its raison d'être, the railway formed a large part of Oswestry's economy. The town remains economically disadvantaged to the present day.

Gobowen station, two miles to the north, remained open, served by trains on the Shrewsbury-Chester line, and became the railhead for a large area.

The line from Gobowen survived in situ through Oswestry, with some aggregate traffic running until the 1980s as far as Llanyblodwel Quarry.

When BR announced the closure of the line through Oswestry, Birmingham City Council appealed to keep it open. The council had identified the almost worked-out quarry as a potential huge landfill site for domestic and commercial waste, served by daily trains from the West Midlands.

While the details were being studied, BR declared the line "out of use" (mothballed).

This dragged on for many years, and meanwhile the Ministry of Roads and More Roads built the new Oswestry by-pass section of the A5 trunk road.

British Rail somehow managed to resist further pressure to close the line completely, and a half-barrier level crossing and warning lights were installed.

The level crossing is still in place, connected to the power supply, and, in theory, operable. Campaigners are hoping the line and the level crossing can be used as part of a rail service.

Cambrian Heritage Railways submitted a *Restoring Your Railway* bid to reopen the line from Gobowen to Oswestry.

Oswestry station is a grade II listed building and is the operational base for a steam and diesel heritage service to Weston Wharf, almost a mile away.

The group has ambitions to extend six miles to Llanybrynnech with a rail-based shuttle service.

Another eight miles would take the line to Buttington Junction on the



The Revolution Very Light Railway vehicle

Picture: Revolution VLR

Shrewsbury-Welshpool line. The total potential population around Oswestry's catchment area is about 30,000, and increasing briskly with much new house-building.

The main line at Gobowen is served hourly northbound to Wrexham, Chester, Merseyside, North Wales, Manchester and Manchester Airport, while southbound trains go to Shrewsbury, Telford, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, London, Hereford and Cardiff.

Passengers and campaigners have been calling for the Gobowen service to be improved to half-hourly, at least in the peaks.

When Oswestry-Gobowen is reopened, there will be an intermediate station at Park Hall, serving the huge Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital campus, as well as much new housing on the site of the old Park Hall army camp and also the stadium of the New Saints football club. The RYR bid was awarded funds by the Department for Transport, although members had

to raise another £23,000 to meet the fees of the consultants, who produced what is known to be a highly enthusiastic and supportive strategic outline business case. Disclosure of the details is not permitted by the DfT, to whom the report was submitted in September 2022.

Meanwhile Cambrian Heritage Railways obtained a Transport and Works Act order permitting train operation from Gobowen to Llanyblodwel.

The order is subject to agreement with DfT/Highways England/National Highways (the name changes frequently although the hostility to railways seems to remain), and they want the A5 level crossing closed and the heritage railway to pay £50 million plus to tunnel under the road.

We are encouraged by the recent approval for the Kent and East Sussex Railway to cross the A21 trunk road near Robertsbridge via a new level crossing. It is possible an initial service could serve Oswestry

operating under "line of sight" tramway rule, using something like the Revolution VLR vehicle currently being developed at Ironbridge, Shropshire, by a consortium largely financed by Eversholt Rail, the rolling stock company.

Another option would be based on the "very light rail" concepts being worked on by the University of Warwick and the West Midlands Rail Executive at Dudley Port.

Crossing the A5 road on the level four times per hour with traffic lights rather than barriers, holding road traffic for no more than about 45 seconds each time, ought to be perfectly reasonable. It happens routinely in Holland and elsewhere.

The grade II listed buildings at Gobowen station are owned by an independent charity associated with Cambrian Heritage Railways, which has already raised and spent hundreds of thousands of pounds restoring them.

It has also secured another grant of £246,000 for more work on the roof and external rendering on the platform 2 building.

Another building is occupied by Severn Dee Travel, the not-for-profit community benefit company established over 25 years ago by remarkable rail campaigner, the late David Lloyd.

David was a former Shropshire county councillor and head of geography at nearby Moreton Hall school.

Severn Dee Travel operates the ticket office, covering its costs from the commission paid by Transport for Wales on all train tickets.

It also hosts, free of charge, the Station Cafe, run by Derwen College, a local charity providing training and rehabilitation services for disabled young people. It has successfully trained many clients in catering and hospitality skills, of whom quite a few have gone on to make a career in the hotel and restaurant sector.

The Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users Association, which is affiliated to Railfuture, supports and promotes all these activities.

SCRUA noted with interest that "reopening the Gobowen to Oswestry railway" was among a long list of projects which the government announced would be paid for by the money "saved" by trashing most of HS2 phase II.

Since this was described as merely "a list of illustrative examples" a day later, followed by further backtracking and contradictory statements, SCRUA awaits further developments.

■ Steve Boulding is chair of Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users Association

Very Light Rail pilot proposed for the High Peak

The campaign to reopen the Peaks and Dales line (Matlock to Buxton) may be boosted by a community-led bid to run a tram-style service from Buxton to the start of the popular Monsal Trail and a reinstated Blackwell Mill station.

This five-mile link could be a pilot project for RevolutionVLR. Its 56-seat vehicle can be modified to accommodate bikes, wheelchairs and pushchairs.

The Very Light Rail (VLR) vehicle could run on the existing quarry freight line. This has been of particular interest to the rail regulators, who would like the issues over interoperability between VLR and freight to be resolved.

Buxton town team's sustainable travel group has received

encouraging responses to the idea from Network Rail (Light Rail, based in York), Northern Rail, the Peak District National Park and Tarmac.

Team member Tina Heathcote told *Pure Peak* magazine: "We have been working hard to overcome any obstacles and we have been delighted by the help and enthusiasm offered."

If successful, the VLR could be extended to the Buxton-Dowlow freight line, giving access to the High Peak and Tissington trails.

"We handed this venture over to the Buxton team and we are delighted to see that they have got it to this stage," said Stephen Chaytow of Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership (MEMRAP). "Everything now depends on the manufacture of



Map: PURE PEAK

three battery units by the Eversholt rolling stock company. It is likely that one of them would be allocated to this route, to help prove both the vehicle and passenger demand." If the trial

goes ahead, it will have arisen from the only day-out 'jolly' MEMRAP's three directors ever had, to Ironbridge to see Revolution's pilot (diesel electric) vehicle, in autumn 2021.

Booked: Pupils go by train to library



Train operator Northern is helping a Cumbrian school encourage its pupils to read by booking them on to Northern train services for free to visit their local library.

time to read together. Craig Harrop, regional director at Northern, said: "We are pleased to be supporting this scheme to get more students to their local library and get them interested in reading."

The project is being run by Community Rail Cumbria with support from Northern.

"I also hope that this will show these young people how easy it is to access the rail network and build their confidence in travelling by train."

During October and November, the train operator transported dozens of children from Flimby Primary School (pictured above) to Maryport library where they signed up for membership and had some

artworks adorning the platforms.

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RAIL USER GROUP AWARDS

By Roger Blake and Stewart Palmer

Railfuture's 9th Awards and Commendations for Rail User Groups (and similar organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships) were presented by Railfuture president Christian Wolmar after this year's national AGM in London on Saturday 15 July.

Eight groups across five Railfuture branches – Devon & Cornwall, London & South East, Scotland, Severnside and West Midlands – had submitted 13 nominations in five of the six award categories, with five of the eight groups participating in the awards for the first time.

Winner of the 100th award/commendation since their inauguration in 2012 was the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group in Severnside branch. The group previously won a Silver award in that first year, and a joint Gold with the Dartmoor Railway Association for the inaugural Adrian Shooter award for Best Website. Bedwyn Trains also won a Silver award for Best Campaign.

The Paul Abell award for Best Newsletter went with a Gold to the Stourbridge Line User Group in the West Midlands, also a previous Gold award winner for Best Website in 2017.

The Gold award for Best Social Media went to Devon & Cornwall's Tarka Rail Association for its Facebook and Twitter feeds and also its ACE Rail campaign's lively Facebook activity. The association also won a Bronze award for Best Campaign.

Going north of the border, the Gold award for Best Campaign went to the Rail Action Group, East of Scotland. The Clara Zilahi Gold award for Best Campaigner was

given jointly to East Sussex's Friends of Bishopstone Station's chair, Barbara Mine, and to the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign lead, Tim Steer.

The Judges' Special Award went for the first time to a local authority, Devon County Council.

Commendations were given to Friends of Bishopstone Station for their website and social media, to Rail CargoLiner for its website, and to Tonbridge Line Commuters for their newsletter.

The awards and commendations were assessed by this year's judging panel of four Railfuture vice-presidents, under the ever-watchful eye of Christian Wolmar. Roger Ford commented: "The judging panel has always been one of my favourite events with good company and the chance to get up to speed on parts of the railway I don't usually cover."

Winners of the seven Gold awards, and Councillor Andrea Davis for Devon County Council as winner of the Judges' Special Award, all made brief presentations about their work after receiving their award certificates.

Especially gratifying this year was the extent of subsequent media coverage for some of the awards and their winners, most notably the Friends of Bishopstone Station, Devon County Council and the five awards won by the three organisations from that county. They featured in five local newspapers and Great Torrington Town Council's online newspaper. Full and illustrated details of all the awards and commendations from 2023, and previous years since inauguration in 2012, are on Railfuture's national website, in RUG Awards under What's on.

The 10th RUG Awards will accept nominations up to Easter Saturday next year – 30 March 2024.

Coalville set for Derby rail link

By Douglas McLay

The long campaign to get the Ivanhoe line reopened is making steady progress.

Campaigners were buoyed by backing from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in his speech to the Conservative party at Manchester in October.

The initial project will be to connect key towns in the corridor of Coalville, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Swadlincote and Castle Gresley with a passenger rail service to Burton-on-Trent and Derby, to provide direct connectivity to job and education opportunities.

The Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line is pleased that the railway to Coalville would be reopened to passengers, but the link to Leicester is not yet included.

However, we remain determined to get services restored to Leicester main line station.

CRIL fully supports this initial scheme, but we will continue to campaign for a phased approach to complete the job.

The benefits delivered by the first phase will strengthen both public demand and the evidence base for a full reopening.

The current positive moves result from the successful 2019 bid by CRIL to join the government's *Restoring Your Railways* programme.

Normally the local authority would lead such a bid. But in the case of the Ivanhoe line, which passes through the areas of four tier 1 authorities, this was not so appropriate.

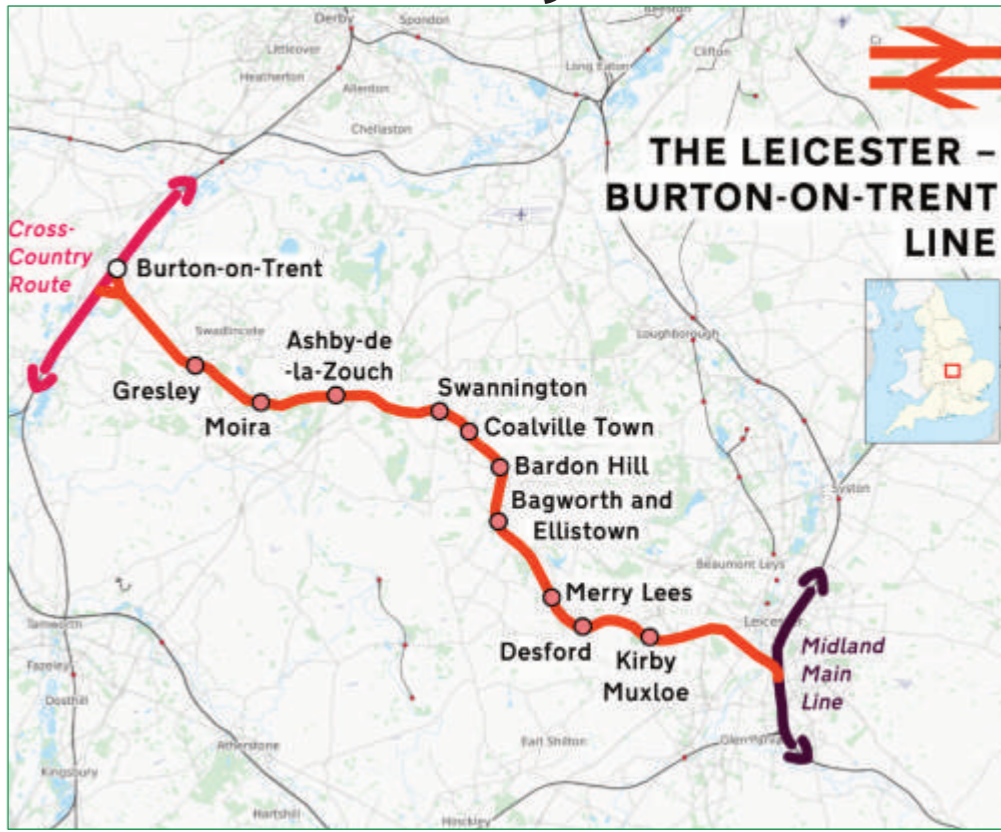
The campaign was invited to submit a strategic outline business case to the Department for Transport to demonstrate the benefits of restoring passenger services on the line.

The business case bid was supported by all the MPs with constituencies along the line and the nine associated tiers 1 and 2 local authorities.

After extensive evaluation, our case was recognised as a very strong one and the rail minister cleared the way for it to move to the development stage.

As a result, Network Rail was fully funded by RYR funds in June 2022 to complete the development stage, subject to it successfully passing intermediate checkpoints.

We expect the development stage to be concluded at the end of the year. The first checkpoint was completed earlier this year when Network Rail worked up the options for government investment. At this checkpoint, it was decided by the RYR team that it would



The Ivanhoe line is shown on this map by railforthevalley.com and shows original stations on the line, most of which closed in 1964. Two stations closed even earlier. CRIL is expecting to see the reopening of stations at Coalville, Swadlincote, Castle Gresley and Ashby-de-la-Zouch and a service to Burton-on-Trent and Derby. The link to Leicester may take longer to achieve



concentrate on a service from Coalville to Derby. The benefits of this offer the best return on investment. This option is achievable in the government's RYR timescales and affordable within the available budget.

If everything proceeds as we expect it to, Network Rail will move on to the design stage which will include a definitive benefits assessment.

Network Rail is expected to complete this to enable construction to be completed by 2025/6. In his October speech, the prime minister

announced that the Ivanhoe line would be reopened from Burton to Leicester. At this stage, it is unclear what the announcement means for the full reopening to Leicester.

However, reopening campaigners accept that the scope of work to reopen from Coalville to Leicester is significant because of the need to double the existing single track and to build a connection to the Midland main line and Leicester station.

Irrespective of whether the necessary funding becomes available, this work could not be completed in the RYR timeframes.

CRIL supports the initial scheme, but we will campaign for a phased approach to complete the job.

■ Douglas McLay is a member of the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line

East Midlands

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Future freight – ready or not?

The guest speaker at the Railfuture East Midlands meeting on 7 October was Simon Walton, UK Editor of pan-European news service, RailFreight.com

Simon gave a thought-provoking and entertaining presentation on the impact of UK rail freight on the economy, on society, and on the environment. He posed the question of its future. Freight is topical in the East Midlands, with the traditional north-south flows of

bulk minerals supplemented by the growing east-west container and other logistics traffic. The future of freight on rail, and its contribution to decarbonisation, depends on political will and the right policy framework, as well as technological innovation and further electrification.

SEGRO Northampton

Railfuture East Midlands is relieved that Network Rail has now installed the rail connection into the new SEGRO Northampton Logistics Park from the Northampton loop off the West Coast main line. There was concern last year when the

developers of the site sought permission to open it to road-only operation, as it appeared the rail connection would be delayed. Railfuture was concerned that this might become established practice and then be hard to change. Consequently, Railfuture was preparing to make representations about it. However, completion of the rail link enables this major logistics terminal to operate as intended, with four daily freight trains planned when it opens next year.

Community adopters
The East Midlands and Lincolnshire

branches of Railfuture jointly had a publicity stand at the East Midlands Railway community rail and station adopters conference. This annual event was held this year on 9 October at the Museum of Making in Derby. Our stand attracted much interest among delegates from community rail partnerships and station adoption groups around EMR's network. It was also a good networking opportunity. We are grateful to members of the EMR team for their hospitality to us.

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



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

August: G Smith, J Bannister, T Davies, G Hill, J Henderson x 2
September: S Boulding, M Kneen, S Hyland, D Owen, L Woodman
October: D Brady, J Ward, P Wilson, M Edgell, M Savage, L Woodman
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!

Bridlington barrow boy

Train operator Northern is planning to install a "Barrow Boy" statue on the concourse at Bridlington station next year.

It was once a common sight along platforms in the 1950s and 1960s to see young boys waiting on the station to transport luggage from the platforms to the hotels and guesthouses for a small fee.

Northern has been working with the Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership and Network Rail on the project.

It has released a scale model for the sculpture (pictured right) which will be cast in bronze.

Kerry Peters, regional director at Northern, said: "This sculpture will bring some of Bridlington's forgotten railway history back to life and celebrate the heritage of the area."

Picture: Northern



Yorkshire

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Hull loses link to Liverpool

Railfuture Yorkshire was disappointed to learn that TransPennine Express will reverse recent improvements to its Hull-Liverpool service from the December 2023 timetable change. The 2022 upgrades saw through Hull-Manchester services extended to Liverpool Lime Street, combined with a change in stopping patterns to reduce overall journey times. These positive changes were instigated by TPE and were the subject of a 2021 public consultation, of which Railfuture Yorkshire was very supportive.

From December 2023, the Hull-Liverpool service will be cut back to run only as far as Manchester Piccadilly and will call additionally at all seven intermediate stations between Leeds and Huddersfield, adding considerably to journey times.

The reversion forms part of a timetable package that will see the number of TPE services between Leeds and Manchester fall from four to three per hour. The present Saltburn-Manchester Airport service, via the Ordsall Chord, will be unaffected. The hourly Hull-Liverpool service will be replaced by a slower Hull-Manchester Piccadilly service, as mentioned above. The Newcastle-Manchester Piccadilly service will be retimed and the Newcastle-Liverpool Lime Street service withdrawn.

TransPennine Express says this temporary reduction in the timetable is required to stabilise performance. Although not in the

Railfuture Yorkshire area, another notable effect is the halving of TPE services between Manchester Victoria and Liverpool Lime Street to just one per hour.

South Yorkshire update

Several members of Railfuture Yorkshire were invited to meet the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority rail team in September. The discussion covered many topics, from a shared aspiration to see pre-Covid service frequencies reinstated on routes in the county, to potential future service options arising from ongoing and anticipated infrastructure investment.

The authority team was able to provide a position statement on the various capital-funded station improvement projects which they are delivering or supporting in some way. Major scheme bids have been placed for Penistone and Chapeltown stations under the *Access for All* scheme. An announcement about successful schemes is awaited from the Department for Transport.

Ongoing work to deliver £3.5 million of improvements at 11 stations in South Yorkshire is expected to be completed by March 2024. Adwick, Barnsley, Bentley, Bolton-on-Dearne, Conisborough, Darton, Elsecar, Hatfield & Stainforth, Kirk Sandall, Mexborough and Wombwell were allocated the funding from £166 million awarded to the combined authority in 2020 from the *Transforming Cities* fund.

Further schemes funded under the city region sustainable transport

settlement project are an extension to park and ride facilities at Penistone and a new footbridge at Thorne North. It is hoped that a new footbridge at Penistone can also be funded through this scheme.

Northern targets fallen leaves

Delays to train services caused by leaves on the line could finally become a thing of the past, thanks to new track cleaning technology. When the new system, known as Water-Trak, detects a slippery rail, a small amount of water is sprayed from the train on to the surface of the track, which cleans the rail and improves braking conditions for the train.

The track cleaning system was successfully trialled on two passenger train units in a collaboration with Northern in 2021. As there are only a limited number of conventional railhead treatment trains available, adding a track cleaning system to regular passenger trains would allow many more miles to be treated, including rural lines often not treated.

Further trials with Northern are taking place throughout this autumn and winter to test the track cleaning system on passenger trains. Five Northern class 170 units have been fitted with Water-Trak and are operating between Liverpool, Wigan and Manchester, and between Leeds, Harrogate and York. The trials are being run thanks to funding from Network Rail's performance innovation fund.

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Electrification questions for MPs and the prime minister

By Richard Wilcock

The October announcement by prime minister Rishi Sunak to electrify the North Wales coast railway came as a surprise.

I wrote to the MP for the Vale of Clwyd, James Davies, asking him the following questions:

- 1 Will electrification be from Holyhead to Crewe, Runcorn and Warrington Bank Quay, allowing through electric services to Manchester-Liverpool-London-Birmingham?
- 2 Will the Llandudno branch be included?
- 3 If Network Rail was expecting HS2 to pay for a rebuild of Crewe station, will this be brought from its dire state into the 21st century as part of the scheme?
- 4 What is the time scale for this project? I remember the government proposed this scheme after Cardiff-Swansea electrification was cancelled.
- 5 Given HS2 costs running out of control, many writers have said the £1 billion budget is too small. Is £1.5 billion more realistic?
- 6 Access to Manchester is still an issue, with lack of progress on the Castlefield corridor. Are upgrades likely on this route? Mr Davies said in his reply that he will be discussing the scheme with the minister. At the time of writing, I have not received a reply. There are additional points:
- 7 Will the line be rebuilt to W10/W12 freight gauge, allowing



North Wales rail network

Graphic: Growth Track 360

Holyhead to again handle containers?

8 HS2 has been cut back at Euston to a six platform station, which will go ahead only as a private sector scheme. Only eight or nine trains per hour could be accommodated, so there would be no chance of services to North Wales unless the track layout is changed to allow HS2 access to other platforms. Otherwise, many trains would have to start at Old Oak Common, not an acceptable solution for the long term.

9 Currently the West Coast main line reduces from four tracks to two near Shugborough, south of Stafford. The original plan was to give HS2 connections to the WCML at Crewe and further north in the Wigan area, but these have now been lost. Now, the only link will be at Handsacre, resulting in six tracks (including two from HS2) reducing to two. This will be a major bottleneck, reducing capacity on the West Coast main line, particularly for freight. The announcement mentions a four-tracking scheme, but this will be

problematic and prolonged in such a sensitive area as Shugborough. The four-track scheme is vital, unless a bypass for the twin track section is provided, but there are no planning consents for this. There is no evidence that the North Wales main line electrification scheme is "shovel ready", so it is unlikely to start until after the next general election. Would the next administration pursue it?

Richard Wilcock is a Railfuture Wales committee member and lives in Prestatyn

By Richard Lysons

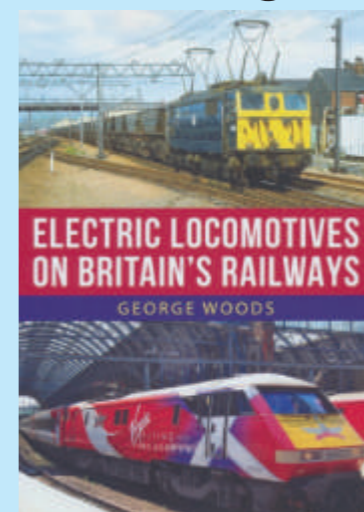
As joint organiser of the Electric Railway Charter, I have become more and more committed to electrification of our railway. When I travel on electrified lines, not only do I appreciate the smooth traction and quieter ride, but I am also aware of the environmental benefits.

I often think that if I had secured my first proper job in other parts of the country, I might not have needed to become such an ardent campaigner for electrification! More recently, Scotland seems to be the place where the greatest progress has been made if one wishes to use electric trains for journeys.

When the Electric Railway Charter was launched in Halifax in June 2018, supported by both Railfuture North West and Yorkshire branches, we called for the full electrification of the Calder Valley lines from Manchester Victoria to Leeds, Bradford and (via Todmorden) to Preston.

We are still hoping that once the current, but much-delayed, TransPennine Route Upgrade (from Manchester via Huddersfield to Leeds and York) is completed, the

Dreaming of electrification



Electric Locomotives On Britain's Railways. George Woods. Amberley Publishing £15.99. ISBN 978-1-3981-0201-9. www.amberley-books.com

wiring team will then move over to electrify the rest of the Calder Valley. You may say we are dreamers, but we are not the only ones (apologies to John Lennon).

I was attracted to George Woods' new book about electric locomotives, not as an aspiring railway photographer but more to educate myself further about electric traction in general. If I am campaigning for something, I ought to know at least some of the technical and historical background. Woods' short introduction – like in other rail titles by Amberley – is crucial to making the photographs comprehensible to the lay person.

Woods' book of previously unpublished photographs shows the different electric locomotive types used on the British railway network over the past six decades. Electric locomotives were all part of the British Rail modernisation plan of 1955 – two years before I was born.

This plan envisaged that diesel and electric traction would replace steam locos within 20 years. Many of us, of course, are still waiting for electric trains on our local and regional lines.

Woods' high-quality colour photographs have informative

captions that provoke a mixture of sadness (the Woodhead route), frustration (was it really necessary to sell our locomotives to foreign countries?) and some optimism and pride.

In particular, the photographs of the last days of the Woodhead route stand out. There are two views of Sheffield Victoria station in 1969, with a solitary guard standing next to 26055 Prometheus and two colleagues chatting at 26054 Pluto. Woods speculates that the latter are "probably discussing their futures". All these years later, staffing remains such a big issue on our railways.

Woods has produced a fascinating and thought-provoking book of photographs. It should appeal to a variety of railway supporters – campaigners, photographers and historians. *Electric Locomotives On Britain's Railways* has made this writer even more determined to see the whole of the Calder Valley line wired up before he receives a telegram from the king.

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

Great expectations

Congratulations on the excellent article about Belper's lack of rail services to the north, something that has been very annoying in the 17 years I have been living in the town. The comparison with Alfreton's service was relevant and left me wondering just how many of the extra passengers there are from the Belper area.

I use Alfreton several times per year to travel to Yorkshire and the North East. I also find myself driving across the Peak District to Buxton in order to catch a train to Manchester and the North West.

This really should not be necessary when you live in a town of over 20,000 inhabitants, with a station on a main line.

Personally, I would like to see a service to Manchester, avoiding Sheffield, with connections at Chesterfield to Yorkshire and the North East. This should originate from Leicester, giving that city and Derby through trains to Manchester, which were lost decades ago.

They are the only two major cities in the North and Midlands not to have direct trains to Manchester, and it takes longer to travel there from Derby than it does to travel twice as far to London.

John Jarman
Belper, Derbyshire
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Too many changes

I sympathise with Belper rail users who suffer lengthy connection delays (*Railwatch* 177).

It is similar on my regular Harpenden-Derby journeys. Until the 1970s, I needed to take a local train to Luton (one of the ring of British Rail's out-of-town pick-up points), from where I could take a direct train to Derby.

Nowadays, I have to endure two additional changes (Kettering and Leicester. The overall speed of my journey is 40 mph (on a 110 mph railway). You could ask: Why use the railway when the parallel M1 motorway is only five minutes away from me?

John Davis, Railfuture life member
Fairmead Avenue, Harpenden,
Herts AL5 5UD

Belper advice

I was very interested in the feature on Belper (*Railwatch* 177), a town and area I know well from many years working there before retirement.

The case for stopping more trains there may well need evidence of residents' desires to travel further afield.

Extra stopping trains might increase the number of passenger

Black history switched to main line



Greater Anglia launched a special train at London's Liverpool Street station in October to mark a series of Black History Month events for rail staff.

Greater Anglia is keen to highlight the importance of diversity in its organisation and supported Black History Month events.

It is the first train company to apply a permanent livery celebrating black history on a train. The operator is committed to ethnic and cultural diversity for both staff and passengers throughout the year.

Managing Director Jamie Burles (second left) was joined by the co-chairs of GA's ethnicity and culture group, Christopher Lewis and Sophie Thrower, to unveil the design. The livery can be

seen on trains operating across Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire as well as to Ipswich, Suffolk.

Christopher Lewis, who is a revenue protection officer at Colchester, said: "I am proud that Greater Anglia has launched this livery celebrating black history, and I hope that it helps passengers and fellow colleagues to have confidence in themselves."

HR director Katy Bucknell said: "We have staff from all over the world at Greater Anglia and it is brilliant to see such a range of events taking place across Black History Month."

"A small change and a single word can have a big impact and allow us to all work together even more effectively." Picture: Greater Anglia

journeys to Derby, but I suspect only a small minority would want to go to Sheffield, London and beyond.

James Stretton, Nottingham
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Devon memories

Congratulations to Devon County Council for its role in opening Marsh Barton station (*Railwatch* 177). The station should really have opened 70-plus years earlier when large numbers of American troops were stationed in the area during the Second World War, and an industrial estate opened after the war.

As a Devonian, I had never heard of a town or village called Newcourt or Cranbrook, which gained new stations in 2015. I strongly support the reopening of the rail line to

Bideford. It was a scandal that it ever closed. The line to Ilfracombe should be reopened too, although it might prove tricky as it would involve bridging the river Yeo in Barnstaple.

It is amusing that the branch line serving Torquay and Paignton is referred to as the Riviera line, even though it no longer serves Brixham, Churston or Dartmouth.

J Evered, Goylands Close,
Llandrindod Wells LD1 5RB
(but born in Exeter)

Editor's note: Newcourt is a suburb of Exeter which developed after the Second World War when it was an American supply depot for the Normandy landings. It is on the Exeter-Exmouth line. Building began in 2010 in greenfield land to create the new town of Cranbrook, on the Exeter-London Waterloo

line, two miles away from Exeter International Airport. In 2021 Cranbrook had a population of nearly 7,000.

Trains return

Marston Vale line stakeholders had the opportunity to look over a class 150 unit at Bletchley station recently. The refurbishment and re-livery look good.

It will be almost a year since the last passenger trains ran on the Bedford-Bletchley line. It has been a long campaign to get to this position.

Driver training is in progress and a partial service should recommence mid-November with the full service restored in January. If we had an integrated railway this could have been a quicker process. The community rail partnership has

been busy trying to keep our volunteers and stakeholders engaged. We have had volunteering days with help from Network Rail and East West Rail. Ridgmont station heritage centre and tea rooms have continued to flourish. A joint major marketing campaign is planned by London Northwestern and the partnership to build back the business.

Richard Ward
Chair, Marston Vale CRP

Family pride

I have recently joined Railfuture. I recall, though only a boy at the time, watching with pride as my father Francis Neville got together with likeminded folk to form the Scottish Railway Development Association.

He died in 2000, having been active in one of Railfuture's predecessors with the snappy title of Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the UK (SRUBLUK).

Peter Neville
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Second class citizens

The longer the rail strikes go on, the more people are put off travelling by train. Indeed I have made fewer journeys because of this.

Why does the government not get the relevant parties round the negotiating table? We used to mock the concept of beer and sandwiches in the past, but at least that meant authorities were taking the strikes seriously.

Similarly, the conciliation service ACAS has not been involved to try to settle matters.

Rail users and their bus counterparts are once again being treated as second class citizens, compared to motorists.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Climate action

Despite flooding in Lincolnshire, I managed to get to Sleaford for the RiverLight festival in October.

In the aftermath of the rains, the turn-out was poor but a number of people grabbed copies of *Railwatch* and promised to join Railfuture.

Also at the festival were Sleaford Climate Action Group, Pedal Powered Sleaford, Plastic Free Sleaford and Extinction Rebellion, as well as the Repair Cafe which is dedicated to repairing and re-using things rather than throwing them

away. The Environment Agency was there to talk about the River Sleas and the Sleas canal. I feel very strongly that we should draw-in closer with the environmental groups, pointing out that taking cars and lorries off the roads and putting passengers and freight on to rail reduces environmental damage.

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Ticket confusion

It seems evident from information in *Railwatch* and elsewhere that there is a disconnection between the official version of ticket office closures and what people are experiencing. My own experience is as follows:

I received an email from the Association of Train Operating Companies stating that my railcard expired on 31 August 2023. I actually renewed my railcard on 15 August at Lincoln rail station ticket office. It was due to expire on 5 September, not 31 August, so if this was a genuine email they have incorrect information both about my date of renewal and in stating that I had not renewed my railcard. It seems unlikely that mine is the only experience of this kind.

The closure of ticket offices is seen as a trade-off in the name of progress, but there seems to be little consideration for the loss of this and other services which were once regarded as a necessity.

In the fuss about HS2, I have not heard it mentioned that railways were built initially for freight, so if our politicians are interested in a comprehensive transport policy they should be considering the revenue freight brings in.

Heavy lorries create an enormous amount of damage to our roads as well as environmental damage and our railways are the obvious way to reduce the expensive repairs needed.

Our railways are short of capacity and the failure to extend HS2 to Manchester could well be a repeat of the 1964 Wilson government's unwillingness to prevent the destruction of the Great Central Railway which, had it been retained, could have formed a basis for HS2. Although HS2 may not be suitable for fast freight it could free up capacity on other lines, most of which go between north and south.

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PROUD CAMPAIGNER: John Bigny with his MBE in 2010

Night Mail farewell to John

Railfuture lost a valuable friend in September when John Bigny died, aged 88.

Railfuture's Trevor Jones joined John's family and friends at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium in October, when the ceremony included a reading of W H Auden's *Night Mail*.

John was secretary of the Edenbridge and District Rail Passengers' Association for 26 years, and was for many years, a member of the Rail Passengers' Committee for South East England (now Transport Focus). He played a crucial role in Railfuture's predecessor, the Railway Development Society, as its administration officer in the 1990s, including organising the despatch of *Railwatch* to members.

Until his retirement, he was an administrator for the National Union of Teachers for 40 years, as well as completing his national service with the RAF in south-

east Asia in the 1950s. John was delighted when he was awarded a richly deserved MBE in 2010 but said: "You need lots of patience. You never stop campaigning, although sometimes you think about throwing your hands into the air."

Earlier this year Sussex Community Rail Partnership chalked up a whole series of successes, including better services at Winchelsea, late-night trains on the Uckfield line and station adoptions.

John explained that campaigning for improvements in the late-night service on the Uckfield line was led by the Edenbridge and District Rail Travellers' Association. The association led the campaign for improved services on the Uckfield line for over 25 years.

The campaign was also supported by the Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee.

Black hole leaves Stone unmoved

By Jonathan Heal

We often wonder whether the people who stride the railway corridors of power know where North Staffordshire is.

Our rail services languish as one of the Cinderella parts of the network, and we worry that we will never get invited to the ball.

Instead of regular, reliable trains, we have a black hole which looks unlikely to be filled in the near future. It is not clear if the government's recent HS2 decision will make matters better or worse.

Years ago, at a Railfuture HS2 conference, we learned of an earlier – but abandoned – plan for a high speed route through Stoke-on-Trent which ruled out stopping the trains at Stoke.

Now a later version of HS2 phase 2a has been scrapped by the government, although the planned link from Birmingham to the West Coast main line at Handsacre is retained.

It is a source of speculation whether the high speed trains will actually go through Stoke and, even if they do, whether they will stop.

The service in North Staffordshire has declined since late British Rail days when there was a Manchester to Stafford stopping service serving Stoke, the town of Stone and other smaller stations.

In preparation for privatisation, the service from Manchester Piccadilly was truncated at Stoke and is now operated by Northern. The Stoke to Stafford service became an irregular, little-used shuttle, although it remained useful for school pupils.

Come the West Coast main line closure in 2003 for modernisation, the train became an even less used bus, returned briefly as a train in 2004 and then was abandoned for good later that year. Barlaston and Wedgwood stations have remained on bustitutions ever since. Norton Bridge station was closed after the bridge was demolished.

It seemed likely that this would be the end of things, until extensive campaigning led to London Midland being required to run a Crewe to London Euston service via Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford and the Trent Valley. The first train ran on Sunday 14 December 2008.

Stone was fundamental to the service and the main beneficiary was Stone, where a four-year long bus replacement was itself replaced by an hourly train to London. It was very popular with rail users so that, for the rest of the franchise period, the trains became increasingly crowded. There were often no seats free when the four-car Euston-bound trains reached



High hopes at Stone 15 years ago

Hopes were high in 2008 when the first southbound London Midland service arrived at Stone's impressive station and was photographed by Aidan Lee Croft.

Peter Cousins reported for Railwatch 119 that the trains were greeted by a crowd of over 100 local residents and the town band played to greet each train. Members of the North Staffs Rail Promotion Group arrived on the 11.07 and Jonathan Heal travelled on the first train to Euston.

There were food and drink stalls lining the station approach road and specially made souvenirs on sale inside the Grade II listed station, which was leased to the Town Council.

Campaigners said the new service was a platform on which to lobby for even better services. They urged residents to make use of the hourly London Midland train.

Richard Stevens from the North Staffs Rail Promotion Group said: "We have been wanting this train for five years and we now have a direct service to London Euston."

He said 25 trains a day would stop at the station and added: "It is very significant for the town and puts Stone back on to the rail network map. We have got the service now and we have got to build on that."

Stone MP Bill Cash said: "It is of vital importance. I have been campaigning for five years and it is a tremendous moment, because this will bring Stone into the arteries of the West Midlands and also provide a national link to London. It is an important moment for Stone."

Rugby. Ideally, the answer would have been to double the length of the train, but Stone, Kidsgrove and Alsager platforms could not easily cope with longer trains.

When the franchise specification for the new West Midlands franchise was written, the compromise was a Crewe to Birmingham service running around the Stoke and Stone loop, that had a specified connection at Stafford to the London Euston train still running via Trent Valley stations. The franchise was won by Abellio, and its London Northwestern Railway brand

started in May 2019 with a cumbersome timetable that involved joining up with another four-car train at Birmingham New Street to go forward as a Euston service. The timetable never really worked, and any disruption led to the timetable collapsing by mid-afternoon and then skipping the Stoke loop whose stations it was supposed to serve.

Other timetable failures meant that Abellio's company, West Midlands Trains, was running the risk of being driven out when Covid changed everything. By December 2019, West Midlands mayor Andy

Street was saying: "I have lost all faith in WMT's ability to run our network." A simpler timetable post-Covid gave North Staffordshire a good stopping service just to Birmingham. This might have worked well for ever.

However, loss of platforms to HS2 at Euston led to Euston-Crewe being retimed and the Stafford connection lost. Travel from Stone to Euston took nearly an hour longer than with London Midland.

Worse came in May 2022 when the Crewe-Stoke-Birmingham service was diverted via Tame Bridge Parkway, which doubled journey time between Birmingham New Street and Wolverhampton.

Peak trains often ran nearly empty for that part of the route. Some of us wondered why our train was being diverted to call at two stations that had not been built (Willenhall and Darlaston). They still do not exist in late 2023.

The final blow comes in December 2023. Under pressure like all train operators to cut costs, WMT's answer is to truncate this service. Although specified in the franchise to connect North Staffordshire with Birmingham, it becomes just a local shuttle from Crewe to Stafford. We will come full circle again.

Strangely the southbound WMT will be followed a few minutes later by a CrossCountry service, which is certain to scoop up the major passenger flow from Stoke-on-Trent to Birmingham.

What have we learnt? Years of regular campaigning through rail utilisation strategies and franchise consultations had improved our rail services substantially. Football figures proved that. But the benefits are being lost by scattergun responses to planning failures elsewhere.

When asking a senior source at WMT what strategy was being followed for North Staffordshire at the moment, the answer given was that the word "strategy" might be an exaggeration for what is happening now. I sometimes wonder if route planners down south actually know where we are.

Jonathan Heal is chair of the North Staffs Rail Promotion Group

Progress on access front at Kidsgrove?

Jonathan Heal's picture (left) shows Access for All works under way in 2021 at Kidsgrove station, Staffordshire, to install a new bridge and lifts. Funds were approved in 2015, thanks to campaigning work by the then MP Joan Walley. Work was interrupted in 2019 with the discovery of mining voids but the lifts were operational from March 2022. The line on the left goes to Crewe, served by East Midlands Railway and London Northwestern. The lines on the right go to Manchester. Northern trains stop but CrossCountry and Avanti whizz by. Southbound trains go to Stoke, Derby, Nottingham, Newark Castle and Birmingham, but this month London Northwestern is withdrawing the Birmingham service, and providing a Stafford "shuttle" via Longport, Stoke-on-Trent and Stone.



Scrapped: The 'disastrous' ticket office closure plan

People power, with some help from Railfuture, saved railway ticket offices, leading the government to back down on its original closure plan mere months after announcing it.

Katie Pennick of Transport for All was clear: The "disastrous and discriminatory proposals should never have been put forward".

Natasha Walton, who led a campaign to save her local ticket office in Stourbridge, West Midlands, told the Daily Express she was thrilled the government had listened.

In this article, Railfuture's Neil Middleton looks back at the campaign and into the future.

So, the Secretary of State for Transport has told the rail operators to "withdraw their proposals".

Reality is that it was a government request, and they changed their minds.

I think we can thank the 750,000 responses for that (including, of course, those that Railfuture submitted). Great to see that it happened, as the approach, process and initial ideas were all rubbish.

So a definite "tick" for the ability of campaigners, including Railfuture, to influence government policy.

For those of us near London, Transport for London, the government, and the train operators have come to an agreement to save the one-day travelcard.

Railfuture's campaigning had a meaningful and positive impact.

There is a common theme to these ideas. Remove something universal and simple to use, and replace it with something more complex – and not as universal. This is a bad habit, and something we always need to think about in any proposal. Is there still a universal, simple option available?

A paper ticket might not always be the very best option, but the benefit of digital options needs to be small.

Take, for instance, an off-peak return journey to London from my local station. When I use Pay as You Go, it is priced on my actual travel times. If I choose a paper ticket, I either pay more for maximum flexibility or accept a return time restriction at the time of purchase. With PAYG, the decision to pay more or less can be made when I return home.

But the idea of changes to ticket selling arrangements has not gone away. A couple of quotes from Transport Focus are very relevant "[We are] supportive of the principle of redeploying staff at some stations from ticket offices to



Discontent over the government's rail policies may have had something to do with traditional Bonfire Night revellers in Lewes, Sussex, featuring an effigy of prime minister Rishi Sunak on a train. A joke tweet from X-based Have I Got News For You explained: "It was mainly because the people who make the effigies cannot do private helicopters. They cannot really do Rishi either." Picture: Have I Got News For You

improve the overall offer to the passenger. However, the details around some of the proposals, particularly new customer support arrangements, were not yet well-developed. A lack of an overall delivery plan also raised concerns that closures might occur before new arrangements are in place."

Referring to Govia Thameslink Railway, Transport Focus says: "GTR has made substantial improvements to its original proposal. Your specific station proposals meet many of the criteria set by Transport Focus around staffing and access to products and services.

"However, we still have a number of industry-wide generic issues which give continued cause for concern."

Transport Focus makes similar comments about some, but not all, train operators.

Thus, rail ticket selling needs to remain a focus area for Railfuture and we need to continue to campaign, working with train operators, so the next set of proposals contains something much more palatable.

I think there are some key themes we want to see:

■ **Back to the beginning** Although it can be natural to think of 4 July as the day before the ticket office closure consultation, it was also just another day when ticket offices were closed because of staff vacancies. Railfuture wants to see those positions filled again.

■ **Experiments** over the summer, such as setting up shops in stations, the creation of welcome points, ticketing staff sitting at welcome desks, and many more approaches were suggested. These ideas need to be tried out at stations to see if they work and how they need to evolve to deliver the benefit.

■ **More of the same.** Railfuture does not want identical arrangements to continue (for example, the ticket office glass to still be there), but new arrangements must still meet passenger needs. So, Railfuture wants:

1 Continued universal access to ticket purchase, so in-person needs to be a credible, widespread option

2 Station staffing hours (and staff numbers) to remain broadly as they are. For example, a change, but not a reduction, in staffed times may be sensible.

3 If the ticket office counter is no longer to be a natural help point, the alternatives must be at least as useful.

■ **Change.** To me, this is about making the alternatives to the ticket office more appealing. So Railfuture wants:

1 Improvements and extensions to online and ticket vending machines

2 More Pay as you Go, including a best price promise. That can be made better with the current fares and ticketing structure – but I do not think it can ever be made good enough.

Fares reform

Fares and ticket reform remained the elephant in the room during this year's ticket office consultation, but starting on it is essential.

A new structure is required that is logical to the average traveller and a coherent whole. Simplification is often mapped to there being just a few fares. While a considerable reduction is essential, the number that remain is less important than that they make sense and that the trade-offs between price, time of travel and flexibility are sensible. There must also be consistency between routes.

So what next?

A good first step on that is to start by reviewing the Transport Focus and London TravelWatch assessments of your train operator to see what the latest thoughts are. Railfuture campaigners must then engage with their operators to champion the good bits and seek alternatives for the bad bits.

Railfuture will champion the same approach on local fares. We will be encouraging small but progressive change.

Nationally, in Railfuture's passenger group we will also be working both on ticket offices and on fares.

■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture's communications director

It's your choice on receiving emails from Railfuture

The Railfuture board recently reviewed the basis on when we do and when we don't email members, writes Neil Middleton. We concluded that we have been overly cautious on our use of email briefings and should change our approach. But before we do this, we are making a small system change to ensure that every member will still be able to opt-out of the email briefings if they wish. To date, we have used consent as the basis, with members having a choice of up to four topics (Aims, Events, Marketing and Funding) and three methods (email, post and phone). We have not regularly used "legitimate interest" (but have done so occasionally – for example the update on ticket offices I sent out over the summer). On reflection, we think this is a missed opportunity, and we now intend to use this basis regularly, as we think being updated on our

activities and campaigning is inherent to being a member or subscriber. "Legitimate interest" is not a carte blanche to bombard you with emails on any topic. We will not use "legitimate interest" as justification for content such as requests for funding – and our updates will not have any political bias in them. We are currently making the necessary system change, and we will then be in contact to advise of this change in approach, and to explain how to opt out if you wish (which will also be possible from links in every email). Tentatively, we plan to adopt this new approach from 1 January 2024. In the meantime, if you do not currently get any emails from Railfuture, please add your email address to your membership record.

www.railfuture.org.uk/selfcare

Or email renewals@railfuture.org.uk

Accrington art shows rail history



A new artwork has been unveiled at Accrington station in Lancashire that documents the history of the railway.

Created by the artist Karen Allerton in partnership with students at The Hollins secondary school in the town, the piece is called "Steam to Green".

The project was supported by rail operator Northern through its Seedcorn Fund, and provides a pictorial history showing the progress of the rail industry from its steam engine beginnings to the present, greener approach.

It was unveiled at the station in September by Mike Cliffe, chair of East Lancashire and Clitheroe Community Rail Partnership.

Craig Harrop, regional director for Northern, said: "Karen's collaboration with the students from The Hollins has created a beautiful – and important – piece of art to highlight the progression of the rail industry over more than 100 years.

"It's a great addition to Accrington station and something that I am sure our customers will enjoy admiring when using the station."



Artist Karen Allerton with students from The Hollins secondary school at the unveiling at Accrington station
Pictures: Northern

Mayor bids for rail control

Liverpool city region mayor Steve Rotherham has signed a devolution deal to explore the potential for taking back control of the Merseyside and Halton rail network. Mr Rotherham wants greater powers to build an integrated, reliable and affordable service with transparent management.

He agreed a memorandum of understanding with transport secretary Mark Harper during the official opening of Kirkby's Headbolt Lane station in October. Mr Rotherham said: "From the world's first passenger railway powered by Stephenson's Rocket to the Liverpool Overhead Railway, our region has been leading the transformation of Britain's railways

for centuries. It is a legacy we are proud to be continuing with the opening of a new rail station served by battery powered trains."

Mr Rotherham has consistently argued for further devolution of local rail services.

The region was the first area outside of London to take control of its local rail network with the Merseyrail concession in 2003, which is now one of the best performing networks in the country. Earlier this year, Merseyrail launched its new accessible train fleet.

The combined authority now wants greater control over investments to create better station facilities, and a better timetable.

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Beeston and Tarporley success

The Beeston and Tarporley Station Reopening Group has been told by the Department for Transport that it has officially approved reinstatement of the station.

The group believes it is a huge step in getting the local area back on to the rail network. It is celebrating along with Eddisbury MP and co-sponsor, Edward Timpson, as well as the numerous local residents who supported their efforts. Parish councils and Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership supported the bid through funding to produce the outline business case.

Michael Flynn, chair of the group, said: "It has been a long haul to reach this point... The next step in the project will be to re-engage with key stakeholders, including Transport for the North, Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Councils, Network Rail and Transport for Wales, the operator of the trains that will serve the station. Together we will develop a delivery plan based on the proposals in the business case which will include the detailed design and financing package." Mr Timpson said: "When I was elected MP for Eddisbury in 2019, one of my main priorities was to improve public transport connectivity across our rural areas – so to have opened up the rail network to our central Cheshire communities is a significant achievement.

"I want to thank the station reopening group for the exemplary commitment and meticulous technical planning that has resulted in a resounding 'yes' from the Government at a time when infrastructure funding is so fiercely fought for."

Rail to boost Bee network

At the launch in March of the Manchester Bee network, which will create a London style contactless travel network across buses, trams and local trains, the prospect of some local train lines being included in the "tap-in tap-out" style network was promised by the end of this year. As yet there is no sign of it.

The rail routes planned to be taken under local control as part of the Bee network are:

- Wigan-Manchester Victoria via the West Coast main line, with a proposed new station at Golborne
- Stalybridge-Southport via Atherton
- Glossop-Hadfield-Manchester Piccadilly
- Rose Hill Marple-Manchester Piccadilly
- Buxton-Manchester Piccadilly
- Alderley Edge-Manchester Piccadilly.

This represents about 20% of local train services across Greater Manchester, and the aims of bringing these under local control are to improve accessibility and bring a greater focus on performance and reliability, as well as bringing in a "tap-in tap-out" payment system.

The Glossop-Hadfield-Manchester Piccadilly and Wigan-Manchester Victoria lines were thought to be the two chosen to trial the introduction of the "tap-in tap-out" service.

The terminals, similar to Manchester Metrolink's, have appeared at many stations across the Greater Manchester area, but none as yet appear to be active.

Poor service on OPSTA lines

The Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association has been offered dates for a meeting with Northern. It follows reliability and punctuality issues on lines the group covers, particularly the Southport-Manchester service. Northern is using class 769 trains for some diagrams on this service, despite the ongoing reliability issues, and is also still having crew availability problems.

The association is worried that Northern's plan to rely solely on this class from the December timetable change is not wise. There are evidently not enough spare diesels to cover all the diagrams on the line either.

Meanwhile the association notes the success of the extension of the Merseyrail service to Kirkby Headbolt Lane using the power from the battery-equipped class 777 trains, and believes that this could be the way to achieve tangible service improvements on the Ormskirk-Preston section of the rail corridor from Liverpool.

This would require the reconnection of the through line at Ormskirk and use of this dual power capability to extend Merseyrail services north to the stations at Burscough Junction, Rufford, Croston and a reinstated station at Midge Hall, on a shared line access basis with Northern Trains. Through working to Preston would obviously entail use of the West Coast main line, which may take longer to get the safety case approved.

The association believes there is a strong demand and a good economic case for this. OPSTA surveys earlier this year reveal that first half-year passenger numbers recorded are at or above pre-Covid levels). The association will continue to gather evidence in support of the passenger demand cases by conducting surveys and passenger counts.

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

New stations for South Wales main line

By Julian Langston

Designs were published in October for five new stations in South Wales.

The stations, along with Cardiff Parkway, which is to be financed by private developers, were proposed in the Burns Report in 2019, which was set up to find sustainable ways to alleviate congestion on the M4 corridor east of Cardiff.

Transport for Wales wants to build the stations on the South Wales main line between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel junction.

Stations are proposed at Cardiff East (formerly Newport Road), Newport West, Somerton (formerly Newport East), Llanwern, and Magor & Undy. Up to four trains per



CARDIFF EAST

Artwork: Transport for Wales



LLANWERN

Artwork: Transport for Wales

hour have been suggested to call at these stations: two per hour between Cardiff Central and Cheltenham, and two per hour between Cardiff Central and Bristol Temple Meads. These would be in addition to other, faster services. The proposal is part of a wider

vision to greatly improve public transport between Cardiff, Bristol and other nearby towns. TfW has launched a consultation into the proposals as well as asking what facilities members of the public would like to see at each station. The consultation, which

runs until 14 January, can be found at [Haveyoursay.tfw.wales/sew-new-stations-and-services](https://www.haveyoursay.tfw.wales/sew-new-stations-and-services). The consultation is a chance for Railfuture members in the area and others with an interest to support the stations and ask for the facilities and services rail users want.

Tram-train CrossRail for the South Wales valleys

By Julian Langston

In its manifesto for the 2021 Welsh Senedd elections, Plaid Cymru promised a Valleys CrossRail.

The idea came from a proposal by Professor Mark Barry to reinstate the route for tram-trains.

Professor Barry is a specialist in connectivity at Cardiff University's school of geography and planning. He is also strategic adviser to Transport for Wales.

CrossRail would connect Treherbert, at the head of the Rhondda Valley, to Pontypool via Pontypridd, Nelson, Ystrad Mynach, Hengoed, Blackwood, Newbridge and Crumlin.

More than 1.5 million people live in south-east Wales: nearly half the principality's population. Apart from largely rural Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan, there are two distinct areas.

The conurbations of Cardiff, Newport and Bridgend on the coastal plain have almost 670,000 people between them. Almost as many people again live in the eastern half of the South Wales valleys.

The valleys area is formed of a plateau, penetrated by numerous steep-sided valleys running broadly north-south to Cardiff, Newport and Bridgend. The rich industrial heritage of coal mining and iron working led to a plethora of railways. Most of these, like the industries they served, are long gone. A rump of three north-

south lines, linking the heads of the Rhondda, Taff and Rhymney valleys to Cardiff, was all that survived the Beeching era.

Later the Abercynon-Aberdare, Bridgend-Maesteg and Newport-Ebbw Vale (Railwatch 177) lines reopened, thanks in part to Railfuture's campaigning.

Work is under way on the £1 billion first phase of the South Wales Metro, which was also a brainchild of Professor Barry before being adopted by TfW in 2016.

Partial electrification, tram-train technology and other enhancements will allow up to four services per hour along the lines from Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney to Cardiff by 2025. Later phases will improve services along the valleys serving Bridgend and Newport.

Geography dictated that these lines run north-south, but the line proposed for reopening by Plaid Cymru and Professor Barry is an exception.

Currently, the only line linking the valleys is between Bridgend and Newport via Cardiff.

The proposed line would remedy this by providing connections roughly midway along the valleys it would serve.

High quality interchanges with existing lines at Pontypridd, Abercynon, Hengoed, Crumlin and Pontypool would make movement around the valleys faster and easier, greatly enhancing

accessibility in some of the most densely populated parts of South Wales.

Towns such as Nelson, Blackwood and Oakdale would gain rail access for the first time since the 1960s.

Of the 50 kilometre route between Treherbert and Pontypool, about 30 kilometres would use existing rail infrastructure, including some which is currently freight only.

Much of the remaining 20 kilometres could use the original alignment, such as over the Hengoed viaduct which still exists and now carries a cycle path. In other places, including where the line crossed the Ebbw valley at Crumlin, the viaduct is gone, and an alternative route would be needed.

The beauty of tram-trains is that it is a lot easier and cheaper to construct such alternatives than it would be with conventional rail.

None of this will be cheap, but surely no more expensive than dualling the Heads of the Valleys road, which started in 2005 and will still take a couple of years to complete.

Costs of the road upgrade are opaque, but phases 5 and 6 alone are expected to cost £1.4 billion.

For this, a tram-train line serving a quarter of a million people could be created, with a journey time of perhaps one hour ten minutes between Treherbert and Pontypool.

Economic activity would be enhanced in some of the poorest areas of the UK, and a very real alternative to car use made available.

Professor Barry said: "If we are serious about really changing the future of the valleys for the better, then this is the kind of transport scheme that we need to consider.

"We should not plan and appraise this scheme based on current transport movements and demand. Instead we should appraise this scheme versus the kind of region we are trying to create... I would like to see this cross-valley scheme operating by 2028."

Petrol heads might say: Pie in the sky. But Professor Barry has already had success in turning his rail ideas into reality.

Thanks to Prof Barry for his views and some of the material in this article. A fuller analysis of his proposals is at <https://swalesmetroprof.blog/2018/06/04/making-metro-work-for-valleyscardiff/>



HENGOED VIADUCT: The former rail line is now used for a cycle path
Picture: Julian Langston

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

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Haverhill Rail reopening

There is increased hope for the restoration of rail services from Cambridge to Haverhill, following a meeting of the executive board of the Greater Cambridge Partnership in September, which decided to halt the further development of the sustainable travel zone and congestion charge proposals.

The board also decided to pause the Cambridge South East Transport project – a bus road linking the biomedical campus with a park and ride facility near the M11 motorway at Granta Park.

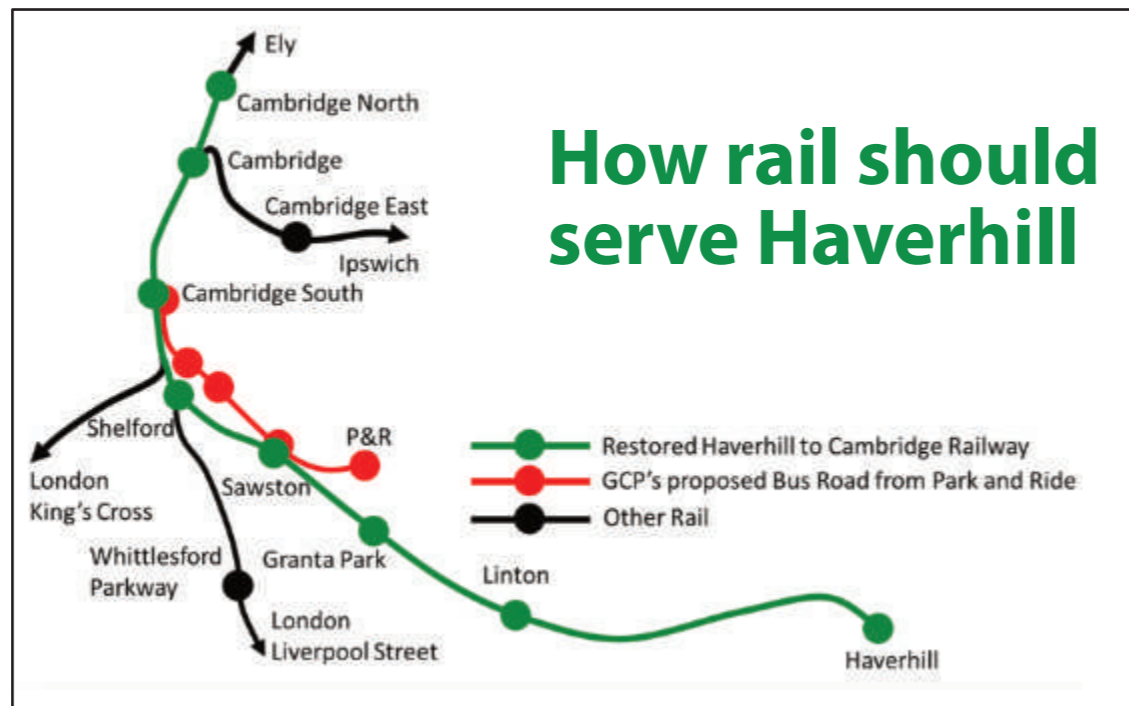
Railfuture East Anglia has been unhappy with the bus scheme and has promoted a better scheme – the reinstatement of the railway from Shelford to Haverhill.

We believe the rail link would transform transport opportunities along the whole corridor from Cambridge to Haverhill.

The rail option would provide a better service to both the biomedical campus and Granta Park, as well as giving the 30,000 population of Haverhill access to rail. Currently they struggle with poor and congested transport links to jobs in nearby Cambridge.

The railway would replace an hour-long bus journey with a 20 minute railway journey, free of the existing endemic road traffic congestion. The bus road was already being met with strong local opposition because it was proposed to cut through valued green belt countryside.

Up to now the local authorities have resisted the reinstatement of the railway while they worked on their bus road proposals, but now these have been paused, and higher levels of congestion will remain and probably grow in Cambridge. The reinstated railway is the perfect solution to transport



How rail should serve Haverhill

along this corridor – fast, comfortable and congestion free, while reducing emissions and improving local air quality.

The rail reinstatement proposal from Railfuture has already received a positive response to its *Restoring Your Railway* bid from the Department for Transport and Network Rail, and is being looked at in a Transport East connectivity study. Railfuture has written to every councillor in Cambridgeshire asking for active support.

CrossCountry franchise blues

The CrossCountry franchise extension looks like leading to another four years of disappointment and a continuation of uncomfortable public transport journeys for East Anglia.

The CrossCountry franchise was restructured by the DfT from parts of the existing CrossCountry

operation and was awarded in 2007 to run until 2016. However, since then it has been extended a number of times, most recently in September 2023 until 2027, at which point the franchise will have run for 20 years.

This has been a disaster for East Anglia as it serves the region poorly with:

- No Sunday morning services serving Stansted Airport, March and Peterborough
- No late evening services from Cambridge to March and Peterborough
- Class 170 trains with very restricted legroom, which are inappropriate for longer distance journeys
- Short overcrowded trains
- No stops at Cambridge North

Recently this has been made worse. DfT-driven cost reductions have led

to a return service being cut, leaving a two-hour gap severely affecting local travel, a gap which is even mirrored into the Cambridge to Stansted replacement buses, leading passengers to suffer a double inconvenience.

The recent franchise extension has been done with apparently no local consultation. There are plans to reinstate the missing return service, but not until 2025, two years from now.

There is also mention that the class 170s could be refurbished, but no indication that this will do anything to fix the inadequate seat spacing. And no mention that any of the other listed issues are being improved.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia

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West Midlands

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New electric trains on way

Railfuture learnt from a meeting with the West Midlands Rail Executive in October that the new class 730 electric trains are expected to start operating in the West Midlands early in 2024.

Pay as you go may be delayed

“Tap in and out” equipment is being installed at all stations in the West Midlands in preparation for PAYG. There is even one at Danzey, a remote stop on the Stratford line. The system will be based on the current ITSO/Swift card, although implementation depends on simplification of the fares structure, including removing train operator-only fares from the area. These currently exist between

Birmingham and Coventry and Wolverhampton. Further complications arise because there is a variety of suppliers of the ITSO system throughout the West Midlands. All of these factors mean that it will take until some time in 2025 to introduce PAYG, probably on a limited basis initially.

Crewe and London links change

The LNWR Crewe-Stoke-Birmingham stopping service is to become a Crewe-Stoke-Stafford service from December. This is likely to remain the service for the long term which is upsetting some passengers. However, there will be good connections to and from Birmingham, while connections into and out of the LNWR direct Crewe-London service are improved.

Birmingham-Shrewsbury

The third train per hour between Birmingham and Shrewsbury is to be reintroduced in June next year. One of these WMT services will be routed via Willenhall and Darlaston in preparation for when these stations open.

Problem of idling diesels

Although fitted with an auto-start capability, new class 196 diesel trains are often found idling for long periods. West Midlands Trains have a policy of shutdown if dwell time is longer than 10 minutes. However, problems have been found at coming out of sleep mode so drivers are reluctant to use it.

Lichfield-Redditch

When a six trains per hour service is

reintroduced on the CrossCity line (Lichfield-Redditch/Bromsgrove), four will run to Redditch. With a catchment area of 87,000 people Lichfield is the largest station in Britain with only two trains per hour. Redditch station is being upgraded to provide a second platform.

Ticket machine survey

Railfuture West Midlands committee is undertaking a survey of ticket vending machines. It is expected that those provided by WMT will be found easier to use for buying local tickets, compared to Avanti or Chiltern, but without the variety of long distance, Rover and Ranger ticket types.

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Branch revival gathers pace

Some long-overdue housekeeping has been taking place in Railfuture Devon and Cornwall since the report in October's *Railwatch* 177. The loss of an active branch secretary some years ago has now been addressed formally, with an online branch general meeting at the end of September confirming Alan Clark from mid-Devon in post to fulfil that vital role. Others who had taken part in the first branch members' online meeting back in early May were also ratified as committee members. Alan had helped to ensure that a new branch newsletter had been published before the general meeting. His email is alan.clark@railfuture.org.uk

Collaboration with local groups

It was gratifying to see representatives from a number of local user and campaign groups participating in September's regional branch general meeting – some, but not yet all, affiliated to Railfuture.

They included (in alphabetical order) ACE Rail, Connect Bude, Heathfield Rail Link Association, OkeRail, Tarka Rail Association, TavyRail and Torbay Rail Users Group, with Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users Group having to send apologies. They and others are tabulated on the Railfuture Devon and Cornwall webpage. Each group contributed a summary of its aims and activities, a basis for shared learning and future networking. Heathfield Rail Link Association, OkeRail, Connect Bude, and SERUG all had AGMs scheduled for October. Other activities for some members have included participating either in-person or online in GWR's annual community rail and stakeholder conference, this year based at Swindon's STEAM Museum.

The annual Railway Studies and Modellers Show, to be held in Newton Abbot Library, Market Street on Saturday 9 December, will provide a welcome opportunity for local groups to meet each other and spread the word among a wider audience about their campaigning activities.

Campaigns progress – 1 Tavistock-Plymouth

After very many years of hard work by an incalculable number of individuals and organisations, a political party conference speech in Manchester (rather than a proper ministerial statement in Parliament) announced the highly significant next step for what had been a successful bid to the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund. In a letter published by Torridge and West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox, rail minister Huw Merriman



BARNSTAPLE BLOOMING: The Tarka Rail Association, in collaboration with Barnstaple in Bloom, notched up another success in keeping Barnstaple station in the public eye when it won “Outstanding” in the “It’s Your Neighbourhood Award” category after judges from the Royal Horticultural Society and South West in Bloom had visited. Barnstaple in Bloom also won a gold award, while the Station Master’s Café was a gold winner in the business category as well. Mike Day’s picture shows, left to right, Marcus Jones, Network Rail western route director, Alice and Robert of the Station Master’s Café at Barnstaple station and Mark Hopwood CBE, managing director of Great Western Railway. Mark and his team were visiting the Tarka Rail Association or the third time since last December
Picture: Mike Day

wrote: “I am delighted to be able to confirm that the project (the reopening of the Tavistock to Plymouth line) will be funded to delivery, subject to future updates to the project business case. Funding will be provided to Network Rail to lead the next stage of work and support close collaboration with Devon County Council to progress the scheme to the required standard.”

Another heartening result for the Railfuture RUG Judges' Special Award-winning county council! For years the Peninsula Rail Group, now re-branded as TavyRail, had been campaigning for Tavistock, with a population of over 10,000, to be reconnected to the rail network at Bere Alston, only five miles away on the Tamar Valley line, from Plymouth. Most recently TavyRail held local campaign mobilising

events, first at Tavistock EcoFest in July and then at Tavistock Carnival in September.

Campaigns progress – 2 Tarka line boom

RUG Award-winning Tarka Rail Association continues to advance its activities on several fronts. It made a submission to the Office of Rail and Road on its draft determination of Network Rail's strategic business plan for the next control period, 2024-29. The association “wish to see active recognition of the dynamic growth in ridership being witnessed on the Tarka line. We observe that journeys recorded by Great Western Railway on the Tarka line continue to break all records since the current service began in 2001. In the first seven four-week periods of calendar 2023, ridership was 11.5% ahead of the comparable

period in 2019. In 2022/23 annual ridership exceeded 700,000 for the first time ever. The Tarka line may be perceived as the operator's longest branch line, but for the communities which it serves it is Northern Devon's main line.” Then less than two months later the first nine four-week-periods saw the half-million passenger journeys threshold passed earlier than in any other previous equivalent period.

The association's ACE Rail campaign project lead, Tim Steer, was invited by the mayor of Barnstaple to join the annual Fair Proclamation in the Guildhall to reply to “The Toast to the Prosperity of Barnstaple” proposed by the district council's head of place, property and regeneration. Later he addressed a meeting of Torridge District Council as the council considered its draft strategic plan for 2023-28, which was then launched for a public consultation. Railfuture Devon and Cornwall responded to the consultation, and Tarka Rail Association and Bideford Railway Heritage Centre were among those following suit with a similar approach.

All requested that “Support further work on developing the business case for restoring a Bideford-Barnstaple rail link, to allow the strategic, economic and environmental case and the implications of reopening to be more fully evaluated” be included in the council's committed actions over the next five years.

More information on the branch website:

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



TAVISTOCK-PLYMOUTH TO BE RESTORED: The good news came through after the Tavistock Carnival in September, when the Tavistock sign, featured in sign-maker Colin Burges' letter in *Railwatch* 177, was displayed and held up by TavyRail chairman Richard Searight
Picture: Nicola Haigh

West Midlands electrification plan

By Stephen Wright and Colin Major

We are extremely lucky in Railfuture West Midlands to have a long-standing organisation for strategic planning of our rail services – the West Midlands Rail Executive – with whom we have had good working relations since its inception in 2017.

The executive covers rail strategy for the Greater West Midlands, Shropshire to Warwickshire and Staffordshire to Herefordshire.

This compares with Transport for the West Midlands, which is responsible for co-ordinating all modes of transport in just the West Midlands metropolitan county. The executive also shares responsibility with the Department for Transport for overseeing the contract with the West Midlands Rail part of the West Midlands Trains operating company.

This summer saw the publication of the executive's revised Rail Investment Strategy 2023-2050, based on its original plan of 2018 but revised to take account of reduced commuting needs since Covid.

In October we met Peter Sargent, the executive's head of rail development, and Toby Rackliff, its business development manager. Up for discussion were the new strategy and the impact of the cancellation of HS2 North West. The executive's new chief executive, Mal Drury-Rose, was able to join us for a while.

The 2018 strategy had as its underlying principle six, four or two trains per hour at almost all stations in the West Midlands region. The impact of Covid has forced the executive to re-evaluate priorities and to adopt a more flexible approach to passenger service provision.

There are eight strategic objectives, including: recovery from Covid, decarbonisation, delivering Midlands Rail Hub, developing growth corridors, maximising access to rail and moving more goods by rail. There are many good aspects of the new strategy, especially its new emphasis on provision for freight, including opportunities for carrying parcel traffic in converted passenger units to stations outside passenger operating hours.

The strategy calls for new railway schemes to provide, where appropriate, more train paths for freight. The West Midlands is well provided with dedicated freight terminals, at least in its central and eastern sectors – Lawley Street, Hams Hall (near Coleshill), Birch Coppice (near Kingsbury), Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal and several others, but less so in the west.

This should be ameliorated to some extent with two planned terminals, one near Cannock, the other near Penkridge, on the Wolverhampton to Stafford line. However, there are significant issues for freight trains gaining access to, or in some cases just passing through, the West Midlands. The positions of several terminals require circuitous routes or engine run-rounds at some locations.

Railfuture applauded the strategy's prioritisation of route electrification. The executive wants to see a substantial rolling programme of electrification, not just in its area but also beyond its boundaries, where it could have a significant effect on local decarbonisation.

Its programme would start with the Snow Hill lines to Leamington Spa, Stratford-on-Avon and Worcester and also the Nuneaton to Birmingham and Walsall lines, specifically for freight movements. It then becomes logical to add Leamington-Nuneaton, Bromsgrove-Droitwich



OUT OF DATE ALREADY: The new version of the network map will have HS2 phase 2 deleted

and Worcester-Hereford. The strategy also expects further electrification – to Shrewsbury, to Cambridge and Felixstowe, and on the Chiltern main line.

It envisages future rolling stock being bimode, to make best use of each scheme and to reduce noise and pollution in stations and elsewhere.

However, an elephant has entered the room since publication of this version of the strategy, namely the cancellation of HS2 to Manchester and the whole eastern leg to Leeds.

This has serious implications for the West Midlands. Curzon Street station, as designed, will be too large for the new service level, and there will be no high speed services to Manchester, Liverpool, or Scotland, nor will there be fast services to Nottingham.

Having spent some months revising the 2018 strategy, the executive now has to re-do a significant proportion of it.

Railfuture suggested to the executive that there might be scope for faster Birmingham to Manchester trains via the northern stump of HS2. Also, with upgrading of the existing line to Leicester, that might provide a quicker route to Nottingham. Both suggestions were well received and will form part of future deliberations.

One good outcome of the HS2 cancellation is the confirmation that all parts of the Midlands Rail Hub are expected to go ahead. Initially this will be what's known as MRH West and MRH Central. MRH West includes reinstating platform 4 at Snow Hill for heavy trains. The platform was the terminal for trams but is currently unused. A south chord at Bordesley will connect the

Chiltern line to the Camp Hill line southwards. There will be a new platform at Birmingham Moor Street and remodelling at Kings Norton.

All these changes will enable extra trains to and from Worcester and Hereford, the South West and South Wales, and for the commuter service via Kings Heath to serve Moor Street instead of New Street and with an increased frequency.

Subject to the business case being agreed with the DfT (both the Executive and Midlands Connect are optimistic on this), MRH East will be implemented. MRH East will comprise a north chord at Bordesley and improvements at Water Orton and the line to Leicester. This would enable extra trains to Leicester and perhaps Nottingham, as well as facilitating a new local service to Walsall, via the freight-only line through Sutton Park.

Several new stations are in the longer-term plans for the line towards Water Orton and on to Aldridge and Walsall.

We raised several other issues with the executive representatives, including proposals for booking office closures, and they raised some themselves. These are detailed in the West Midlands report on page 18.

Railfuture West Midlands is extremely lucky to have an organisation responsible for rail strategy so much in step with much of our own thinking, even going beyond it in some areas.

We are grateful that they are so willing to discuss issues with us in a frank and honest way. If something is too sensitive they will say so. Our liaison with the newer Midlands Connect works in much the same way.

West Midlands report: See Page 18

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

North East

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Bishop line hello to Caroline
Caroline Pearce is the new chair of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership, following the sad passing of Bob Whitehouse in November last year.

Since 2016, Caroline had worked closely with Bob on the "theatre on trains" project while also managing Luxi – a not-for-profit video production company. The collaboration of Luxi and the rail partnership was recognised with local and national awards.

Caroline also worked with the current partnership officer Felicity Machnicki on the *Our Line Connections* project,

Another partnership project called *Storylines* involved musician Sam Slatcher in collecting memories from passengers at Stanhope and other stations. They are being used in music, poetry and films to celebrate the significance of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in the run-up to its 200th anniversary in 2025. You can view the films on the Bishop line website.

The line runs from Bishop Auckland to Darlington, passing the Locomotion Museum at Shildon, through Newton Aycliffe, Heighington and the Hitachi Rail site, Darlington's North Road station with its rail museum, and runs over the famous Skerne Bridge to Darlington.

Viaduct repair hits East Coast



The damaged Plessey viaduct

A routine inspection in October revealed that part of a parapet of the Plessey viaduct on the East Coast main line north of Newcastle had fallen into the River Blyth. The southbound line was closed to traffic, and an emergency timetable demanded single line working over the viaduct. While this allowed London-Edinburgh services to continue, the month-long repair involved replacement of almost all Northern and



RAIL PROMOTION: Felicity Machnicki, Caroline Pearce, Northern's Marie Addison and CRP vice-chair Charlie Walton

The partnership is working with Northern to encourage travel on the line and recently hosted a rail safety day for local schools at Locomotion.

The anniversary year is being planned to include nine months of special events. The full programme will be published on the 199th anniversary of the railway - 27 September 2024.

More trains for Coast line

Northern has promised passengers some express passenger services in December, but at the moment they do not look very appetising. Running at two-hourly intervals at first, they will go from Middlesbrough to Newcastle stopping only at Thornaby and Sunderland – and taking nearly as long for the full journey as the present

all-stations trains. Hartlepool will be omitted, allegedly because the revival of platform 3 is not yet complete. However, on looking at the working schedules, a stop is made at Hartlepool for operating purposes in some cases. These trains do not stop at Stockton, because of pathing difficulties. Railfuture will be urging Northern to try harder to serve Stockton and Hartlepool.

TransPennine troubles

As a result of much reorganisation of its service pattern, the North-East is going to have reductions in TransPennine trains from December, though TPE promises to put most of them back in a year's time. The Manchester-Newcastle services will not run, but adjustments will be made to Liverpool-Newcastle services to ensure that as much of the traffic from the withdrawn trains as possible can be accommodated, even if it means holding trains from Liverpool at Manchester Victoria to achieve this. Railfuture notes that the loco-hauled services will be totally dispensed with, thanks to complaints about noisy locomotives idling at some termini.

Perhaps it is just as well that the loco-hauled trains promised a few years ago for the Middlesbrough service did not ever run. Manchester will continue to be linked not only to Middlesbrough but also onward to Redcar and Saltburn. A fascinating innovation is the proposed Manchester-Huddersfield-Wakefield-Castleford-York services. They are outside our territory, but offer the quickest way to go from York to Wakefield, in contrast to CrossCountry's service via Leeds.

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Thames Valley

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Wantage/Grove wins unanimous backing
Railfuture Thames Valley is delighted that Oxfordshire County Council unanimously passed a motion in favour of building a new station at Wantage/Grove and to fund a strategic outline business case, a primary campaign objective. See *Station that never should have closed in Railwatch 177*.

The outline business case for a new Oxford-Eynsham-Witney-Carterton (Windrush) line has recently been completed successfully, another principal campaign.

OXRail 2040 sees stations as mobility hubs

In September, Railfuture had an informative meeting with county council officers including principal rail development planner Pete Brunskill, who gave us an in-depth presentation of current and planned projects and the council's OXRail 2040 strategy. Many rail stations will become mobility hubs. Some smaller stations, such as Culham and Hanborough, are projected to have housing and employment growth nearby. The council hopes to host a rail summit next year, to which we made some suggestions for speakers to invite.

Chiltern needs backing for new trains

Railfuture Thames Valley participated in the Chiltern Railways stakeholder meeting in September. Railfuture is unhappy that Chiltern has bowed to pressure from the Department for Transport to introduce evening peak restrictions on cheap day return tickets (1600-1900). This will deter a lot of off-peak travel, such as families on days out in London, and cause overcrowding on trains before and after the restricted period.

Networking opportunities at conference

Great Western's stakeholder conference in September was held at the STEAM museum at Swindon. Railfuture Thames Valley took advantage of opportunities for worthwhile networking. One of the speakers was Oxfordshire's Councillor Andrew Gant, who mentioned the council's pro-Wantage motion (see above).

Railfuture Thames Valley was also represented at two of GWR's local transport forums – for the North Cotswold line and also for London Thames Valley & North Downs. We welcome the news that from December the North Downs line trains will all serve Gatwick. We are reserving judgment on changes to Didcot-Oxford-Banbury services. Among matters we raised at the Cotswold line meeting was the provision of lifts at Kingham.

New rail partnership launched

Railfuture was represented at the launch of the new Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership, at an event on Oxford Parkway station in September. Its focus is on improving rail access for under-represented sections of the community.

House building needs rail links

Railfuture Thames Valley and our affiliate, Witney Oxford Transport, are making contributions to the draft West Oxfordshire District Council local plan. We stressed the importance of matching housing developments to rail.

High speed option for Aylesbury and Brackley

Finally, at a recent branch committee meeting when the cancellation of HS2 phase 2 was discussed, the idea was floated that it might be the time to consider intermediate stations on phase 1 at Aylesbury and Brackley. Brackley has not been served by rail since 1966.

www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch
[X/Twitter @RailfutureTV](https://twitter.com/RailfutureTV)



Headbolt Lane station in Kirkby, Merseyside, opened in October. A young rail enthusiast who calls her blog *Gloves Trains* visited the station on Day One. You can see her enthusiastic response to Britain's 2,579th station at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEeJrQZ095A&t=18s>

Rail must get bigger and better

By Roger Blake

When prime minister Rishi Sunak cancelled phase 2 of HS2 in October, a raft of improvements was promised in its place. Immediately, the Department for Transport published *Network North: Transforming British Transport* listing them. It was re-published with corrections nine days later, but errors and inconsistencies persist. All 13 references to *Restoring Your Railway* schemes have been announced before!

There is also the notorious 14th scheme, the Leamside line in the North East, which was de-announced.

The schemes that survive the many rounds of examination are:

East Midlands

Reopen the Ivanhoe Line between Leicester and Burton.

Reopen the line from Ashfield to the Erewash Valley to passenger trains. The line would be renamed the Maid Marian line.

North East

Build a new station at Ferryhill in County Durham.

South West

Reopen stations and restore passenger services to Wellington and Cullompton.

Reinstate five miles of track and build a new station at Tavistock to connect it with Plymouth.

West Midlands

Build a new station in Meir (Stoke) on the Crewe-Derby line.

Reopen the Oswestry-Gobowen line, with a new stop at Park Hall.

Reopen the disused Stoke-Leek line.

Fund the building of Aldridge station.

Yorkshire & Humberside

Restore the Don Valley line between Sheffield and Stocksbridge.

Build a new station at Haxby on the York-Scarborough line.

Build a new station at Waverley on the Sheffield-Gainsborough line.

Reopen the disused Barrow Hill line.

And now the bad news

For the East of England, North West, Scotland, the South East and Wales, there was nothing about *Restoring Your Railway*.

Thirteen *RJR* schemes did get mentioned, so what about some other bids from the North, Midlands and Wales which did not? It is not clear what will happen to these schemes in future but campaigners will continue to make the case for them:

East Midlands

Firsby and the east Lincolnshire coast seaside resort of Mablethorpe.

North East

Reopen the Consett-Newcastle line to passenger services.

Reopen the Darlington-Weardale line to passenger services.

North West

Reopen the Middlewich line to passenger services.

Reinstate the Fleetwood Railway line. This was a flagship scheme visited by the then transport secretary Grant Shapps when he launched the *Restoring Your Railway* fund in January 2020.



Scottish transport minister Fiona Hyslop installed the final track clip with Alex Hynes, managing director of ScotRail, to mark completion of track laying on the Levenmouth reopening project on 25 August Picture: Network Rail

Wales

Reopen the Gaerwen-Amlwch line on Anglesey to passenger services.

Yorkshire & Humberside

Reopen lines and new passenger services, Gainsborough-Barton. Reopen the Askern Branch line.

As the DfT has failed to provide annual updates of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline since October 2019, there is little point in hoping for a second update to the *Restoring Your Railway* fund programme following the first

published in June 2022.

Railfuture continues to campaign for a bigger, better railway, and is already looking forward to the next new station. The December timetable change will herald the opening of Thameslink's Brent Cross West, but not yet White Rose in Leeds or the three on Birmingham's Camp Hill line.

Work continues on new stations at Darlaston and Willenhall despite the contractor going into administration.

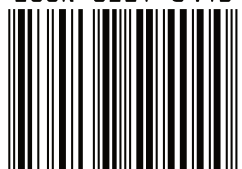
Transport for Wales is consulting on five new stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction.

As part of the Levenmouth reopening project, work is proceeding in Scotland to restore the communities of Buckhaven, Methil and Leven to the rail network. Services are anticipated to start running next year. That is why Railfuture's annual general meeting will be held in Edinburgh on Saturday 13 July.

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

■ You can stay in touch with Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight Groups via www.railfuture.org.uk/

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