



October 2020

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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So the Government trumpets yet more blue sky thinking on 'what needs to be done', this time regarding strategic links, both rail and road. Led by the NR Chairman, and with environmental issues within his brief, rail should prevail. There is then no shortage of schemes ready for the off, but everything will be on hold until his report next year, when the pressing need is to crack on and get something done!

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around the UK. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

The recent timber train trial from Georgemas Junction to Inverness was highly successful. It demonstrated that the line has the capacity for regular timber traffic, although some sidings would need remedial work, and high payload wagons procured. Reinstatement of the Norbord factory connection on the Aberdeen line would be a game changer. There is now a lot of political and public interest in rail freight.

FoFNL is lobbying NR and Transport Scotland to opt for a dynamic loop between Clachnaharry, near Inverness, and the former Clunes station near Kirkhill: the formation of the erstwhile six-mile section of double track, which is shared with the West Highland Line, is still available. A dynamic loop would enable a better and more resilient service, as trains in opposite directions could pass without slowing or stopping. NR is likely to make its recommendation early in 2021.

NR has applied to the Highland Council for a bridge to replace the Delny level crossing near Barbaraville between Invergordon and Tain, the scene of three fatalities in recent years. The line speed could then be raised from 55 to 75mph.

Campaign for Borders Rail

Jim Steer, Director of the High Speed Rail Group, has reiterated its support to extend the Borders Railway. An HS2 hub at Carlisle would put Cumbria on the High Speed map, enable three-hour journeys from London to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and make a completed Borders Railway a vital part of the national network. Also, Anglo-Scottish rail freight has good growth prospects, and is a vital lifeline for Scottish exports. More line capacity for high-speed passenger services could also accommodate additional freight train paths. But freight companies crave dependability: the rail option has to be there, every day, all year-round, so an alternative route to Scotland's central belt would boost market confidence in the rail freight sector.

Demonstrating a project's feasibility is key to its approval. So it's encouraging that the long awaited feasibility study on extending the Borders Railway is finally underway, looking at Carlisle city centre and station, and how the line would contribute to the future prosperity of the whole Borderlands.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett has criticised the decision not to offer refunds, extensions or any other goodwill gesture to those who bought annual railcards only to be told not to travel. Given the sharp decline in commuting across the rail network, the industry needs to reach out to the leisure sector - and there is no better time to do so. Everyone is thinking twice about holidays abroad; staycations - potentially including days out by train - are going to be the thing. But without that all-important 33% discount, consumers might find other things to do.

Friends of the Settle – Carlisle Line

The Settle - Carlisle Line will be closed between Skipton and Kirkby Stephen from 24 to 28 October to replace two old bridges at Stainforth.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Transport for the North is proud that green transport is being researched and developed on both sides of the Pennines. The Government has named Tees Valley as the UK's first Hydrogen Transport Hub, whilst to the west, Eversholt Rail and Alstom are developing the technology at a research centre in Widnes.

East Suffolk Travel Association

ESTA's submission to the Sizewell C proposal supported options to improve the capacity of the southern half of the Lowestoft–Ipswich line; but this should happen irrespective of the outcome, with additional car parking at many stations, and bus parking by the A12 at Darsham. If the power station is built, EDF should contribute towards rail improvements such as upgrading the Leiston branch and its three level crossings. Rail should also be the lead option for construction traffic, although overnight construction trains should not interfere with the daytime passenger service.

Local issues include the Family & Friends voucher scheme; updates when Oulton Broad swing bridge fails; lighting at Brampton station; the horns of the new trains disturbing nearby residents, and the lack of substitute buses for Brampton during engineering work. However, positive feedback is also important: "I boarded the 1410 from Halesworth to Lowestoft. After Beccles the conductor announced that there were problems with Oulton Broad bridge. On approaching Oulton Broad South, he asked Lowestoft passengers to remain on the train while he spoke with the signallers. Then he announced that a replacement bus was waiting opposite the station approach to complete their journey."

ESTA also maintains contact with other local user associations. The Peterborough - Norwich RUG has campaigned to retain the Norwich – Liverpool trains, and not split the service at Nottingham; instead it may now run from Norwich to Derby [*see the link below to the ECML plans from December 2021*] - a little better.

English Regional Transport Association

ERTA laments the repeated deferral of new radial rail links around Heathrow. Government should look beyond the airport as a magnet in itself to the wider strategic gains, with reduced emissions and improved connectivity. The Southern Link from Guildford and Woking should link with the Chiltern Main Line at Old Oak Common for destinations like Oxford, Bicester, Banbury, Aylesbury, and via East West Rail (EWR) to Milton Keynes and the West Coast Main Line. And with over a million visitors per year normally, RHS Wisley needs a rail link as an alternative to driving.

Upgrading the Redhill - Tonbridge line could increase its utility, the more so with a direct Gatwick link. However, terminating trains on through platforms gives rise to capacity/pathing issues. The Brighton arm is at capacity, but with an Arundel Curve, Gatwick trains could terminate at Brighton via Horsham, Worthing and Shoreham.

A rebuilt Guildford - Cranleigh - Horsham line could link Reading with Gatwick, and then Tonbridge or Croydon, whilst a realigned Polegate - Stone Cross avoiding line would enable direct semi-fast services between Brighton, Hastings and Ashford, and free up paths for more London - Eastbourne trains.

Hitchin Rail User Group

In response to a Freedom of Information request, LNER released an [Indicative Train Service Specification](#) for the ECML from December 2021. The Great Northern stopping service from Cambridge to Kings Cross will become a Thameslink service to Maidstone East. However, HRUG is disappointed that the peak GN service to Peterborough will continue to call at Stevenage rather than at Hitchin as it once did.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Porterbrook have announced a five-year programme to modernise 214 Class 377 trains that provide suburban services on the Southern network, and 56 Class 387s operating on the Great Northern outer and Gatwick Express routes. They will be fitted with USB/power sockets, information screens and LED lighting.

Many of the planned improvements at Southern stations are starting to appear, including waiting rooms and shelters, refurbished toilets, more seats, information screens, automatic doors, more cycle parking, and LED lighting. Those in the coming year include all the proposals that WSRUA made last year.

Okerail

The [Okehampton Times](#) has encouraging news on work to reinstate the Exeter to Okehampton rail service. NR and GWR are assessing the condition of the infrastructure, and costing and planning the work needed to inform a Restoring your Railway Fund bid. A decision on the outcome is expected early next year.

Avocet Line Rail User Group

From 24-30 October the line will close to renew Exmouth Junction, and extend platforms at St James' Park and Lympstone Commando. GWR has consulted ALRUG on the work to be done, and the format of the replacement bus service. Long-term it seems that the Avocet line will have all 3-car Class 165 trains rather than 4-car Class 150 units, which will provide greater capacity.

A new removable barrier at Cowley Bridge Junction north of Exeter will limit the damage from flooding. Metal panels fit between posts in sockets between the lines, and permanent ones beside the track, with blocks underneath between the rails. Although the barrier closes the railway, with less damage when the flood recedes, it can reopen more quickly.

The Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) being prepared by Exeter CC, East Devon DC, Mid Devon DC and Teignbridge DC is now "dead in the water", as both Mid and East Devon have withdrawn. The draft plan will not now go out to public consultation. Instead, rail improvements will be left to the limited and sometimes conflicting decisions and policies of the four local authorities, together with Devon CC, the train operating companies, NR and the Government. All the more reason to support ALRUG!

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more effective our campaigns. Join [here](#): from the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Rf and its Campaigns by clicking on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Railfuture consultation responses](#).

The Rf webinar 'Attracting passengers back to rail' may be viewed at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/webinar>. In a subsequent poll, 80% of attendees felt safe travelling by train, and that promotional fares were the best way to attract people back.

The DfT has signalled the end of rail franchising, although what will replace it is still not clear. Interim Emergency Recovery Management Agreements include a performance related fee based on punctuality, passenger satisfaction and financial performance, with management fees capped at 1.5% of the cost base of the original franchise. In due course, a White Paper will respond to the recommendations of the Williams' review. [Rf Policy Director Ian Brown](#) discusses the latest development. Rail services are essential to connect people to work, education and a social life. The limited changes contained in the new arrangements pave the way for the future, and are consistent with a more defined, strategic role for rail.

The thirteen programmes that NR will progress urgently as part of Project Speed include three major electrification schemes - the Trans-Pennine route upgrade, Midland Main Line to Sheffield, and the Uckfield branch - and two schemes for which Rf has campaigned: regular passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line to Newcastle; and on the Okehampton line, with a new parkway station to provide a railhead for West Devon and North Cornwall. The third round of the Ideas Fund in November is expected to add the restoration of an Oxford - Cowley passenger service. [Rf Chairman Chris Page](#) discusses some of the issues.

[Railwatch](#) features an article on a new [tool](#) that reliably predicts passenger demand at proposed new stations or on lines anywhere in mainland Britain. Developed by Marcus Young at Southampton University, the web browser interface requires no special knowledge. The on-line [demonstration](#) has a narration.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

RfTV welcomes the general approach to transport corridor connectivity in Oxfordshire CC's Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, but is concerned about the lack of ambition in terms of what is delivered and how soon. Electrifying Didcot - Oxford and EWR is vital to meet climate change obligations. Investment priorities supported include the Cowley branch, Hanborough, Begbroke, and a Swindon - Oxford service, although a new Grove/Wantage station should come sooner. Adding the North Cotswold line to the list of corridors could attract housing and other developments from less sustainable locations. More action is needed to encourage freight by rail, and facilitate its transfer to electric road vehicles for local delivery. Freight loops on EWR would create more south-north paths, and take HGVs off the A34.

RAILFUTURE LONDON & SOUTH EAST

A primary purpose of a new rail link between Lewes and Uckfield is to be the catalyst to channel housing into a single, well-connected location, and so deliver sustainable transport rather than car-dependency.

NR's Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the "Kent & East Sussex Coastal Connectivity Programme" due out later this year is expected to have examined options to improve services in east Kent, and add more on an upgraded MarshLink, including an hourly direct link with St Pancras International. Shorter journey-times to/from London, and a twice-hourly service from Ashford International to Rye, Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne, are seen as fundamental to attracting investment and people with aspiration to revive the economic fortunes of the coastal communities.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Local authorities around Britain are developing plans for active travel routes and facilities. This is a great opportunity to engage with, advise on and support efforts to connect rail with active travel infrastructure. Are you in touch with your local authority's active travel officers?

Supported by both Northern and CrossCountry, work has started on the Tyne Valley CRP's biggest project: reviving the old and redundant buildings at Haltwhistle station to improve the waiting areas, and to create a welcome to the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, a new studio and office space, and small units for rent by small businesses and artists. The work should complete early next year. Anyone interested in the studios or offices should email Julie Gibbon at secretary@tvcrp.org.uk.

The Clitheroe to Hellifield project was successful in the first call for Restoring Your Railway Ideas, and work on its SOBC is now well underway. Another Community Rail Lancashire project, to secure a passing loop and a more frequent train service on the South Fylde Line between Preston and Blackpool South, is one of 50 schemes in the second tranche.

Bolton Community and Voluntary Services has awarded Bolton CRP £4000 to put on an inaugural 'community rail mela' next year. The multi-cultural festival will bring Bolton's diverse communities together at the station and in other venues across the town.

Katie Goldthorpe has been appointed as Community Rail Officer of the recently created New River Line CRP, which will work with Greater Anglia to promote the Broxbourne - Hertford East branch. Local branch lines will thrive despite Covid-19: that was the message at a virtual Greater Anglia conference from CRPs, station adopters, local authorities, other organisations from across East Anglia, and key players.

Essex & South Suffolk CRP has created a series of self-guided [railway walks](#) to help people discover their local area. Each walk starts at a rail station to create an environmentally friendly and healthy day out.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

TF aims to improve rail ticketing, with flexible season tickets, cut price offers and better value for money fares, particularly in the leisure market, which has held up better than commuting. Its partnership with London TravelWatch goes from strength to strength. Pooling knowledge, skills and resources is making more of a difference for all transport users. TF is also working to improve services in Scotland, Wales, the West Midlands and elsewhere.

TF reports three more [casework successes](#) in October: a Chiltern passenger refunded a court settlement fee of £419 after being given incorrect advice; a full refund of over £300 from Trainline for a passenger who had lost his tickets; and a Penalty Fare Notice overturned after train branding confusion.

...and now the rest of the news...

To make requests for passenger assistance more reliable, the [Office of Rail and Road](#) (ORR) has announced new measures to improve their communication and coordination. Every station must now have:

- A dedicated assistance telephone number
- A 'Responsible Person', who will ensure calls to those numbers are answered
- A Handover Protocol, to ensure that such calls provide the information necessary to deliver the required assistance: the passenger's need, the train they are travelling on, and where they are on it.

The RAIB has released [a preliminary report](#) into last month's derailment of a tanker train at Llangennech on the Heart of Wales line. At some point after leaving Robeston (Milford Haven) the brakes on the third wagon came on. The leading axle ceased to rotate, causing a flat spot and a substantial 'false flange', a raised lip on the outer side of the wheel tread. When the train reached the Morlais Junction crossover, the false flange caught on the converging stock rail and distorted the track, causing a derailment. 100m or so further on, facing points turned the locomotive and the two leading wagons to the right, but the derailed wagon went straight on. It detached, overturned and caught fire; another nine wagons then also derailed. NR does not expect the line to reopen until the New Year.

An independent review led by NR Chairman Sir Peter Hendy CBE will look at how to boost transport infrastructure within and between the devolved nations to improve connections, create new ones, and bring communities closer together. It will also consider the role of future technologies, and assess the environmental impact of current and future infrastructure. The report is expected in Summer 2021.

Meanwhile, a joint NR and Highways England document – [New Parkway Stations](#) - will help partners such as local authorities, LEPs, strategic planners and third-party fund raisers assess whether a parkway station is the right transport solution for their area, and how it might be delivered.

Following two phases of consultation, NR has published its [latest proposals](#) to four-track and electrify the line between Huddersfield and Westtown (Dewsbury), and improve Huddersfield, Deighton, Mirfield and Ravensthorpe stations.

A joint NR and Transport for the South East agreement explores options for better cross-regional services, including new links between Gatwick Airport and destinations in Kent, shorter journey times between Brighton and Southampton, extending high-speed services from Ashford to the East Sussex coast, and new southern and western rail links to Heathrow Airport. They will also develop major upgrades to the Brighton Main Line at East Croydon, and the South West Main Line at Woking.

Following the introduction of an Aberdeen Crossrail service between Inverurie and Montrose, rail services returned to Kintore on the Inverness line on 15 October after almost 60 years. The new £15 million station was funded by Transport Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and Nestrans. It is fully accessible, and 24 of its 168 parking spaces are fitted with charging points for electric vehicles. A further £200m will be invested on enhancing the railway between Aberdeen and the Central Belt.

A fleet of 'new and improved' mobility buggies at London Waterloo will allow passengers with accessibility needs to move seamlessly from the concourse to the platform and onto their train.

Crossrail CEO Mark Wild has updated the London Assembly Transport Committee on completion of the Elizabeth line, focusing on construction and systems integration, followed by intensive trial running in 2021. Handover of the line to TfL is also underway. The plan is to open the line to passenger service in the first half of 2022.

A CBI report [Connecting Communities](#) urges the Government to update its approach to investment, particularly to reflect the change in patterns of commuting. It identifies three issues: long-term funding, a fragmented approach to project appraisal, and slow or ineffective delivery. It recommends:

- Ten-year funding settlements for regional infrastructure, to enable strategic planning, as well as improved infrastructure maintenance
- Changes to the Green Book approach to project appraisal, focusing on programmes of work that can promote local growth and environmental sustainability in areas that need it most, rather than just the most profitable
- A focus on driving delivery, as well as increasing investment within local authorities through improving planning capacity and capability.

Leaders from across the Midlands are calling on Government to fund a region-wide smart ticketing platform to revolutionise the way passengers use and pay for public transport. A 'tap and cap' system, similar to that used by TfL, would allow seamless payment for trips on the rail, bus and tram network via smartphone, travel pass or bank card, and be capped at a daily or weekly limit, regardless of travel mode or transport operator. It could also be adapted to include emerging transport modes such as electric bike hire and the rental of e-scooters.

The Rail Electrification Alliance - VolkerRail, J Murphy & Sons, Jacobs, Systra, Siemens and NR - has been awarded a four-year £216.2m contract to upgrade the ECML power supply between Doncaster and Edinburgh.

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen and Hartlepool Council Leader Shane Moore have announced plans to bring the second platform at Hartlepool station back into use. It has two through lines, but the platform on the Up (southbound) line from Sunderland is currently disused.

The Weardale Railway is an 18-mile heritage branch line linking Darlington and Bishop Auckland to Witton-le-Wear, Wolsingham, Frosterley and Stanhope. County Durham's Cabinet voted to invest £2.1m to transform the line into a major visitor attraction.

Birmingham City Council's planning committee has approved Transport for West Midlands' plans for Moseley station. Together with Kings Heath and Hazelwell, all three stations on the Camp Hill line now have planning permission, a major step forward for plans to reopen the line to passenger services.

James Palmer, Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, has challenged the best brains to develop conceptual designs for the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM) vehicle, its infrastructure and how the system might operate. He said that the CAM could form a template for the future of public transport in other small cities and regions across the globe.

Kent County Council is consulting on its draft Rail Strategy 2021 (see below).

A surfer who was forced to leave a London to Bristol train wants GWR to review its ban on surfboards on IETs. A GWR spokesman said: "We cannot take surfboards on long-distance services because there is no feasible, safe storage space on board. They can be taken on our Night Riviera sleeper service from London to Penzance, [and] on local stopping services."

,,,and finally

A man boarded a bus in Manchester wearing a snake as a face covering. One passenger said she thought it was a "funky mask" until she spotted it slithering over handrails. She found the incident "really funny", adding that the animal did not seem to bother any of her fellow passengers: "No-one batted an eyelid." Transport bosses in Greater Manchester confirmed a snake was not a valid face covering.

A French MP has shown why it's worth checking where you've left the car – not on a level crossing in the path of a passenger train. "Fortunately, the visibility from the train was good and there was no danger," he told France Bleu. "I have no excuse: it's been two years since the line opened, and I even inaugurated it..."

CONSULTATIONS

A second public consultation on Cambridge South station will run from 19 October to 29 November.

- NR: [Ely Area Capacity Enhancement](#), closes 1 November
- Kent County Council: [Rail Strategy 2021](#), closes 17 November
- Homes England: [West of Ifield Development](#), closes 1 December
- HM Government: [HS2 Phase 2b Western Leg Design Refinement](#), closes 11 December.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains a [List of Events](#) and a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a Calendar of Events embedded in a document may be discarded, a stand-alone list would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

NB. Because of Covid-19, events are being cancelled, postponed or conducted online. Webmasters, please update your websites with any changes as soon as they are made.

October

- Monday 19. Avocet Line Rail User Group AGM, Online (**Zoom**), 1900.
- Wednesday 21. Friends of the Barton Line, **Online**, 1830 for 1900.
- Tuesday 27. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Zoom**, 1930.
- Tuesday 27. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930.
- Tuesday 27. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, but all meetings currently **cancelled**).
- Friday 30. English Regional Transport Association Northampton meeting, Online (**Zoom**), 1400
- Saturday 31. Campaign for Borders Rail AGM, Tullie House, **Carlisle (cancelled)**.

November

- Tuesday 3. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month).
- Wednesday 4. Rail Action Group East of Scotland AGM, Village Hall, Ayton, 1900.
- Thursday 5. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month (except August) at various venues).
- Saturday 7 November. Rf North West.
- Tuesday 10. Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**.
- Tuesday 10. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Wednesday 11. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- Friday 13. English Regional Transport Association Great Central meeting, Online (**Zoom**), 1400.
- Saturday 14. Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group meeting, Methodist church hall, Gosforth Road, **Seascale**, Cumbria, CA20 1PU. 13.05
- Saturday 14. Fen Line Users Association AGM, 1400. **Online?**
- Wednesday 18. Friends of the Barton Line, the Sloop, **Barton**, 2000.
- Saturday 21. Rf London & South East regional branch, Kent division meeting. **Online**. 14.00
- Saturday 21. Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association AGM, St John's Centre, Church Street, **Penistone**, 1400.
- Tuesday 24. English Regional Transport Association AGM, Online (**Zoom**), 1400
- Saturday 28. English Regional Transport Association London Forum, Online (**Zoom**), 1400

Further Ahead

- 5 December. Rf East Anglia, Cambridge.
- 9 December. Community Rail Awards, now **Online**, 1900.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributing organization, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

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