

railwatch

THE INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL

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Train travel is tough with a buggy: Page 2

There is nothing better than a relaxing journey by train.

But for Hackney GP Dr Golda Ninan, travelling by train gets tough when she takes her two-year-old son Guy with her.

Her local station, Cambridge Heath, has steep stairs which make it virtually impossible for her to take her buggy unless partner Marc is on hand to help carry Guy and the buggy.

To make life easier when travelling by train, Golda has been leaving the buggy behind and carrying Guy in a sling.

But as Guy gets older – and heavier – transporting him in a sling is becoming impractical.

The family still use the train as often as they can and Golda travels to work in Stoke Newington every day by train.

“It’s a great service on the Overground although it was a bit of a challenge when Transport for London first took over the service. There were a lot of train cancellations. Now the service is much better.”

But travelling by train to visit friends and family is becoming more stressful.

“We regularly go to Bicester, Chippenham and Worthing by train and they all involve bad experiences. Great Western is the worst. I have had to stand up holding Guy for the entire journey to Chippenham in the gap between the carriages. Not a pleasant experience.

“And when the train ticket can cost around £100, it does not seem fair. The journey to Bicester on Chiltern is not much better. The



UPHILL STRUGGLE: The stairs at Cambridge Heath station are a big stretch for a little girl, especially when Dad has a bike too

Picture: RAY KING

in the ordinary carriages. I feel the least they could have done would be to open up first class.”

Given the chance, Golda would travel by train much more often but she added: “I have obsessed and fumed about train travel.

“The accessibility of public transport for the young is key in engaging their interest and investment (emotionally, not just financially) in public transport for the future – otherwise they are going to turn to other modes of transport.

“Also, my personal view is that climate change is the key looming disaster for us all. Better, more accessible public transport is key to getting people out of cars.

“I know many people with young kids who use cars because they cannot bear the difficulties of a child on public transport.”

Golda’s local rail users group is campaigning for lifts to be installed at Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations.

Lifts are often seen as an issue mainly for disabled people but making stations accessible benefits everyone, especially people with luggage or bikes, older people and children.

Considering the enormous amounts of public money spent on the railways, the network should not just be for able-bodied young people. It should be available for everyone.

Golda added: “We choose not to have a car so are dependent on public transport but I am now considering getting a car, just because of the difficulties of taking Guy on the train.”

train is nearly always crowded with people going shopping at Bicester Village and it would be almost impossible to find space for a buggy if I had it with me.

“Although Southern has been attracting a lot of complaints recently, the journey to Worthing is actually easier. For one thing, the trains are not so crowded and

that is important when you are travelling with children.”

She added: “I have often wondered why trains don’t open up their first class carriages when something has gone wrong – say when I got the three-hour delayed Great Western train back from Chippenham to London. They squashed all us commoners

Chair’s column: People with skills needed to help Railfuture

Railfuture recently received a donation from the National Council on Inland Transport, which was winding up because its membership had declined.

We offered a year’s complementary membership of Railfuture to its remaining members. However NCIT offers an object lesson in what will happen to Railfuture if we do not change to attract a wider range of potential members and to campaign more actively.

Last year the Railfuture board agreed a new strategy to make Railfuture a more effective campaigning organisation, by ensuring that we prioritise and focus on initiatives which are realistic and achievable. The first step was to allocate each director a portfolio of specific responsibilities. Each of our specialist groups – Passenger, Infrastructure & Networks,



Railfuture chair Chris Page

Freight, Communications, Finance & IT, Governance, Membership, and European Passenger Group – is now represented by a director.

This year we have created terms of reference for each group, defining the key tasks that they need to perform. For Passenger Group these include defining policy, coordinating

responses to consultations by our train operating company liaison officers, and campaigning on the key national topics identified in the Annual Review, namely Fares and Ticketing and ‘Passenger First’.

The new Membership Group has the particularly important remit of changing Railfuture so that it is attractive to a wider range of potential members.

This will require us to buy some external expertise, which will include creating a much stronger social media presence to create a parallel ‘virtual branch’ of online members and supporters. The new European Passenger Group is focusing on tickets, services and connections for travel between the UK and other European countries. To be effective, each group must have members with the skills and

expertise needed to fulfil its responsibilities. These include expert knowledge of their key campaign topics, the ability to research for evidence, the ability to write concisely, the ability to represent Railfuture in a professional way, the ability to work as part of a team, contacts with the rail industry, and specialist skills such as finance or information technology. Obviously group members will not each have all these skills, but they will each be expected to take a specific role and to contribute to the key tasks of the group.

We wish to increase the diversity and expertise of each group, so if you are a Railfuture member and feel that you can bring something extra to one of our groups, please let me know.

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Generating Reasons to Inhibit Projects

Railfuture campaigners with good ideas for improving the railway have for years had the wind taken out of their sails by the GRIP system.

GRIP is Network Rail’s Governance for Railway Investment Projects, formerly called the Guide to Rail Investment Projects.

Sadly GRIP sometimes proves an insurmountable hurdle which prevents good schemes going ahead and, even at its best, introduces delays.

Officials say schemes have to be subjected to the GRIP process to ensure that public money is not wasted.

Campaigners say large amounts of public money are wasted by subjecting schemes to expensive scrutiny.

Here CHRIS AUSTIN examines the steely grip of GRIP, arguing that its principles are right.

But he believes that the process is not working properly and is actually jeopardising many new station projects.

He also considers the introduction of the Government’s new way of assessing rail projects – informally dubbed the pipeline.



Main picture: RAY KING

CROSSRAIL NEARS COMPLETION: A new Elizabeth Line train under test near the new Custom House Crossrail station in east London in April with road-rail construction vehicles in the background. Crossrail was approved in 2007 before the GRIP process was introduced. With a £14.8 billion budget, it is said to be Europe’s largest infrastructure construction project

Funding

One of the principal benefits of privatisation was the financial freedom it gave to break away from annual funding limits and constant changes resulting from the restrictions of public sector funding.

So, the five year control period set up for Network Rail was one of the real benefits, particularly as the Regulator, and then the Office for Road and Rail, set spending at a level that was needed, rather than one the Treasury wanted.

Enhancements

The next step, outlined in a Government consultation paper in March, is the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline, which for England and Wales moves away from a five year cycle and on to a continuous pipeline of enhancement projects, not limited to a five year period.

Enhancement projects funded by third parties are the subject of separate Market-Led Proposals Guidance (on which I will report in a later issue).

The proposals stem from the review of Network Rail undertaken by Dame Colette Bowe in 2015.

In practical terms, they add a series of tests for enhancement projects with gateway decision points to decide whether or not to proceed. They are described as “Determine, Develop, Design”

and, after approval, “Deliver and Deploy.”

GRIP

There is some overlap with Network Rail’s Governance for Railway Investment Projects, which was introduced to provide a rigorous assessment method to ensure both value for money and to provide some idea of scheme priority.

The GRIP process has eight stages, starting with “defining the outputs.” Only at stage 4 do you reach a single proposal for development.

The process is designed to minimise risks, and includes four review stages to ensure that projects remain viable.

Many major projects, such as the Reading flyover and re-signalling, have been completed on time and within budget, but there are also a number of cases where the process has not been able to prevent the project going disastrously wrong, both for small and large projects.

Small scheme

Marsh Barton station in Devon on the main line between Exeter and Newton Abbot will serve a busy business and retail park of 6,000 people, planned to rise to 8,000, and will encourage modal

shift from car to rail in a part of Exeter that is a perpetual traffic jam. But its costs have risen from a £4.2 million estimate in 2014 to £13 million today, and the funding gap prevents work starting on a station originally planned to open in 2016.

The reasons for the cost escalation are unconfirmed but are thought to relate to an altered specification requiring wider platforms, longer ramps and more extensive piling (the clue is in the station name!) with longer possessions than originally thought.

These things should have been revealed by the GRIP process, which for some reason failed in this case. The costs of other new station schemes have also risen, driven by a changed specification, in some cases associated with the need to alter signalling to accommodate the station.

Major project

If it can fail for a small project, little wonder that it proved inadequate for a major project like Great Western electrification, where the plans are highly complex, linked to procurement of new rolling stock of innovative design, and where Network Rail was under pressure from Government, train operators and

stakeholders to deliver and to expand the scope of the project.

Add the fundamental organisational changes within NR that have taken place during this period, the fact that every aspect including project management is fragmented through contracting out, as well as the problems that arise from a stop-go policy on electrification over many years, and it is perhaps inevitable that things did not go as originally planned.

Underlying all this is the requirement for more enhancements than there are the resources (financial and human) to deliver, and it is hard to see how the original aspirations can be met.

It is frustrating, but the new procedures are inevitably going to extend the planning time for projects, with no guarantees that they will resolve the basic problem of poor specification by project sponsors or the limited resources available to Network Rail.

For Railfuture, we will have to be looking for the smart projects that are worth doing, but can be carried out with modest resources, or by an agency other than Network Rail.

Above all, we are going to require a great deal of patience! There is no silver bullet to fix this one.

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■ ■ 'Inter-City Kitty' needs beefing up

Railfuture East Midlands' key campaign for this year is for improved services on the line from Derby to Crewe, which we have nicknamed the Inter-City Kitty (it should be a lion). An hourly single-coach class 153 unit is inadequate for a service linking the major cities of Derby and Stoke, and interchanges of the importance of Crewe and Derby. The line offers great potential for high-quality inter-regional services to north-west England, for example from Nottingham to Liverpool, Chester or Manchester Airport. We have commissioned artwork as a focus for the campaign and are planning a launch event in Derby, to be held after the £200 million project to upgrade signalling and track layout there is completed.

■ ■ TV boost for Leicester-Burton line

Railfuture East Midlands chair Ariadne Tampion was interviewed for the BBC East Midlands TV *Inside Out* programme about the Leicester-Burton line which was broadcast in February. The programme was a boost for the campaign to reopen the line, which is important for connections to Leicester and also to Birmingham via Burton.

■ ■ Rail (and less road) needed for future

Railfuture East Midlands has called for more emphasis on improving the rail infrastructure in our response to the draft strategic growth plan from Leicestershire County Council. Currently the strategy is focused on road-building, in particular a new "A46 Expressway" around the east and south sides of Leicester to enable major new housing and industry developments. We want to see greater capacity for both freight and passenger trains, new stations, in particular at Blaby, Croft and Elmesthorpe on the Leicester-Nuneaton line within the proposed A46 Growth Corridor, and at Castle Donington, which would support a proposed Northern Gateway development. We also called for reopening the National Forest Line from Leicester to Burton-upon-Trent which is not even mentioned in the draft strategy! We have opposed development in areas such as Lutterworth which currently have only road access, but would be happy for development to proceed if a rail connection was reinstated. Coincidentally, developer DB Symmetry has revealed plans for a huge industrial complex, including a rail freight terminal on land between the M69 and the Leicester-Nuneaton line to the north-east of Hinckley. There would be vast warehousing, and a rail terminal to cope with 800-metre-long trains.

■ ■ Leicester to Coventry

Midlands Connect has started advocating strongly for a direct Leicester-Coventry service, improvements for which we at Railfuture East Midlands are already campaigning. The existing rail journey can take up to 65 minutes with a change at Nuneaton, whereas a direct service would cut the time to 40 minutes. It would require major works, probably a Nuneaton dive-under, estimated to cost £50 million. Trains could even bypass Nuneaton station to achieve faster timings.

■ ■ East Midlands Parkway

Railfuture East Midlands vice-chair Terry Holt has learnt from East Midlands Trains that the true footfall figure for East Midlands Parkway for the 12 months ending September 2017 was 498,000, including passengers travelling

on Megabus tickets. This is at least 50% higher than the Department for Transport figure. This is crucial because inaccurate DfT figures affect the benefit-cost analysis used to decide investment priorities. The figure was achieved despite timetable limitations, disruptive roadworks in the area which have a significant effect on a parkway station relying on road access, and the lack of local bus routes to the station.

■ ■ Branch AGM

The guest speaker at Railfuture East Midlands AGM on 24 March was Andrew Pritchard, whose roles include director of policy and infrastructure at East Midlands Councils. He spoke about priorities for improving the region's passenger services and the prospects for economic growth associated with High Speed 2, including around the proposed Staveley maintenance depot near Chesterfield as well as the Toton hub and regional rail freight.

■ ■ MP speaks up for Kettering rail users

Kettering MP Philip Hollobone spoke in a Westminster Hall debate to put forward the various demands of Kettering Rail Users, including restoration of a half-hourly service northward along the Midland main line to give the town the connectivity it needs, and also improving connections from Corby. He also raised the issue of fares. The off-peak London return from Kettering is £48.50, whereas from Rugby or Peterborough, both further from London, it is under £30.

■ ■ Double track restored to Corby

The restoration of double track on the Kettering-Corby line was completed in February, together with works to strengthen bridges and viaducts, lay cabling and install signalling, install drainage and stabilise embankments, ahead of electrification which should be completed by 2020.

■ ■ CP6

Network Rail's control period 6 (2019-24) includes upgrades costing over £16 million each on Nottingham-Newark and Nottingham-Chesterfield lines.

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■ ■ Railfuture reply to Cambridge study

Network Rail has been commissioned by the Government as part of the Chancellor's 2017 autumn Budget to develop the East Anglian network east of Cambridge with emphasis on improving connections to Ipswich and Norwich, to integrate with East West Rail developments. We met Network Rail officials to promote our proposals. Network Rail is expected to report to the Chancellor soon.

■ ■ Needham Market access battle

Campaigners calling for improved access at Needham Market station took their fight to Westminster in April, delivering a petition calling for Government funding to improve access. Jen Overett, who organised the 1,400 signature petition, said: "The access arrangements at Needham Market station are woefully inadequate and deter many residents from even using the trains." The campaigners are hoping to win an *Access for All* grant to fund alterations, which could include the installation of a lift or slope. Town councillor Terence Carter

Twitter: @railwatch



Picture: BURY FREE PRESS

ACCESS PLEA: Jo Churchill MP, Jen Overett, Needham Town Councillor Terence Carter, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and Needham District Councillor Wendy Marchant

said: "The 49 steep steps to access the Ipswich-bound platform are not only prohibitive for wheelchairs. It is a physical challenge for passengers with limited mobility, buggies, small children, bikes or heavy luggage too."

■ ■ Railfuture promotes the cause

Railfuture East Anglia provides speakers to various organisations in the region. We addressed the Norfolk Railway Society in April. Railfuture's Ian Couzens also presented our submission to the Norwich area transport plan to members of South Norfolk District Council. This included making the case for new stations serving developments such as Long Stratton.

■ ■ Value of Wisbech central station

Following our representations to the Wisbech access strategy consultation, that suggested cutting the railway formation on the approach to the town centre, it appears there has been a change of mind by the councils concerned. The near town centre site for the station suggested in previous studies was to have been abandoned for a station south of the A47 bypass two miles out of town. We reminded the planners that the importance of stations has been recognised in the Government's housing White Paper which cites "railway stations as key anchors for the next generation of urban housing developments." The local plan has allocated 3,550 new homes to Wisbech bringing the population of the town up to 46,000. The White Paper said: "As the UK's population grows and urbanisation continues apace, stations are the epicentre of growth and regeneration and are destinations in their own right for shopping, working and socialising."

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Wisbech

■ ■ Rail response to snow

Railfuture East Anglia sent a letter to Network Rail, Greater Anglia and ORR, highlighting shortcomings in the rail industry's response to the snow in late February. We called for better preparation, trains to be kept running and better information. Network Rail is carrying out a review and thanked us for the comments. NR excused the branch line closures because it allowed staff to focus on 43 key main line locations. An inaccurate forecast was followed by snow affecting services for three days.

■ ■ Promoting the pluses of PlusBus

Railfuture's recent report *Seamless Public Transport in East Anglia* highlights the value of PlusBus, the add-on to rail tickets which allows rail passengers to use buses with their rail ticket. Railfuture is liaising with Journey Solutions Partnership travel, which administers PlusBus, to promote the idea. Please contact Trevor Garrod if you can give examples of good or bad practice: trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk
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Fares and ticketing up for review

Railfuture's passenger group wants to see changes to how rail fares are assessed to meet the needs of the travelling public.

To this end the group has set out three campaign aims for fares and ticketing: Value for money, clarity of fares, and the effectiveness of "smart" payment.

These accord with recent research by the multinational accountancy and consultancy company KPMG (▼), which was published by the Rail Delivery Group, on what passengers think when they buy a train ticket.

Fewer than one in three passengers are confident they have purchased the best value when buying a ticket, and an even smaller number (29%) expressed satisfaction with their ticket buying experience.

Railfuture's passenger group is planning to produce a fares and ticketing strategy to encourage rail companies to make fares clearer, especially for infrequent rail users, and to help rail users find the best way to buy a ticket.

Allison Cosgrove, passenger group chair, said: "We are committed to trying to make the ticket buying process more open and understandable.

"It is shocking that so many people do not believe they are getting value for money. People must feel that they are getting the best deal possible."

The passenger group is also encouraging all members to participate individually in the national consultation on fares which began on 4 June. The public consultation lasts until September.

You can register to take part at www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/fares

The current fares system dates back to the 1990s when the railways were privatised by John Major's government.

One problem now facing the Rail Delivery Group, which represents the private train operators, will be how to reconcile the problem of specifying how peak



SENIOR: One of the longest journeys on the Scottish rail network. Leave Newcraighall at 07.42 and arrive at Thurso at 17.55. Cost: £46.55. Stunning views no extra

fare rates apply to a train which is off-peak for part of its journey.

Increasingly people are using home computers and mobile phones to buy tickets. A rise in part-time and freelance work patterns has undermined season ticket revenue. But there is widespread suspicion that the review will make matters worse for passengers, who have seen average rail fares rise by more than inflation for years.

The long-standing impressive growth in number of rail passengers has stalled in some areas, which has been partly attributed to continually rising fares.

Mick Cash, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, said: "No one trusts private rail firms to do the right thing by passengers." Anthony Smith, chief executive of the passenger watchdog Transport Focus, which is backing the review, said: "Rail passengers want a fares system they can trust, that is simpler, offers better value for money and is more understandable. Opening the debate on reform is overdue." According



Picture: RAY KING

QUEUE HERE: Not enough ticket machines at London's Victoria station in May. A station staff member who was asked about the problem said: "Yeah, it's rubbish isn't it?"

to a 2018 report, *Tomorrow's passengers: understanding how to make rail travel more attractive to infrequent and non-users*, published by Transport Focus, almost 40% of people who never or rarely travel by train state that the cost is the main reason.

Janet Cooke, chief executive of London TravelWatch said: "We have been lobbying for simpler fares for many years. Rail passengers continue to pay fares that increase annually faster than their incomes. The least they deserve is a fairer system."

People who research their own rail journeys realise that station ticket machines are useful for picking up pre-booked tickets, but can be a financial disaster for people who buy their tickets on the day of travel. Several phone apps offer ways to reduce fares

by legal "dodges" such as split ticketing. One of the ways fares could be reduced for regular users is to introduce a national rail card.

In 2003 Railfuture commissioned research showing how a national rail card could increase both patronage and revenue.

Demand for a new under-30 railcard was so strong it crashed the railcard website the day it went on sale in March. All 10,000 cards quickly sold out. Proof of the demand for cheaper tickets for young people.

▼ KPMG was criticised by a House of Commons committee headed by Frank Field and Rachel Reeves. The committee said KPMG which signed off Carillion's accounts was "complicit" in its January collapse. Carillion had many rail contracts.

A cheap day return to confusion

By Graham Morrison
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There is much discussion about the complexity of the current fare system, which tends to concentrate on longer and more complex journeys. I have been struck by the lack of transparency about fares on even simple return journeys, and was moved to start researching some examples, using official websites and a little bit of help from a friendly ticket clerk. For simplicity I have ignored the impact of railcards and cheaper weekend only tickets.

There is competition for passengers between London and Cambridge, and with Greater Anglia trying to increase its share of the market on the Liverpool Street route its fares are usually cheaper than the King's Cross route.

For a day trip to Cambridge the straightforward return fares are £37/£36.80 peak (via King's Cross) and £25.40/£19 off-peak (Liverpool Street). Interestingly, on some websites the fare on the semi-fast trains now diverted from King's Cross to St Pancras is quoted as £39 peak and £27.40 off-peak. That seems to be an error, as

the Thameslink site shows the same fare as for King's Cross.

Greater Anglia offers Advance single tickets as low as £7 each way, which can be available in peak times – but advance planning and careful assessment of the risks is required.

Many people who live or work in London already have a return ticket that includes travel in zones 1-6. They can buy an add-on to Cambridge for £30.60 peak and £24.50 off-peak. Those rates are not advertised online and can be obtained only at staffed ticket offices.

As many readers will know, these tickets have the advantage that they are valid on trains that do not stop at a boundary station. But the sharp-eyed will have noticed that the off-peak rate is actually higher than the fare from Liverpool Street on Greater Anglia services. Since all Cambridge services on that line call at Tottenham Hale, if using that line you'd think it would be cheaper to buy an off peak return from Tottenham Hale – but it costs £22.40 – more than the ticket from the terminus at Liverpool Street at £19.

Straightforward, is it not?

◆◆◆◆ Algeria inaugurated a new 10 kilometre £200 million tram line in March in Ouargla

Scotland 'will get the best' from its railway

By Lloyd Butler

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Alex Hynes told the Railfuture AGM on 12 May that he planned to give Scots the best railway they had ever had.

Mr Hynes, managing director of both ScotRail and Network Rail Scotland said integration of track and trains would play a key role in reaching his target.

Mr Hynes was speaking at the AGM, held at the Macdonald Holyrood Hotel in Edinburgh.

He highlighted how severe weather in March (dubbed the Beast from the East) proved the advantages of having single control – command and control joined up and integrated.

As a result, Scottish passengers fared better than the customers of some train operators in England.

He also said there were far more people who want to use the railway but the lack of capacity prevents them.

If you cannot run more trains, then you must have more carriages, so ScotRail was increasing its train stock by 25%. John Finnie, the Green Party MSP for the Highlands and Islands, also backed a more positive approach



A Norman McNab picture used on a postcard which was given away free to passengers on the West Highland line. The Friends are trying to persuade Abellio to continue with the initiative. A Glasgow-Oban train near Inverhaggerie crossing, Strath Fillan

to rail, criticising the franchise system by saying companies had a legal duty to their shareholders, whereas the only shareholder on the railway was the public. He felt it important to shift the emphasis from road spending to rail, saying that £60 billion was committed to improving roads between Stirling, Inverness

and Perth, while the railway remained single track in places. He also asked for rail connections when new factories are built, saying "no-one would suggest you build a factory but not build a road to it."

He criticised the suggestion that airport tax should be reduced, reminding members that there is

no VAT or fuel duty on air travel.

The session ended with a display of stunning photographs from Norman McNab of Friends of the West Highland Line.

Fraser McDonald said the Friends were formed when the Serpell Report suggested cutting both Oban and Mallaig lines back to Crianlarich and they work to ensure passengers can continue to enjoy the spectacular scenery on the line.

In the business session after lunch, Ian Brown was returned to the Railfuture board after a one year absence, along with Wendy Thorne and Chris Page, re-elected for three years, and Stewart Palmer, who will serve a two-year spell.

The AGM voted to give the Railfuture board the power to create new membership types and reduce fees if necessary.

As a result, the Railfuture board agreed on 2 June to reduce the membership rate for individual members from £21 to £18.

A motion on Railfuture's European passenger group was passed with an amendment. More information at www.railfuture.org.uk

© Picture: NORMAN McNAB

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■ ■ Railfuture under scrutiny in Sussex

Railfuture's campaign to reinstate the Uckfield-Lewes line has attracted attention from key stakeholders. We were called before Lewes District Council's scrutiny committee. Our presentation can be seen on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/Uckfield+Lewes

We believe some of Brighton's 30,000 needed homes could be located so as to support the case for a Brighton-Lewes-Uckfield link.

■ ■ Railfuture Light

Three light rail experts addressed our branch AGM. There were presentations by KenEx Thames Transit which aims to connect Dartford, Gravesend and Grays, and on the Cambridge Connect ideas. The third speaker was from UK Tram which represents tram operators, promoters, manufacturers, contractors and consultants. The links and presentations can be seen at www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East

■ ■ Goodbye Angel Road?



The Railfuture-backed STAR project (Stratford-Tottenham Hale-Angel Road) entails the replacement of Angel Road station on the West Anglia main line. Work has already started on the new station serving Meridian Water which is planned to open

next May, but unless Angel Road is formally closed some trains will have to continue to call there instead, diluting the new service. Railfuture believes retention of London's least-used station makes no sense so will support its closure. The Lea Valley Rail Programme can be seen in www.railfuture.org.uk/CLUA-Introduction

■ ■ Railfuture supports heritage line

Network Rail chairman Sir Peter Hendy oversaw the linking of the Rother Valley Railway to the National Rail network at Robertsbridge in late 2016. Now the heritage line is applying to the Department for Transport for powers to build a new railway between Bodiam and Robertsbridge Junction. This will join up with the Kent and East Sussex Railway between Bodiam and Tenterden. Railfuture is lending support to RVR Ltd's proposal.

■ ■ Campaigns 2018-19

Each division in Railfuture London & South East will run a specific campaign in the coming year, following a decision by the branch AGM:

- Eastern – shaping the new rail strategy by Essex County Council
- Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire – improving the Midland main line timetable and new franchise
- Kent – promoting Hoo Peninsula passenger railway, to support new housing
- London Metro – West London line service frequency (Hounslow-Hampstead/Hendon)
- Surrey – Gatwick-Oxford services via the North Downs line using tri-mode trains
- Sussex & Coastway – further developing MarshLink/East Coastway services

www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East
Twitter: @RailfutureLSE

◆◆◆ You can join the Railfuture lottery at www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery

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■ ■ Challenging view of rail reopenings

Railfuture Scotland's AGM heard editor of *Rail Engineer* and long-time railwayman David Shirres speak on line reopenings, where he confirmed the suspicions of many members by stating: "The Authorities are totally opposed to expanding the rail network and only do so when community action results in strong political support." In Scotland he considered only Levenmouth to be a soundly based prospect, based upon population and economic deprivation. He considered many other campaigns throughout the UK to be total non-starters, claiming that the sheer number of reopening campaigns actually harms the chances of the "very few" good ones. Railfuture Scotland takes issue with this assertion, noting that the successful Scottish campaigns such as those for the Borders, Airdrie-Bathgate, Larkhall and Alloa lines, were opposed and ridiculed by the transport authorities. They are now fulfilling essential roles. But perhaps Mr Shirres was trying to let us down gently, observing that big road projects seem to sail through the appraisal process that trips up so many rail schemes. He even admitted that the appraisal for the dualling of the £2 billion A9 road to Inverness included a significant monetary value benefit assigned to "reducing motorists' frustration". With the well-known willingness of motorists to switch to trains, we are certain that this innovative idea could be used in rail appraisals too!

■ ■ Greens win £2m for rail development

In return for supporting the Scottish Government's budget, Green MSPs negotiated £2 million for this financial year to assist local rail campaigns with the expensive appraisal process. Among contenders are the campaigns to reopen Newburgh station, to extend passenger services from Alloa to Kincardine and Dunfermline, and for a new St Andrews line. The University of St Andrews Playfair Consultancy has also produced a business case for a St Andrews line which shows strong support from the student population, most of whom make frequent journeys to Edinburgh, and also from most businesses. The conclusion was that previous estimates of passenger numbers were very conservative and that many more passengers would use trains to and from the "Home of Golf".

■ ■ Give Bonnybridge its railway back

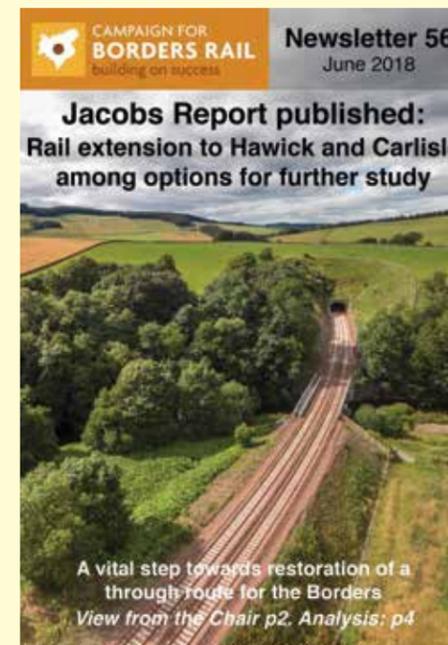
Between 1832 and 1967 the small town of Bonnybridge had four railway stations. Now it has none. In 2015 a campaign to reopen one re-activated, with useful discussions with Falkirk Council. There is a ready market for reopening. Railfuture Scotland's Roddy McDougall has shown from the last census data that a large number of Bonnybridge residents commute by car to towns with a railway, and a Bonnybridge station would make commuting to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Perth much easier.

■ ■ Give RAGES their two stations

A petition has been raised to get the long-promised East Linton and Reston stations to open in Network Rail's control period 6, which begins next year. A member of Rail Action East of Scotland started the petition, which has 3,000 signatures so far. RAGES hopes to meet Transport Minister Humza Yousaf to press him on this matter.

■ ■ Better links to Carstairs needed

Clydesdale Rail User Group is pressing for an



Membership of the Campaign for Borders Rail has grown to 1,240, and there are plans to advertise in major newspapers to recruit more. The campaign is arguing for the Borders line to be extended to Hawick and Carlisle. Campaigners have met MPs John Stevenson and John Lamont. A transport corridors study by consultant Jacobs UK assessing the viability of extending the 30-mile track by almost 70 miles into England was published in April. Now extending the line will be examined among 21 road, rail and other transport options

appraisal for reopening two former West Coast main line stations at Law and Symington. The immediate priority is to introduce Sunday trains to Carstairs, one of the few stations with only a six-day service, to obtain the full benefit from the reinstated service to Edinburgh. There is also pressure to rectify the nonsensical situation where the train to Hamilton leaves a minute before the one from Clydesdale arrives, meaning a long wait for a connection.

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St Andrews Rail Link campaign:
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Capital Rail Action Group:
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Newburgh Train Station campaign:
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Bonnybridge Railway Campaign:
<http://bonnybridgerailway.scot>
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Thornhill Station Action Group:
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www.thornhillstation.co.uk/

Campaign for Borders Rail:
<http://www.campaignforbordersrail.org/>

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Our growing railway

Britain's Growing Railway is a fine book which details new and reopened stations and lines across the country. It is an uplifting story of the railway getting closer to its customers.

But I could not find any mention of two significant new stations – those at Rochester (2015) and Bromsgrove (2016). Both are relocations and rebuilds, with modern standards of accessibility and passenger information. The new Rochester station is nearer the city's historic centre than the old station. The new Bromsgrove station, with two island platforms, becomes the southern terminus of the extended cross-Birmingham service to/from the Lichfield line.

And there is the Godley relocation (1986) on the Manchester-Glossop line (see *Railwatch* 129). Together, these three stations have more than two million passengers/year.

Keith Rogers, Stockport



You can join the rail knitwork

Railfuture director Wendy Thorne thought members might like to knit a steam train. A free pattern is available at www.clarescopefarrell.co.uk/knittedsteamtrain.html

Corrective action

Andrew Oldfield in *Railwatch* 155 complements *Britain's Growing Railway* as "a decent addition to the list of Railfuture publications" and refers to "omissions". Readers who know of any omissions, errors and inaccuracies, please let me know.

*Roger Blake
roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk*

Bimode appeal

In *Railwatch* 155 Graham Nalty gives an excellent rebuttal of the cancellation of the Kettering-Sheffield section of the Midland main line electrification, but there is an even stronger case when you remember that the Midland Railway also had a main line to the west of England from Derby. This route now offers a Derby-Birmingham service of four trains per hour, operated by Arriva CrossCountry. Two

of these CrossCountry trains also serve the Derby-Sheffield section of the MML on their journeys to and from the North East. Thus the Derby-Sheffield section carries four passenger trains per hour, with bimodes already promised for the London-Sheffield service. The need to provide longer trains for the frequently overcrowded CrossCountry services brings a strong case that there should be a requirement in the forthcoming renewal of the CrossCountry franchise that these should be bimode as well.

A full house of bimodes would then give a much stronger case for electrifying Derby-Sheffield, with the trains using their diesel engines on the non-electrified sections at either end until these can be electrified in their turn. Even now a Newcastle-Reading train is under the wires for 2

hours of its 4½-hour journey.

Paul Abell, Rotherham

Bimode failures

I wish I could share the enthusiasm of Trevor Garrod, in *Railwatch* 155 for bimodes. We had the class 73 as long ago as 1962, when they were called electro-diesels. They were massively underpowered when off the 3rd rail. Ending electrification short has a long and inglorious history.

Wesley Paxton BA, Annan

Electrify now

Graham Nalty rightly calls for the Midland Main Line to be electrified (*Railwatch* 155). More power to his elbow and may the wires extend beyond to Leeds via Barnsley, York via Rotherham and Manchester via

the Woodhead route. There are still glaring gaps in Scotland's electrified rail system. Glasgow Central lines to Kilmarnock and East Kilbride share some common track out of Central station. Both are operated by the ubiquitous but increasingly old Super Sprinters on these hilly, multiple stop routes. Electric class 385s would be just fine and could serve the Kilmarnock route still better if it was extended around 1.5 miles to an inviting site just beyond Bellfield roundabout.

This level, rail connected site is easily accessible by road from two sides, serving much of Kilmarnock, also Hurlford, Crookedholm and further flung hamlets. Mauchline and Cumnock await reopening. Both are on the Glasgow-Dumfries-Carlisle rail route which has seen four stations reopen since 1984. Thornhill and Eastriggs should be reopened too. This route needs a fast bi-mode train to Manchester Airport to restore direct, cross border trains.

Graham Lund, Girvan

Pathetic Stratford

There are now hardly any through trains to London (extraordinary, given the importance of Stratford-upon-Avon as a tourist destination), and it takes up to 24 minutes to travel the 19km between Stratford-upon-Avon Parkway and Warwick Parkway, a pathetic average speed of 47.5km/hr. Choice of destinations is severely limited by the continued lack of the Stratford-Honeybourne link, so it is disappointing to read in *Railwatch* 155 that Warwickshire County Council is "not interested" in reopening this short but potentially valuable missing link.

One can hardly blame motorists for voting with their wheels.

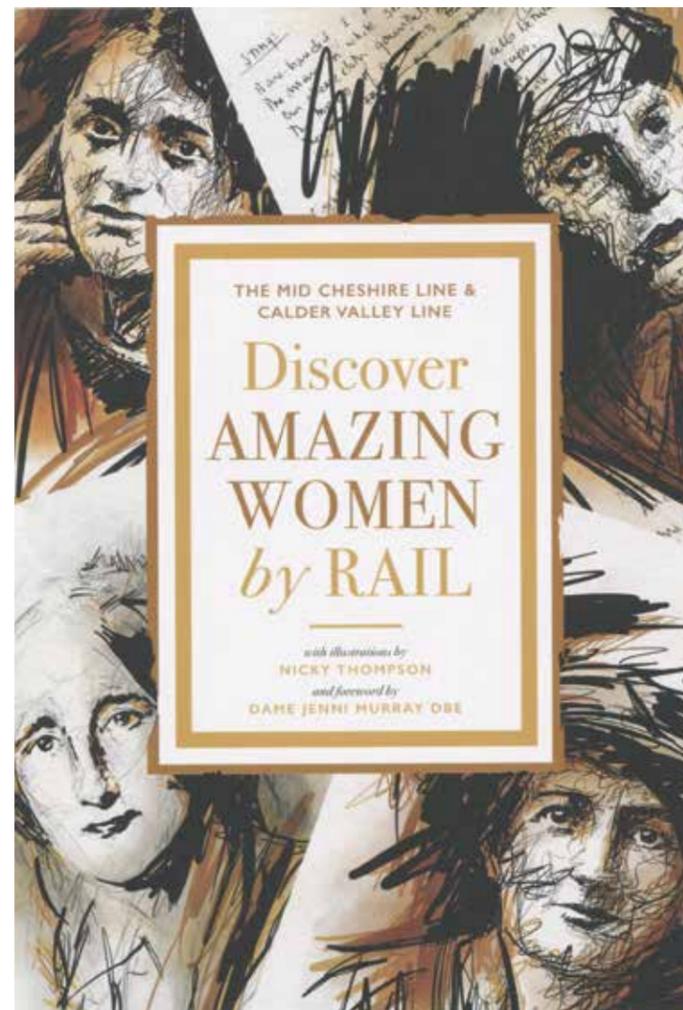
Chris Benson, Epsom

Inconvenient truth

Am I alone in noticing the shrinking number of conveniences on our trains? A recent trip to Birmingham highlighted the issue. Greater Anglia's refurbished inter-city

Send your letters and emails to:

The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
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stock has lost half its toilets, leaving only one at the shared carriage-end vestibules. The same reduction has occurred on its refurbished Class 321 units.

On transferring to Marylebone for our journey to Birmingham Moor Street, Chiltern Railways' refurbished Mark 3 coaches also appeared to be stripped of conveniences. I did not see one when leaving my seat in the second carriage all the way to the front of the train on arrival.

Furthermore, we still seem to be charged for using the facilities at Marylebone and Liverpool Street. On a journey back south

from Edinburgh on the Highland Chieftain, one of the First Class vestibule toilets was locked out of order, meaning there was an almost constant queue of people waiting to use the remaining WC.

Lloyd Butler, Suffolk

Leicester-Coventry

I used to live in Atherstone, going to college at Nuneaton and then to the polytechnic at Coventry. So I was interested to read in *Railwatch* 155 of a proposed direct service from Leicester to Coventry. However, I just don't believe that

Chance to win a RUG award

It is time to think about nominating your suggestions for this year's Rail User Group Awards. The deadline is Saturday 1 September. The categories are: 1 Best website, 2 Best social media promotion, 3 Best newsletter, 4 Best new group, the Oliver Lovell Award, 5 Best campaign, 6 Best campaigner, the Clara Zilahi Award [Railfuture members only], 7 Judges' Special Award. The seventh annual RUG Awards will be presented at our autumn conference in Reading on Saturday 10 November. Award winners receive next year's Railfuture membership subscription free. Full details in Rail User Express at www.railfuture.org.uk/Rail+User+Express and on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+awards

Northern connections

This is the front cover of a new booklet designed to explore the history of some remarkable women – and to stimulate tourism by rail.

The booklet highlights the sometimes hidden histories of remarkable women from Chester, Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham, Stockport, Manchester, Rochdale, Hebden Bridge, Halifax, Bradford, Leeds, Burnley and Blackburn. The 40-page booklet shows how you can travel by rail to discover more about 32 inspirational women.

Historian Richard Lyons, a Railfuture member, joined forces with Alice Mannion of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships to produce short biographies, suggested itineraries and travel tips. Nicky Thompson produced

the artwork. Radio 4's Dame Jenni Murray wrote the welcome page for the booklet, which includes famous women such as the Bronte sisters, novelists Elizabeth Gaskell and Sylvia Plath, Channel swimmer Sunny Lowry, suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, singers Kathleen Ferrier and Gracie Fields, and less well-known women such as engineer Laura Annie Willson, diarist Anne Lister and embroiderer Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth. One of the key people in the revival of rail's fortunes, Barbara Castle who became MP for Blackburn, the minister of transport who accepted the idea of the social railway. The booklet was launched at Elizabeth Gaskell's house in Plymouth Grove, Manchester. It can be downloaded from the website amazingwomenbyrail.org.uk

£51 million of works will be needed at Nuneaton to enable this to go ahead. Surely trains can simply go into Trent Valley station, then back out again the same way?

Tim Mickleburgh, Grimsby

connection to the Great Western main line near Acton Main Line station. How do we get someone important interested?

Chris Read, Milton Keynes

Pressure on MPs

I sympathise with colleagues in Devon at the in-action in getting the rail route from Okehampton to Bere Alston via Tavistock re-instated. I lived in Tavistock for a number of years and have family still in the area. One way of campaigning would be to lobby every surgery that Devon MPs hold until a firm plan is fully funded and a start date announced.

MPs do not like pressure but they will respond quicker.

Geoffrey Heathcock BEM JP, Cambridge

Bad Schandau

The 8km long metre-gauge tramway from Bad Schandau does not go to Sebnitz, as stated in *Railwatch* 155. It goes from Bad Schandau to Lichtenhainer Wassenfall and was opened in 1898 to transport tourists to the waterfall and the inn.

Martin Smith, Abingdon

Heathrow link

Why isn't there a direct service to Heathrow from the WCML? The route actually exists. At Harlesden there is a single track link which I understand is cleared for use by passenger services on diversions and which then has a direct

Power source

The excellent article on alternative power sources for electric traction in the absence of a firm commitment to rail electrification reminded me of another power source the UK government is evaluating. That is the use of Small Modular Reactors. Their potential for rail applications could include providing power to recharge battery-powered trains or hydrolysis for hydrogen-powered units, desalination and of course as a supply of current to overhead and third rail as and when routes become electrified.

Laurence Fryer, Stoke Newington

Contact details

Railwatch has excluded contact details of letter writers in this issue. In future, when letters are received, the editor will assume that postal and email addresses can be published unless specifically asked to exclude them.

Railwatch welcomes articles and pictures from rail users and rail user groups

Send your material to: The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
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Please use email if possible but include your postal address

Tapping into the potential of heritage railways for commuter travel

By Chris Austin

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A quiet revolution has been taking place over the past five years. The national rail network is expanding by starting to use the potential of heritage railways.

Trains are already working from the national network on to steam lines – and there are more to come.

Heritage lines have also become major tourist attractions in their own right.

World leader is the North Yorkshire Moors Railway with around 350,000 passengers a year.

Other railways also attract hundreds of thousands of visitors, such as the Severn Valley (240,000) and the West Somerset (180,000).

The Bluebell Railway in East Sussex was the first standard gauge privately owned railway to be run by volunteers, and will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary in two years time.

Of the 140 heritage railways and railway museum sites in Britain, 53 provide a standard gauge link between communities.

The untiring work of volunteers over half a century has ensured their survival.

Some lines still serve major towns, notably the East Lancashire Railway where the combined population of Ramsbottom and Rawtenstall is 38,000, or Dereham on the Mid Norfolk with a population of 19,000.

But the business models for local railways and heritage railways are quite different.

Local railways generally provide a service from 06.00 to 23.00, 363 days a year at fares comparable to the bus (or sometimes cheaper), using paid staff, and are heavily controlled and regulated through the franchise agreement or their licence. The gap between costs and revenue is funded by the Government through the franchise agreement.

By contrast, heritage railways are seasonal, running perhaps 240 days a year, typically between the hours of 10.00 and 18.00 and largely dependent on unpaid volunteers. They charge premium fares because the cost of running steam locomotives is very high and, while safety is regulated by the Office of Rail and Road, the timetable is at the discretion of the railway. Trains are slow, with a 25 mph speed limit. No public subsidy is paid to them.

On privatisation back in the 1990s, the idea of using any heritage line as part of the national network would have been laughed at, but since then five



Picture: GORDON A

MAKING THE CONNECTION AT OKEHAMPTON: A Pacer from Exeter, left, alongside a preserved former Hampshire unit (nicknamed Thumper) which is bound for Meldon



heritage lines have developed through services.

Today's standards are more rigorous. Main line certification of rolling stock is required even for the mile or so required to reach Wareham, and there is no low cost way of upgrading 60-year-old diesel multiple units. Swanage Railway has done a deal with South Western Trains to provide a Wareham-Corfe Castle shuttle service on summer Saturdays, which is a good starting point, but it has a big role to play in encouraging visitors to the resort and in relieving the chronic congestion on the A351 as well as providing car-free access to the sensitive Isle of Purbeck. On the West Somerset Rail-

way, there is a clear opportunity for the huge numbers of visitors to the railway itself, as well as providing better access to Butlins at Minehead, where 7,000 visitors move in and out on summer changeover days, all currently by road. Most importantly, it will help to support West Somerset's ailing economy, and improve social mobility in an area ranked bottom in the national league tables. The only question is who pays for the service.

Other railways such as the Welsh Highland and the Keighley & Worth Valley are able to provide car-free access to a national park or an historic town, and offer valuable tourist transport. What prospects are there for more

broadly based public transport on these lines? So far, this has not been tried as everyone has been looking for services that can be provided without Government support, but this may be about to change.

The radical approach of Peter Wilkinson, the Department for Transport's managing director of passenger services, who is responsible for franchising, makes clear that he wants to encourage special train operation and extend franchised services to destinations off the national network.

On heritage railways, there is clearly scope for better connections and several railways such as the Bluebell, have made extraordinary efforts to link up with the national network. The Bluebell has extended its line to connect with the national network at East Grinstead.

There are other opportunities. West Midlands trains could run on to the Severn Valley to serve a new development at a former industrial site at Foley Park, and perhaps go on to Bewdley.

The Great Central might have potential once the two halves of the railway are linked at Loughborough, providing a run from Leicester to Nottingham. Both Epping-Ongar and Alton-Alresford may also have valuable public transport roles to play.

The public transport business model means that financial support would be required. It would also necessitate a different approach to the way the heritage railway is run, using more paid staff and a strengthened management team to deal with the more complex issues, particularly in relation to performance and

ticketing. What additional safety and regulatory requirements might be required? GSM radio and the standard train protection and warning system are generally not used on heritage railways, which rely on traditional safety measures and more staff on hand, to check train doors, for example.

Politically, the prospects are better now than at any time in the past. In December Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said his vision for an expanded rail network included routes such as the line to Okehampton, that are not owned by Network Rail, and on which heritage trains run.

Peter Wilkinson's approach would seem to leave the way open for services over heritage lines to be provided under sub-contract to the train operator and funded through the franchise agreement subject to the normal value-for-money criteria.

With so many links now in place, Network Rail has the expertise to deal with through services to and from heritage railways, while train operators such as Great Western have actively encouraged travel, with through tickets and leaflets encouraging visitors to use heritage railways.

Becoming a national rail operator is a major task for a heritage railway, requiring huge management effort, and it could be highly risky financially. It could change the character of the heritage railway which has been painstakingly and lovingly created over many years.

Will this deter volunteers or even put off visitors in search of the steam train experience? Who will ride on the steam train if the national rail service over the line is half the price?

Despite the pitfalls, there are a number of cases where a restored public transport service would be value for money and a real boost to the local economy.

While this is not quite "reversing Beeching", as some media commentators described the Grayling statement, there are several other cases where tourism transport could be considerably enhanced by through running, and more again where good connections are the answer.

However, the high start-up costs mean that this will work only where large numbers of people want to travel, or there is a problem such as traffic congestion which the railway can mitigate.

Running trains, even with volunteers, is not an inherently profitable business, so the key question on links is who pays for the social service element.



Inset: MRLG

Picture: RAY KING

BISHOPS LYDEARD: A preserved Great Western steam loco in 2010. INSET: An artist's impression of a possible future with a modern train in the station at Minehead

West Somerset's gateway to opportunity

By David Latimer

david.latimer@btinternet.co.uk

Ever since British Rail closed the Minehead branch line in 1971, local people have been calling for the line from Taunton to be reopened.

Shortly after closure a railway association was established by local people, one of the aims being to re-establish a rail service to Taunton.

It took years however to get a steam-operated heritage line fully operational from Minehead as far as Bishops Lydeard, six miles from Taunton.

The section of track linking Bishops Lydeard to the Great Western main line and Taunton remained for occasional excursions and periodic freight trains bringing in stone for sea-defence work.

The dream of re-linking the heritage line to the national network and running commuter services to Taunton and Bristol never died.

A number of attempts to get things moving were made over the years, to no avail.

Then in 2015 Minehead businessman Alex de Mendoza and former Cheshire Railtours proprietor David Latimer got together to form the Minehead Rail Link Group and a number of local councillors and residents quickly joined in.

The aim was to work with local authorities to extend some of GWR's Cardiff/Bristol to Taunton services over the West Somerset heritage line to Minehead.

MRLG joined Railfuture, and

was instrumental in creating *Somerset Rail Campaigners*, an alliance of the five main rail campaign groups in the county.

Informal, friendly meetings were held, without any commitments at this stage by any parties.

Following considerable media coverage and support from businesses and residents, MRLG grew and a robust management committee was formed.

Sponsorship was secured from many local firms, displays were mounted in commercial centres and leaflets distributed.

Train planning diagrams have been produced that prove there is capacity on most days to run at least seven GWR services off the main line through to Minehead, while retaining capacity for a steam train service between Minehead and Bishops Lydeard, with some adjustments to the steam timetable to allow steam and diesel trains to pass each other at passing loops on the single track line.

It is also hoped that following the appropriate agreements with the Office of Rail and Road, the customary 25 mph speed restriction applied to heritage train services could be raised on sections of the heritage railway.

"Until recently, many people did not realise we have a fully serviceable line from Minehead right into Taunton with track and signalling maintained to high standards", said Alex de Mendoza.

"It is ridiculous, in this age of worsening traffic jams and increasing awareness of green issues and inclusion, that the short section of line linking Bishops Lydeard to the main line is only used for occasional excursion trains."

MRLG realises that at present it would be impractical to extend the Minehead-Bishops Lydeard steam trains into Taunton.

But GWR trains could run to Minehead, giving West Somerset regular through trains to Taunton, Weston-super-Mare, Bristol and Cardiff.

Such a service would reduce traffic congestion and parking problems as well as giving a realistic alternative to commuters, holidaymakers and the business community.

It is also the best way to revive Minehead's holiday trade.

A report and business-case study on the commuter service potential has been produced by students from a Pennsylvania university.

MRLG is now aiming to get a full feasibility study done so they can get down to talks with all parties, including trades unions, to ensure the dream becomes reality.

The group has tremendous support from local people and business and has been encouraged by the helpful and co-operative response from all parties.

■ David Latimer is publicity officer for the Minehead Rail Link Group.

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■ ■ Ticket office surprise

Railfuture Severnside's AGM on 14 April was hosted by our affiliated group Friends of Bridgwater Station. Members arriving by train were surprised to find that the ticket office and booking hall had closed at 12.45 because of staff shortages. Great Western Railway had promised to extend opening hours from early 2017 but has yet to do so. In March FOBS wrote to the regional station manager pointing out that Bridgwater station had been under-resourced and lacked adequate ticket office facilities for many years. The town has a population of 38,000 and is the second busiest National Rail station in Somerset, yet the Department for Transport had declined funding to improve disabled access, citing "comparatively low footfall" (344,000 passenger journeys in 2016/17 according to the Office of Rail and Road) and a low priority by GWR. Railfuture was planning to raise these concerns at GWR's community rail conference in June. However in May Somerset County Council announced that £1.2 million would be spent on improving the station frontage, car park and links to buses. £800,000 of it would be funded by the DfT and the remainder by EDF Energy as part of its Hinkley Point mitigation funding.

■ ■ Hope for Minehead

Minehead Rail Link Group, which is affiliated to Railfuture, recently reported a very constructive meeting with GWR at Taunton station. Although GWR did not have sufficient rolling stock to extend any Cardiff-Taunton services to Bishop's Lydeard this year, it told MRLG that it was confident of doing so in the summer of 2019.

■ ■ Negative vibes from the National Trust

The National Trust has replied to our request (*Railwatch* 155) for nearest stations to NT properties to be listed in its handbook. The trust said the majority of its members reach its properties by car and it saved £200,000 per year in printing costs by omitting information such as access by public transport. NT did, however, send a copy of its *Getting Here* booklet which gives details of bus routes (and in most cases, railway stations) closest to its properties. The booklet is available to NT members on request.

■ ■ Positive action from English Heritage

By contrast, English Heritage continues to give details of access by rail to sites in its members' handbook and the 2018 edition is up to date with the inclusion of Hayles Abbey Halt on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway.

■ ■ Rail is answer to pollution

Railfuture's response to the Cheltenham Local Plan consultation supported the borough council's policy of safeguarding the route of the former Honeybourne line within its boundary. We said that while it would be technically feasible to reinstate a link from the GWSR heritage line along its original route (currently a cycleway) to Lansdown Junction, an alternative route from Cheltenham racecourse to the main line in the Swindon Village area should also be considered. A disturbing revelation in one of the consultation documents is that the whole of Cheltenham borough is an air quality management area because of a very high level of car commuting.

■ ■ Direct link to hospital promised

At neighbouring Gloucester, Great Western Railway has provided an additional 240

parking spaces on land adjacent to platform 4, something we had asked for in a BBC Radio Gloucestershire interview in 2014. Direct access from this platform to Great Western Road and Gloucestershire Royal Hospital will be possible when stage 2 of the work is completed this summer.

■ ■ Rail's potential for Bristol centre

Railfuture was invited by Bristol City Council to respond to its City Centre Framework consultation. This is mainly concerned with movement within a narrowly defined area which excludes Temple Meads station. Our response expressed concern at the scant mention of rail in the consultation document, which gives the impression that only buses have enjoyed a dramatic increase in use in Bristol in recent years. In fact, rail station figures reveal a rise in passenger numbers at the city's 12 stations from 4.1 million in 1997/98 to 13.2 million in 2016/17. The consultation document says that most car journeys into central Bristol originate from outside the city boundary. We have replied that rail has the most potential to achieve modal shift for these journeys and we expect to see the West of England Combined Authority make progress with MetroWest.

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Wessex

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■ ■ WoE campaign goes to Westminster

The Salisbury-Exeter Rail User Group has now taken its campaign to the House of Commons. In February, group chairman Bruce Duncan (who also chairs Railfuture Wessex) travelled to Westminster to meet a group of MPs whose constituencies adjoin the West of England line. SERUG's realistic four-point plan for the line includes: 1 Reinstatement of double track between Dinton and Tisbury. 2 A long loop east of Crewkerne. 3 A loop near Whimple. 4 The ability to split and rejoin units at Yeovil Junction. Together, these would achieve greater capacity, improved resilience, faster journey times and the opportunity for new services. Without exception, the MPs confirmed their support for the proposals. It fell to Sir Oliver Letwin MP to send a formal request to Rail Minister Jo Johnson asking him to initiate funding for a costed appraisal. A follow-up meeting at Westminster with Jo Johnson took place in May so SERUG could expand on the issues affecting the WoE line. The politicians' interest is encouraging but SERUG supporters are urged to continue lobbying MPs to make sure things start moving.

■ ■ Island Line developments

Railfuture's representative on the Isle of Wight bus and rail users' group reported back from a meeting of the Island Line stakeholder forum. South Western Railway looks set to plan for a regular 30-minute service, compared to the present service which runs at alternate intervals of 20 min and 40 min, by installing a passing loop at Brading. The group queried this on the basis that a Brading loop could not achieve the desired aim of connecting both into and out of the Portsmouth catamaran with the same train. However, the chief executive of Wightlink said he would be prepared to run catamarans at times to connect with both the trains from Waterloo and the Island Line. SWR's planning manager would like to see the loops at Sandown and Ryde St John's Road retained to allow for late running, peak periods or growth of the traffic on Island Line.

Twitter: @railwatch

However, this would affect the steam railway's plans to extend to Ryde St John's Road and have a run-round loop as there is only space to accommodate one or other loop. The heritage operator rules out track sharing because it would mean compliance with Network Rail regulations, and they say reversal at Ryde with "top and tail" locos would be too costly.

■ ■ Boxing Day services

Railfuture was among a group of stakeholders consulted as part of South Western Railway's decision-making process about running trains on Boxing Day. We have long been aware of widespread frustration among rail users over the lack of train services around Christmas time. As well as a day for visiting friends and family, Boxing Day has become a major day for shopping and attending entertainment or sporting events. In our submission we say that, if Boxing Day services are to be introduced on principal sections of the SWR network, they need to be given two or three years to bed in as there have been no such services for many years.

■ ■ Southern passengers pay high price

Rail passengers in our region deserve to see some improvements to their services, however small. New analysis by the Southern Policy Centre reveals how the burden of paying for the UK rail system falls unfairly on passengers in central southern England. Their research found that passengers are paying 16.6p per mile more than the cost of running the service, while those in northern England, Scotland and Wales are receiving subsidies of up to 40p per mile.

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West Midlands



Picture: Urban Growth Company

■ ■ Birmingham International

This is an artist's impression of what Birmingham International station could look like, once High Speed 2 is built. The Urban Growth Company – set up by Solihull Council to maximise the benefits of HS2's arrival – has been awarded £9 million to turn the station into an integrated transport exchange. The estimated cost of the entire Birmingham International station project is £286 million and the UGC hopes to secure funding to deliver the project by December 2025.

■ ■ Action group for Droitwich passengers

Droitwich Spa Town Council has backed a suggestion by Councillor Alan Humphries to set up a Droitwich Rail Users Action Group. Mike Posenby, chairman of Bromsgrove Rail User Group, said: "We welcome the creation of the group as this is a significant development for putting forward the interests of railway passengers."

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Where next with CrossCountry Trains?

By Steve Wright

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Later this year the Department for Transport is expected to start consulting the public on the future of CrossCountry Trains.

Unless the DfT decides to extend the existing franchise or make another direct award, the new XCT franchise will start towards the end of next year.

There are obvious shortcomings at present. Trains do not have enough seats, luggage or cycle space, there are insufficient four-seat bays, poor alignment of seats to windows, expensive walk-on fares, and some cities are poorly served.

Other concerns include poor refreshment facilities, smelly toilets, lack of on-the-day reservations, inadequate stakeholder involvement, and diesel trains operating under electric wires.

Railfuture submitted a comprehensive set of aspirations prior to the present arrangement, following consultation with branches, and Railfuture is now starting a similar process in advance of the DfT's stakeholder consultation.

However before deciding our aspirations for 2019 and onwards fundamental questions need to be addressed.

Currently XCT's core services are hourly expresses between Edinburgh and Plymouth – many starting and finishing in Glasgow, Manchester and Bristol – several extended to Exeter, Manchester and Bournemouth, and Newcastle and Reading – some extended to Southampton. Aberdeen, Dundee, Penzance, Paignton and Guildford have occasional extensions of one or other of these core services.

XCT also runs hourly semi-fast services between Cardiff and Nottingham and between Birmingham and Stansted Airport, and also hourly stopping services between Birmingham and Nottingham and Birmingham and Leicester.

The DfT must decide what XCT should offer in future.

Should XCT concentrate on being a quality, long distance inter-city express service, serving only the most significant conurbations?

Or should it provide a frequent inter-urban service similar to that at present?

Or should it be a combination of both? Should the local services between Birmingham and Leicester or Nottingham remain part of XCT or be allocated to a different train operator. What should be done about the semi-fast Cardiff-Nottingham and Birmingham-Stansted services?

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



Picture: RAY KING

STOPPING SERVICE: An XCT train at March, Cambridgeshire, in September last year. Could a local operator do better?

Most XCT services suffer overcrowding because at some point on their journey they are ideally timed for use by commuters.

Inter-city service

Core stops on the Plymouth to north-east England service might be Exeter, Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, with occasional stops at significant towns where demand is known to exist. Bristol to Plymouth and Penzance is wholly within GWR territory, while Leeds-Edinburgh direct is soon to be provided by 125 mph trains from Northern. The only section on this route currently served by XCT alone is between Bristol and Derby. The regular service to intermediate stations, other than Birmingham, could be provided by a different train operator.

A similar rationalisation could apply to the Reading to north-east England axis, with most trains from Bournemouth to Manchester stopping only at Southampton, Basingstoke, Reading, Oxford, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent and Stockport. A further refinement might be that each of these services alternate each hour – Plymouth-Leeds and Bournemouth-Manchester one hour, Plymouth-Manchester and Bournemouth-Leeds the next.

There might also be scope for an overnight service from the south and south-west of England to Scotland, joining or splitting at Birmingham New Street.

Inter-urban service

The present franchise provides a half-hourly frequency between Birmingham and Bristol, Manchester, Reading and Sheffield. This is a service pattern that we would want to perpetuate and if possible extend to serve major centres not well-served now, such as Cardiff, Gloucester and Liverpool, possibly with extra

trains or by splitting and combining trains.

There is almost certainly demand for an additional train per hour between Birmingham and Leeds to give a half hourly frequency. Additional and longer trains capable of 125 mph would be needed to tackle overcrowding.

If an inter-city set of services as described above were to be added to the present pattern, this might provide even better opportunities for inter-urban services to serve new destinations or existing stops more frequently.

Birmingham to Nottingham or Leicester

These services connect major Midlands cities but are more local transport in character. Instead of XCT, they could be run by East Midlands Trains or West Midlands Trains or possibly jointly under a Midlands Connect brand.

An all-stations could be provided but so too could a limited-stop express service which could even be extended to Worcester and Lincoln.

Cardiff-Nottingham Birmingham-Stansted

Suggestions for the future for these are somewhat more problematic since both are cross-regional and connect major urban centres. Neither can be regarded as inter-city standard, and demand, with some notable exceptions, is probably not great enough to justify an inter-city style service. At some stations XCT provides the only regular service.

Cardiff is poorly provided with express services beyond the Midlands. The present service is hourly but is used to serve numerous stations en route and provides for intermediate journeys rather than long distance.

A change of train is necessary for passengers wishing to go north of Derby and we have some doubt about the demand for direct journeys between Nottingham and stations south of Birmingham.

The possible exception is University and this could be provided by alternative services.

There is a strong case for direct express trains from South Wales to Birmingham and beyond. Whether these should go to Newcastle, Edinburgh or just Leeds is open to debate. Stations between Gloucester and Newport might be better served by enhancing the present services from Arriva Trains Wales while stations north of Cheltenham (including the future Worcestershire Parkway) might be best provided by West Midlands Railways.

The present hourly trains between Birmingham and Stansted provide the only service to Stamford, Oakham and Melton Mowbray, apart from one train each way between the last two and London St Pancras, and also the only service between Leicester, Peterborough and Cambridge. All these trains are local in character rather than an inter-urban express service.

This service does however provide a useful connection between Birmingham, Leicester, Peterborough, Cambridge and on to Stansted Airport.

Would a better service overall be provided if local services were run by a local operator, with a limited-stop Birmingham-East Anglia service calling only at, say, Nuneaton, Leicester and Peterborough, then splitting at Ely for Cambridge, Stansted and selected stations to Norwich?

This will be the last chance to reform XCT services for years and DfT officers recognise the current shortcomings and appear to be open to novel suggestions.

But I am Birmingham-based, and make no claim to understand the needs of all parts of such a wide-ranging operation.

Members' views on what services their local communities would benefit from would be most welcome.

Let me leave you with one final heretical thought. Do we actually need a XCT franchise? Would it be better to allow regional train operators to provide express and semi-express services between centres within their own boundaries and to those of their immediate neighbours?

Could inter-city services (wash your mouth out, Wright) be left to open-access operators?

■ Steve Wright is XCT liaison officer for Railfuture's passenger group.

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■ ■ Oxford remodelling

Railfuture Thames Valley's meeting in Oxford in February heard Network Rail's Rob Mashford give us an update on the Oxford corridor works. As Carillion was the main contractor, the work was taken in house by Network Rail through a subsidiary company called Western Enhancement Delivery. The former Carillion team were taken into Network Rail employment so that work could continue without interruption. Work is currently proceeding on the down carriage sidings and new northern ladders into platforms 1, 2 and 3. Works on new up sidings and new canopies on platforms 1, 2 and 3 will allow passive provision for electrification. All signalling will transfer to the Thames Valley signalling centre at Didcot. The new layout will allow increased parallel moves, with four-aspect signals and bi-directional signalling for greater operational flexibility. There will be extensive blockades, starting in July, with platform 4 the only operational platform for trains to/from the South and Chiltern trains terminating at Oxford Parkway. Rob was unable to answer questions about the rebuilding of Oxford station, the Cowley branch, Didcot-Oxford electrification and possible quadrupling. As programme manager, he is responsible for implementing plans which have been approved, as and when funding is released. Work on a new platform 5 and rebuilding Botley Road bridge is still in the development stage. The road will be lowered and widened, and the new bridge work can be assembled on the site of the youth hostel which will be demolished.

■ ■ North Downs line hopes

For many years, decades even, Railfuture Thames Valley has been advocating the reopening of the flyunder east of Reading station, for through trains between Oxford and Gatwick. Since the rebuilding of Reading station, some North Downs Line trains have been terminating in platforms 14/15. Now the proposal for trimode trains equipped for overhead AC and third-rail DC current collection and diesel power offers the possibility of a through service between Gatwick and Oxford. This could be the third train per hour on the North Downs Line, provided that Network Rail's usual objections about capacity can be overcome.

■ ■ www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch
Twitter @RailfutureTV

North East

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■ ■ Network Rail, Transport for the North

Railfuture North East has responded to Network Rail's East Coast main line *Investment Choices* consultation, as have Coastliners and the South East Northumberland Rail User Group. We have confined our attention to the York-Newcastle-Berwick section. We consider that the alternatives between Northallerton, Eaglescliffe, Stockton, Ferryhill, and Leamside need upgrading for much higher speeds. All of them, as well as the lines towards Saltburn (including Teesport) and along the Durham Coast, need to be electrified if rail as a whole is to play a greater part in the broader economy of the North East.

Coastliners and Saltburn Line User Group have

submitted ideas to Transport for the North's *Strategic Rail Plan*. The basic aims of the plan were to provide half-hourly passenger services as a minimum, to standardise minimum speeds for different types of passenger line, and to link everywhere in the north directly to Manchester airport. Railfuture supports these aims. Nowhere on the Coast line yet has such through links and no TransPennine expresses yet run east of Middlesbrough on the Saltburn line. However, there are signs that TransPennine is waking up to the idea of extending existing Middlesbrough trains to Redcar and Saltburn. Middlesbrough MP Andy Taylor, who is the shadow transport secretary, favours restoring a third platform, but running right through the station, behind the existing platform 2.

■ ■ GRIP – how to win and lose

Construction is expected to start soon on a new station for Horden/Peterlee with a likely opening date of February 2020. Costs are high because Network Rail's Governance for Railway Investment Projects process requires material for platforms to last for 100 years. The GRIP process was explained by station project officer Ray Brewis in a lecture to Railfuture North East. He showed a diagram summary of the eight-stage GRIP procedure. He said his six-year-old grand-daughter saw it and asked: "Is that a new board game? If so, when does a player win?"

■ ■ Revised May timetables

Delayed completion of electrification schemes elsewhere and a shortage of rolling stock have not prevented welcome improvements in the North-East, following the May timetable changes. It has not yet proved possible to double the overall frequency between Carlisle and Newcastle as Northern had hoped. The Coast line, south from Newcastle to Sunderland, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough, now has better connections from Scotland. Bishop Line services are now hourly throughout the day, and all go to or come from Saltburn via Middlesbrough and Darlington. TransPennine connection-times to and from the Coast line at Thornaby are now much improved in both directions and the promised hourly Sunday services to Middlesbrough have also begun. SENRUG is hoping that some redundant electric units from elsewhere could improve services between Morpeth and Newcastle.

■ ■ Northern potential for the future

Railfuture is hoping that, once Northern has put all its franchise commitments into effect, it could add an electric local service between Darlington and Berwick to link Chester-le-Street, Cramlington, Morpeth and Alnmouth with the rest of the main line. Coastliners is hoping for a Sunderland-Darlington service which might also serve Northallerton. Such a local service would, at long last, link the three artificially isolated stations of Yarm, Eaglescliffe and Stockton, all in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees. It would provide a credible rail alternative to the busy, congested A19 road that parallels them, as well as enabling passengers to change to a main line train at Northallerton with ease, thanks to its simple platform layout. Already inter-city style trains serve Northallerton, with Grand Central calling five times daily and Virgin trains every two hours, and at least two TransPennine services hourly each way.

■ ■ www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch
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Picture: KEIGHLEY NEWS

THIS WAY FORWARD: Transport Secretary Chris Grayling at Colne station with Pendle MP Andrew Stephenson

■ ■ Skipton-Colne high hopes

The campaign to reopen the Colne to Skipton line has had its most productive year, according to chairman Peter Bryson. He said: "Standing in front of us all on Colne station, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling made the game-changing announcement that not only would the Government be funding the next feasibility study, he also confirmed that the leadership of this project would soon pass over to his own department. We now obviously wait, with great interest, to see just how quickly both the Department for Transport and Transport for the North can take this project forward into the next exciting stage."

■ ■ Go slow rail freight

Lucy Hudson, head of freight at Transport for the North, was guest speaker at Railfuture Yorkshire's meeting in April. Members were told that because of capacity problems on the route, biomass trains take seven hours to get from Liverpool to Drax power station, an improvement on the previous nine hours! Members suggested a range of reopenings which would address the capacity restraints facing freight.

■ ■ Northern Powerhouse

Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith submitted a response to the Transport for the North consultation on behalf of four Railfuture branches. We called for an early start on implementing the Northern Powerhouse Rail proposals and the long-term rail strategy, even though it is vague at this stage, particularly concerning the proposed high speed line via Bradford which will probably require expensive tunnelling sections. The phrase Northern Powerhouse Rail will have a hollow ring to it if it does not improve connectivity for the whole of the North, not just the cities.

■ ■ Harrogate Azuma

A Virgin Azuma train visited Harrogate in April, a precursor to a promised two-hourly direct service to London starting in May next year.

■ ■ www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch
Twitter: @RailfutureYorks

Rail to rescue as landfill sites get scarcer

GB Railfreight has signed a strategic agreement to carry waste to Manchester and Leeds, on behalf of the waste management company Biffa.

Biffa recently opened a transfer station in Manchester and a similar site is to be opened in Leeds.

Mick Davis of Biffa said: "Rail transportation will enhance our service offerings from our existing landfill network while also providing significant environmental benefits compared to road transportation."

With a declining landfill capacity, waste has to travel further to find a final home, one of them being Biffa's landfill facility in Roxby, near Scunthorpe.

These two strategic rail links are expected to cope with 250,000 tonnes of waste a year, the equivalent of approximately 16,000 lorry journeys.

Biffa is considering other regions of the UK where rail might provide similar advantages.

Intermodal park

A weekly train of tar tank wagons will be the first rail traffic at A V Dawson's new £2.6 million intermodal park at Tees Riverside, following a deal with Tata Steel at Port Talbot, south Wales.

Managing director Gary Dawson said the firm is committed to Government objectives to move heavy freight from road to rail.

He added: "We built Tees Riverside intermodal park because we knew there was an opportunity to take a substantial amount of heavy traffic off roads and convert it to rail, while offering a more efficient delivery process for customers."

The tar tanks from Port Talbot will be delivered to Koppers, at Port Clarence, near Middlesbrough. Dawson already transports steel coil from Port Talbot to Middlesbrough.

Depot at risk

There are fears that the end of DB stone traffic at Hamworthy Quay in Poole harbour, Dorset, may lead to the depot being sold off for housing. Railfuture's freight group will be on the watch.

Silk Road link

A new flow of containers has started operating through the Channel Tunnel to Germany with onward connections to Poland and via the Silk Road to China. The first CMA CGM Logistics train left London Gateway, heading for Duisburg, in



Picture: GB RAILFREIGHT

CLEAN AND TIDY: A class 66 freight loco is named the Flying Dustman at York in March

May. It is hoped the one train a week service will expand to six trains a week.

Eurotunnel has invested in a whole-train scanner at Frethun, near Calais, in an effort to boost Channel Tunnel rail freight.

Scottish news

Peel Ports has partnered with DB Cargo UK to provide a new rail service for containers via the Port of Liverpool for the first time.

The new service started in May and will provide shipping lines, forwarders, tank operators and cargo owners with a seamless route between the quayside at Liverpool and Scotland.

The return service to Liverpool will carry Scottish goods for export, with a large proportion destined for America.

Scottish family-run company Walkers Shortbread will be one of the first customers, exporting 700 containers a year to America.

Andrew Stokes, head of international sales at Walkers Shortbread Ltd, said: "Increasing our logistics efficiency and reducing our road haulage miles are both key to our export strategy."

Mossend International Railfreight Park was launched in May after owners P D Stirling celebrated 85 years of rail operation. David Stirling of PD Stirling Ltd said: "This will help Scotland lead the world in providing a lower cost, efficient and more sustainable alternative to long haul road transport."

Keith Brown, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, said: "The Mossend International

Railfreight Park marks an exciting chapter for the delivery of sustainable transport in central Scotland.

"Not only will MIRP play an important role developing Central Scotland's freight infrastructure, it will also support sustainable economic growth within the region and help to deliver our ambitious plans for the future of rail and freight.

"The Scottish Government is committing record levels of investment in rail as part of our £5 billion package of transformative improvements to infrastructure and services in Scotland's railways up until 2019."

New rail guide

The Insider Rail Guide to the Kyle of Lochalsh Line by David Spaven and David Fasken is a pocket-sized book of 128 pages, with 40 historic and contemporary photographs.

It includes a history of the line from its opening to Stromeferry in 1870 and the later extension to Kyle of Lochalsh. The next guide will cover the Aberdeen-Elgin-Inverness line.

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Picture: NETHERLANDS TOURISM

rowland.pittard@railfuturewales.org.uk

Wales and Borders new franchise

The new operator of the Wales and Borders franchise was announced in May with KeolisAmey replacing Arriva Trains Wales in October. Transport for Wales, a not-for-profit company owned by the Welsh Government, has chosen the joint French-Spanish venture of KeolisAmey to operate the £5 billion Wales & Borders franchise, including the rail component of the South Wales Metro. The franchise will run until 2033 and has received enthusiastic coverage in the mainstream press. Railfuture Cymru/Wales welcomed the 61% improvement promised for Sunday rail services and called for early action on its implementation. As part of the deal, the UK Government is providing £125 million towards the £738 million cost of the next phase of the South Wales Metro. The "core Valley lines" from Merthyr, Rhymney, Treherbert, Aberdare and Coryton to Cardiff city centre, Penarth and Barry, will be electrified to allow tram-trains to operate on existing track and some on-street sections in both Cardiff and the Valleys. The rolling stock on the metro will be a combination of metro vehicles and tri-mode trains (diesel, batteries and 25kV electric). The use of batteries will enable a "smart" electrification programme, requiring limited modification to bridges.

The franchise also promises new rolling stock procured by the Welsh Government at a cost of £800 million, to be introduced from next year. On-board toilets will be retained on all new and existing trains. The plans include assembling over 50% of the new trains in Wales and it is expected that 95% of trains used by the franchise will be new or refurbished by 2023 with a few existing loco-hauled services surviving. Four new stations will be built in Cardiff – at Gabalfa, Crwys Road, Loudoun Square and the Flourish (next to the Millennium Centre). A new Treforest Estate station will be built nearer to Nantgarw. Every existing station in Wales will be upgraded at a cost of £194 million and the stations will be powered by renewable energy. There will be 285 extra weekday services, in contrast to the no-growth franchise awarded to ATW 15 years ago. However ATW did increase the number of services by over 20% during its franchise. Railfuture Cymru/Wales has called for the new franchise to deliver on rolling stock meeting the standards set out in Railfuture's *Welsh Development Plan*.

Bridgend's new £1.5m station

A major £1.5 million station improvement project has just been completed at Bridgend station, the fifth busiest in Wales. First Minister Carwyn Jones officially opened the new facilities at his "home station". The National Station Improvement Programme provided the funding. The station will benefit from free wi-fi as part of a substantial investment in Welsh stations by the Welsh Government. It will be installed in the coming months. The project began in autumn 2017. The new facilities include an improved concourse area with a new information desk, ticket office and new seating, refurbished passenger toilets including a new baby changing facility, a waiting shelter, CCTV, signs and passenger information displays. However the screen showing bus departures from Bridgend bus station has disappeared.

Electrification work causes disruption

Electrification work throughout south Wales was causing disruption on most days from



Picture: VIVARAIL

VIVARAIL: Three-car diesel-battery trains from Vivarail will be used on the Wrexham-Bidston, Conwy Valley and Chester-Crewe routes by the new Wales & Borders franchise

April to June, followed by the closure of the route through Patchway and Severn Tunnel. The Ebbw Vale branch was closed for several days for electrification work at Ebbw and Gaer junctions. This involved the provision of the bases for run-off electrification. Newport-Cwmbran was closed for many days at various times from April to July for similar work at Maindee West junction. Cardiff-Severn Tunnel Junction was reduced to a two-track railway because of lack of capacity. Railfuture has expressed its concern that many travellers in South Wales are being inconvenienced by these works even though they will not benefit from electric trains in future. Swansea Malliphant sidings, which has electrification masts in place, has received additional expenditure, to provide fuelling facilities and toilet discharge facilities which were not part of the initial plan. Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns continues to state that it was not worthwhile to electrify to Swansea because it will save only two minutes for services from London Paddington. This ignores the benefits of electrification for local services. Electric trains are more environmentally friendly and with faster acceleration would be able to accommodate more services and more station calls, including those planned for Miskin, Cardiff Parkway and Llanwern.

Infrastructure expenditure

Network Rail's expenditure for control period 6 (2019-24) does not provide funding for work in Wales and the Borders to a level that would be expected for a rail network of that size. No money has been allocated for enhancements. The North Wales resignalling has been curtailed, as have the north to south Wales line speed improvements. Welsh AMs and MPs are requesting that the £433 million saved on not electrifying to Swansea should be made available for enhancements in other areas.

Electrification cuts in South Wales

The House of Commons report *The cancellation of rail electrification in South Wales* was published in May and includes references to submissions by Railfuture Cymru/ Wales . www.railfuturewales.org.uk [Twitter @RailfutureWales](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWales)

North West

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Electrification delays and disruption

The cancellation of Oxenholme-Windermere and delays to the Manchester-Preston electrification schemes caused significant disruption up to and from the May timetable change. The Lakes Line between Oxenholme and Windermere is feeling the effects of the failure to electrify that line. The replacement

Twitter: @railwatch

bi-mode trains are not ready, but Northern has received some class 158 diesels from Scotland. With a top speed of 90mph, they are easier to timetable on the West Coast main line than the current class 156 and 153 units. However, the new units will entail an extensive driver training programme, and their lack of availability is causing significant cancellations on this line in particular. Northern has apologised for the cancellations and said that the May timetable change should have seen an improvement, and that these should continue after that date. Some of the proposed additional services that were in Northern's provisional timetable for May 2018 have not arrived either, notably the doubling of services from Greenbank and Macclesfield to Manchester. These are still hourly services rather than the twice per hour service promised. Some services that are currently operated by electric trains will be changing temporarily to diesel operation because of the incomplete Manchester-Preston electrification.

Northern extends penalty fares

Northern introduced the penalty fare scheme on some routes within its central region from 14 May. This is a franchise commitment and follows trials of the scheme on the Airedale and Wharfedale lines in Yorkshire, and is now extended to four lines in the North West: Manchester Victoria to York via Hebden Bridge, Manchester stations to Liverpool via Newton-le-Willows and Warrington Central, and Manchester to Wilmslow via Manchester Airport. Northern has put up posters at affected stations and started making announcements on trains in mid April. Customers travelling without a ticket on a Northern train anywhere on any of the above routes could face a penalty fare of £20 or twice the single fare, whichever is the greater. Ticket vending machines that do not issue the particular ticket passengers want, will have a "promise to pay" ticket available, which will have the starting station printed on it and this will get around the common trick of fare dodgers saying they got on at stations closer to their destination station than they actually did. Rail minister Jo Johnson has announced that, while fare dodgers will continue to receive penalties, those with a genuine reason for not having a valid ticket will now be able to challenge a penalty with an independent committee. Once an appeal is received, the clock will stop on the 21-day deadline for the payment of a penalty fare, until the outcome is resolved. The process will also give greater consideration to circumstances of how and why the penalty was issued to ensure people are not unfairly penalised.

RUG predicts overcrowding in Bolton

The Bolton Rail User Group is very concerned that timetable changes in May and December will cause local services to become significantly overcrowded. Members have recently carried out train loading surveys which showed significant overcrowding on all services not operated by class 185s (mostly run in pairs to make a six-car service) and noted that with the reducing number of those being used on local services, more overcrowding was inevitable. With the prospect of electric services being operated by four-car class 319s, which cannot be coupled as eight-car units because of platform limits at some intermediate stations, BRUG is calling on Northern to address the issue by ensuring an adequate number of six-car services.

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

www.railfuture.org.uk

The many faces of rail in the West Midlands

By Colin Major

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

What is the West Midlands? It may seem like a simple question, but in rail terms defining the area is an intellectual challenge.

Following the recent creation of new statutory and transport bodies in the West Midlands and the award of the old London Midland franchise to West Midlands Trains Ltd, there are many transport organisations in the region with West Midlands in their titles.

So much so that passengers and Railfuture members wishing to contact or influence travel provision may feel like Alan Davies answering a question on BBC2's QI programme.

Question

"Who are the following and what do they do? West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands, West Midlands Rail, West Midlands Trains Ltd and West Midlands Railway"

Answers

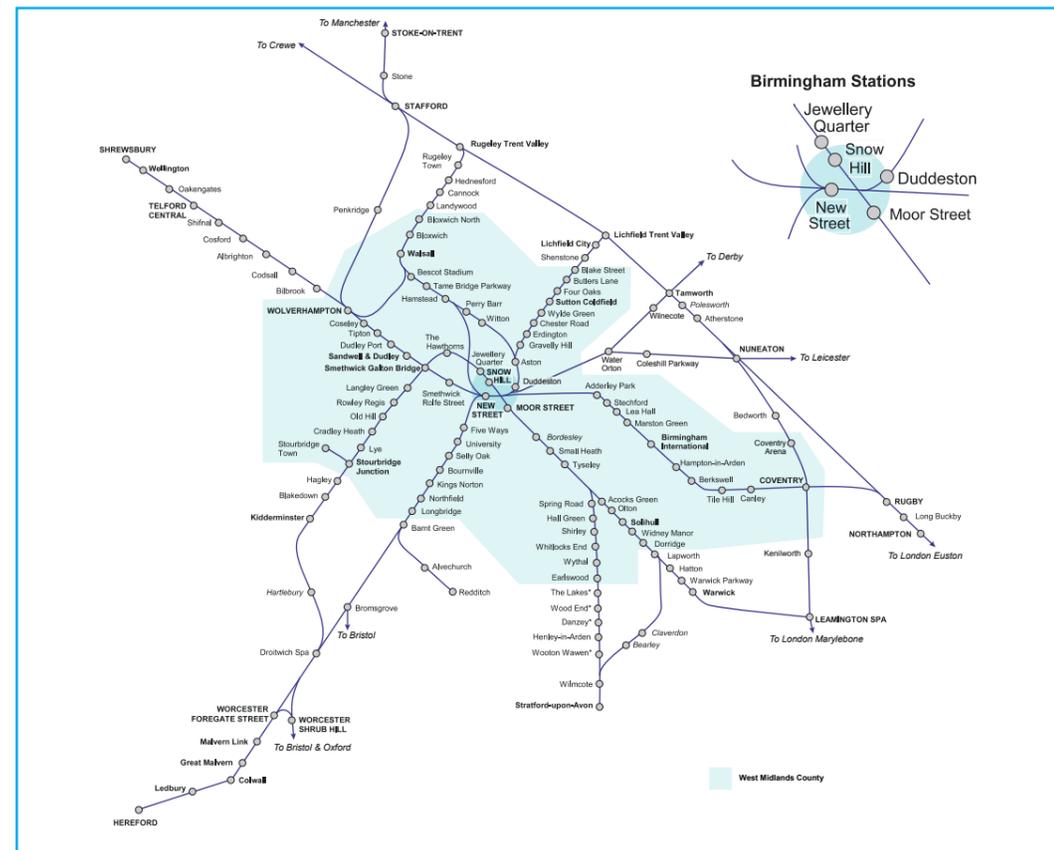
West Midlands Combined Authority is a strategic authority with powers over transport, economic development and regeneration. It formally came into being on 17 June 2016 and comprises Birmingham City, Coventry City, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell MBC, Solihull MBC, Walsall MBC and Wolverhampton City Councils, with an elected Mayor of the West Midlands as chairman, currently Andy Street, former chief executive officer of John Lewis.

Transport for West Midlands is the executive body of the WMCA that oversees transportation (road, rail, bus and Metro) within the metropolitan county. The organisation incorporates the previous responsibilities of Centro and the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority. TfWM currently has responsibility for franchising bus routes, alongside the ability to set standardised fares across all operators similar to Transport for London.

West Midlands Rail was established in December 2017 jointly by the 16 local authorities covering the stations shown in the map, above. It has joint responsibility with the Department for Transport for overseeing the franchised train operating company West Midlands Trains Ltd.

West Midlands Trains Ltd took

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



WEST MIDLANDS RAILWAY: The network which serves West Midlands County and its surrounds



over from London Midland in December 2017 and is a consortium of three companies: Abellio, JR East and Mitsui with two separate business units.

Those routes and stations in the map area above are one business unit and branded as West Midlands Railway.

The other operates the lines from Euston as London Northwestern Railway.

Both brands have their own unique livery.

It is intended that any future franchise operator in the West Midlands will retain the West Midlands Railway unique livery, which may well be extended to the Metro trams.

Still confused?

Contact Railfuture West Midlands and we, like Sandi Toksvig, will provide more detailed answers and award marks!

Colin Major is secretary of Railfuture West Midlands.

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Map: SAGREDOVELLIE KING

Chinley is part of a national problem

PAUL ABELL reports on the latest moves to make Chinley station accessible for all passengers

The cover of *Railwatch* 154 featured the campaign spearheaded by the Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group to reinstate accessibility at Chinley station.

The status of Chinley station as a crucial railhead for the district surrounding the village itself prompted the Transport Group to organise a petition to the Department for Transport calling for level access to the station.

Signed by more than 800 people, the petition was presented during the evening session of the House of Commons on 12 March by High Peak MP Ruth George.

Along with the MP, the Transport Group has now arranged a meeting in June with Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani (who has responsibility for Access for All), while Network Rail has undertaken to fund and carry out a feasibility study at the station, so watch this space! The Chinley campaign has echoes in many other places, as shown by the letter from Lichfield Rail Promotion Group chair David Dixon in *Railwatch* 155 complaining that even Lichfield Trent Valley is still waiting for lifts, despite the station being used by more than 1.2 million passengers annually.

The only accessible platform at Lichfield Trent Valley is platform



FOOTBRIDGE AS BARRIER: Trains at Chinley station call at either side of this island platform, which can be reached only by the green footbridge. The 24 steps visible on the left are matched by a similar number on the right. The whole bridge is open to the weather and tricky even for able-bodied passengers in the wet, especially if they have luggage or young children

one, used by northbound trains on the West Coast main line. Passengers returning south will find that they have arrived at platform 2 – which is not accessible. And you can forget about using the Cross-City Line to reach Birmingham from platform 3. That can be reached only by climbing 33 steps (it is not called the High Level for nothing).

Accessible at last

However, John Beedle reports progress on the Newcastle to Carlisle line, where a new entrance has been provided at Blyadon station. For years use of the station was hindered by the lack of a step-free access to

the Newcastle platform. To cross the line the footbridge had to be negotiated, causing problems for the disabled and families with prams and pushchairs.

The Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership came up with a scheme to provide level access to the platform via a surfaced pathway from the adjacent Keelman's Way, the riverside path.

This has provided better links from the station for Hadrian's Wall walkers and also for residents of the Stella Riverside housing development, with its 500 homes. The scheme was funded by Gateshead Council, the Department for Transport and the Association of Community



THE BLAYDON THREE: Craig Harrop of Northern Rail, Fiona Forsythe of the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership (centre) and Liz Twist, MP for Blaydon

Rail Partnerships. On a beautiful spring morning, the entrance was formally opened by Liz Twist, MP for Blaydon, who talked of the importance of the railway to the Blaydon.

Since a timetable change five years ago use of the station has grown steadily. Craig Harrop, for Northern Rail, thanked Gateshead Council for funding the ramp and hoped the new entrance would encourage even more people to use the station.

From the new timetable in May, Blaydon benefits from trains stopping every hour.

■ *Railfuture* vice president Paul Abell is a former editor of *Today's Railways* UK

Lifeline for west Wales

By Mike Walker and Adrian Kendon

It is now impossible to travel by rail from south Wales to north without crossing the border into England.

This sad state of affairs has existed since the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth line lost its passenger service in 1965 and the Afon Wen to Bangor line closed.

Decisions made in London have blighted rail travel in Wales ever since.

Rail passengers who want to travel from Carmarthen and Aberystwyth must go via Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and Shrewsbury, and take more than five hours.

But five years ago, a local campaign group, Traws Link Cymru was formed, which aimed to re-establish the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth rail link. The benefits of reopening this rail link and, in due course, the Afon Wen to Bangor connection, are enormous.

It would provide a rail corridor connecting north, mid, west and south-west Wales within an inter-regional transport network. There would be a direct rail connection from Aberystwyth to Cardiff, reducing the rail journey time by more than two hours and offering a more socially inclusive form of transport.

Rail services would be integrated closely with the bus services, enabling further investment in the latter to provide feeder links from more outlying communities to the railway line.

A new railway would provide a major boost to the regional economy, as has clearly been the case in Scotland with the reopening of the Borders line.

Commuting to work would be easier and the line would contribute significantly to the economic infrastructure of west Wales, especially during the period of construction, and would provide an option for freight transport.

It would be a major boost to the tourist industry, providing a safer and environmentally friendly mode of transport.

There is obvious demand for public transport in west Wales. The current Carmarthen to Aberystwyth bus service carries almost a quarter of a million passengers annually, but takes two hours 20 minutes on twisting and uneven roads.

There is already proven demand for rail transport in west Wales, with over 300,000 passengers per year now using Aberystwyth station, a 40% increase over 10 years. Carmarthen station has more than 400,000 passengers

per year, an increase over the same period of almost 50%, in line with the growth of rail travel throughout Britain.

Passenger numbers have increased significantly in rural areas, reflecting the social as well as economic role of the railways.

It is no longer reasonable to expect all costs to be met from fares. The railway brings major economic benefits to the wider community, not just those travelling by rail.

The Traws Link Cymru campaign has attracted support throughout west Wales.

Public meetings have been held at all the principal towns that would be served by the new railway: Aberystwyth, Llanilar, Tregaron, Lampeter, Llandyssul and Carmarthen. The response has been universally positive.

Meetings have been held with prominent local bodies, and with politicians and Cabinet Ministers in the Welsh Government.

Members have also travelled to London for face-to-face meetings with the Welsh Office Minister Stephen Crabb and Transport Minister Guto Bebb.

Support comes from health boards, universities, schools, businesses and councils along the line. A petition has attracted almost 20,000 signatures.

The Welsh Government provided £30,000 for an initial scoping study by engineering firm AECOM, who in 2015 reported favourably on the prospects for reopening and gave an indicative cost of around £750 million for the project.

A Welsh Transport Planning and Appraisal Guidance assessment was carried out by ARCADIS.

Plaid Cymru has given strong support.

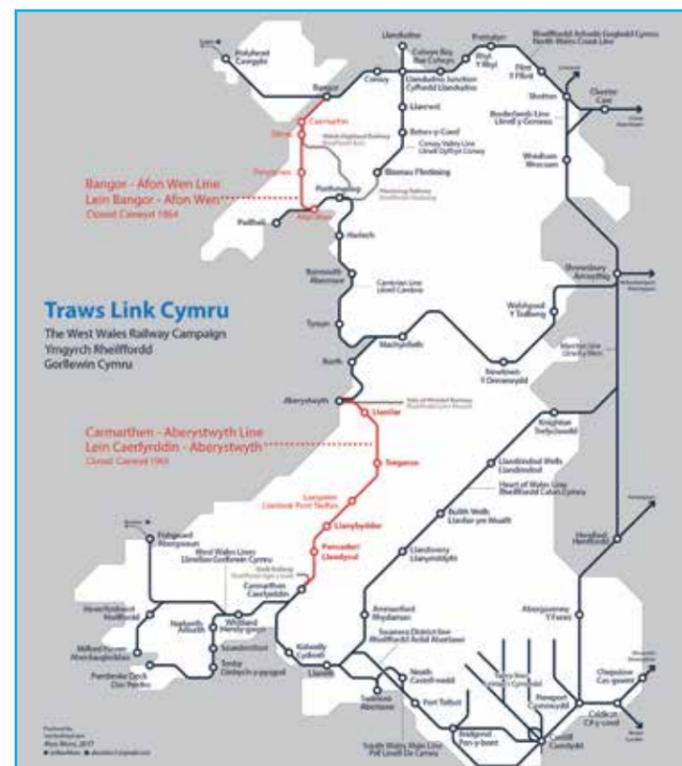
A full feasibility study was carried out by engineering and consultancy company Mott MacDonald in 2017. The report was submitted to the Welsh Government and will also go to the new Infrastructure Commission for Wales.

When Traws Link Cymru began the campaign, few believed they would succeed.

There is still a long way to go, but it is remarkable how much has been achieved.

People are no longer asking if the railway will open, but rather when.

We now look forward to sitting on a train, drinking a cup of coffee from the trolley, and enjoying the beautiful scenery of west Wales on the 10.00 service from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth.



Map: ALEX AKINS

FAREWELL TO JIM WADE, A GREAT FRIEND OF THE RAILWAY

The funeral took place on Friday 6 April of Jim Wade, who died on 17 March after a period of ill health, writes Steve Jones. He was 75. James Hammond Wade was born in 1942 in Corby, where he

lived for the whole of his life. The son of a railwayman at Corby steelworks, Jim had a lifelong interest in railways. On his first day at Rockingham Road Infants School in Corby, in 1947, he

played truant to watch the trains from the nearby railway bridge. He did the same on his second day but was apprehended and, as he put it, "was brought into compliance with the education system!"

Later, in the 1950s, he would help his father load racing pigeons into "pigeon special" trains to Scotland. He was not especially interested in pigeons, it was the trains that he really went to see.

Jim was a founding member of the Corbyrail campaign in the early 1980s and was a longstanding member of Railfuture.

The opening of the new station at Corby in 2009 was the culmination of many years of campaigning. The reopening of the line to Corby might never have happened without Jim's passion and dedication.

Living close to the station, he was there almost every day in his role of station adopter, maintaining the flower tubs on the platform as well as chatting and having coffee with friends. He was well respected, having been a



GENTLEMAN: Jim Wade

county councillor, a licensed lay reader at his local church, and an active member of the Torch Trust, a charity for the blind. Before he retired, Jim was a paramedic for 28 years. He was also a volunteer at the Nene Valley Railway.

Jim was one of those once met, never forgotten people. He was a thorough gentleman with a quiet and friendly bearing.

His death coincided with the opening of traffic of the reinstated double track on the line between Corby and Kettering.

Picture: Northants Evening Telegraph

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KENILWORTH: Local residents wait to board the 06.16 Leamington to Coventry train (a single coach class 153) as it approaches Kenilworth on 30 April. Inset: Students who designed artwork for the new Maghull North station on Merseyrail gather at the station to see their pictures unveiled by Mayor of Maghull June Burns. The station was expected to open on Monday 18 June

New stations open at Kenilworth and Maghull North

For the first time for 53 years, passenger trains now serve Kenilworth following the opening of the town's new station on 30 April 2018.

The old station was closed in 1965 leaving the Leamington Spa-Coventry line as a freight-only branch.

From the 1970s, passenger trains, mainly Bournemouth to Manchester CrossCountry services, have used the line although they will not be stopping at the new station.

A 30-year-long campaign came to fruition in 2013 when £11.3 million of funding was agreed between Warwickshire Council, Coventry and the local enterprise partnership, with the Department for Transport involved via its new stations fund.

The station is however more than 15 months late, which has led many campaigners to doubt that the existing process is fit for purpose to deliver enough new stations efficiently in future.

Kenilworth town councillor Richard Dickson said it was important for the county council to review the process and identify what went wrong before it embarks on more major projects.

Richard, also a member of Friends of Kenilworth Station, said his excitement at the opening was muted as residents had waited so long. He said: "It is only an hourly service that does

not run on Sundays. But I for one will be catching it to work every morning." He said many people had experienced F.E.A.R – frustration, embarrassment, anger and resignation.

Rail expert Andrew Long commented: "Will the original British Rail through service ever be restored, which saw direct Leicester-Leamington Spa trains via Nuneaton [Trent Valley] and Coventry? It would be ideal to compete with the M69 motorway while also avoiding Birmingham New Street."

Maghull North

Seven weeks later, on 18 June, Maghull North station was expected to open on Merseyside.

Local residents visited the new station in March for the unveiling of art work designed by local children, exhibited on hoardings around the £13 million station.

Students from Maghull High, Deyes High, St Andrew's Primary, St George's Primary, St Gregory's, St Thomas Primary and Summerhill Primary schools showed off their artistic talents.

Rob Grey from Network Rail gave the students a presentation about the work involved in building a new station, and the jobs and skills that are needed to work in the rail industry.

Councillor Gordon Friel of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority said: "The new

Maghull North station will be of huge benefit to local residents while also playing a big part in the on-going development of the area. This art project helps to bring a bit of colour to the new station site."

Maghull Mayor June Burns said: "It was an absolute pleasure to meet all of the children who have helped brighten up the site."



Andy Heath, managing director of Merseyrail said: "Maghull North will make our rail network much more accessible for those living nearby and it is great to see the station already becoming part of the community."

Network Rail's Rob Grey said: "The station forms part of a massive £340 million railway investment in the Liverpool City Region."

Maghull North is between the existing Maghull and Town Green stations on the Ormskirk branch of Merseyrail's Northern line.

A nearby housing development includes 370 new homes, with more homes planned for the area in the near future. Merseytravel

is also making progress with long-awaited plans for the Halton Curve. Extra track was laid in May, clearing the way for new services to be introduced in December.

A new hourly service will operate between Liverpool and Chester, serving Liverpool Lime Street, Liverpool South Parkway (for Liverpool John Lennon Airport) Runcorn, Frodsham and Helsby, with future hopes to expand the services further into North Wales.

The £18 million Halton Curve project has been funded through the Government's local growth fund and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Ken Skates, Welsh Government Transport Secretary, said: "Improved rail connectivity between North Wales and Liverpool will create significant economic and social opportunities for passengers and businesses."

■ With new stations now planned throughout Britain and campaigns for even more, the Railfuture website includes an interactive map of all known new station proposals.

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