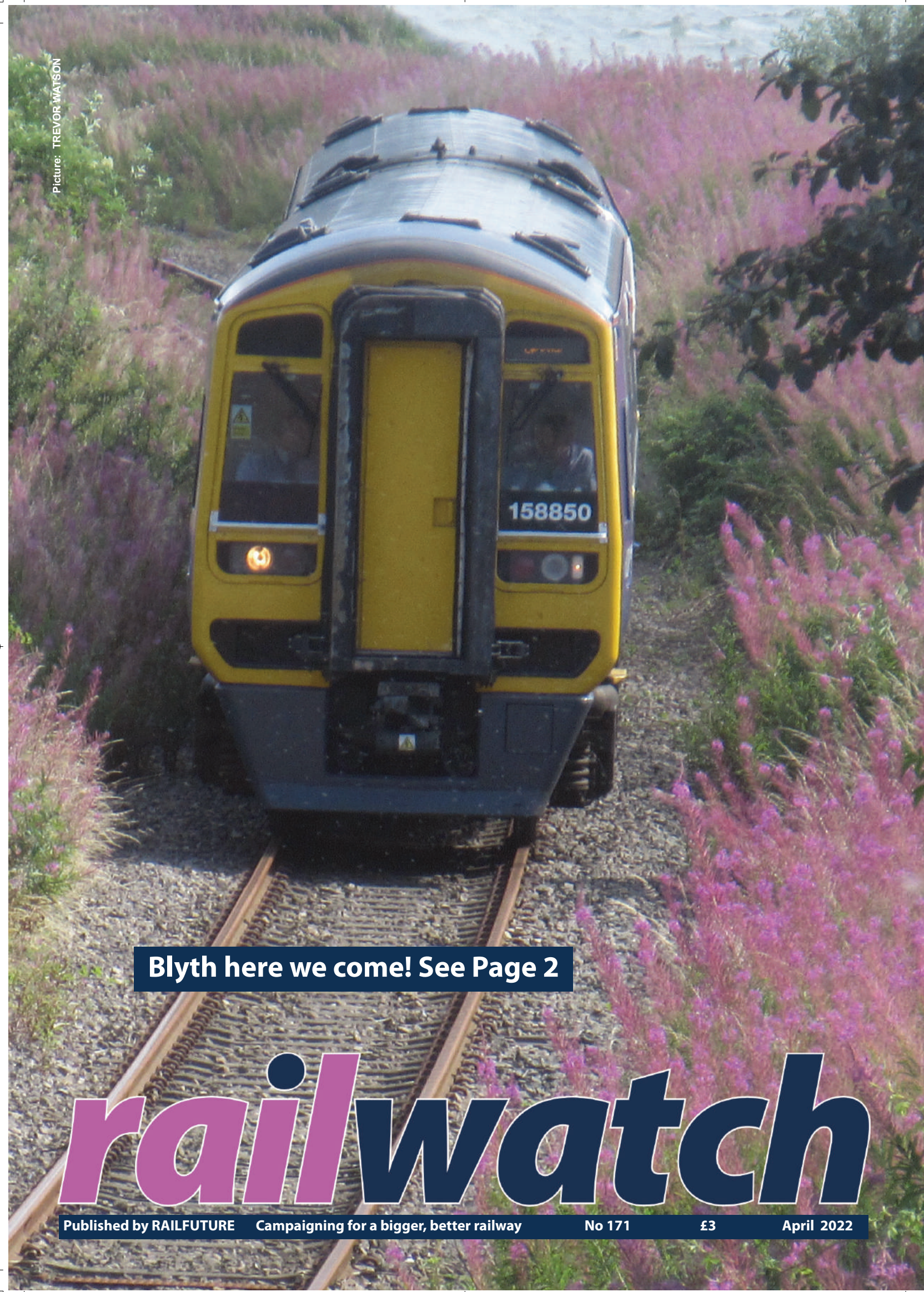


Picture: TREVOR WATSON



Blyth here we come! See Page 2

*rail*watch

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From Blyth to Bideford?

PAGE ONE

Our page 1 picture by Trevor Watson shows an ordinary train making its way through the rosebay willowherb growing beside the track.

An ordinary scene? Not quite. Soon there will be a regular passenger service on the 18-mile Ashington, Blyth and Tyne system, now renamed the Northumberland line. It is one of the first results of the government's Restoring Your Railway policy.

The class 158 train is shown approaching Morpeth on the line from Bedlington in August last year with a contingent of socially distanced dignitaries.

The train left the East Coast main line at Benton Junction and entered the southbound platform at Morpeth, where it reversed and returned to Newcastle via Bedlington.

Another major step forward came in January, when a planning enquiry completed its collection of the necessary evidence relating to reopening the Ashington-Newcastle line for passenger trains. Government inspector Richard Clegg is required to assess the pros and cons of issuing a Transport and Works Act Order to authorise the scheme. Six new stations – at Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth, Bebside, Newsham and Seaton Delaval – are



Picture: SENRUG

2008: Dennis Fancett, left, and the then Wansbeck MP Denis Murphy joined train crew for a photograph in the South East Northumberland Rail User Group's reopening campaign. Their achievement has inspired others all over Britain

- Tarka team target Bideford: Page 5
- The clamour for rail: Page 12-13

planned, along with infrastructure changes. Consent has been granted for all the stations except Newsham. Meanwhile, Network Rail is carrying out enabling work on the line, which is expected to open in 2024. While the overall Northumberland line project, which will get passengers from Ashington to Newcastle in 36 minutes, has been largely supported, it has faced criticism. County councillor Caroline Ball said proposed station designs lack "wow factor". Liberal Democrat councillor and former leader of the county

council, Jeff Reid, has questioned whether the project is a good use of public money.

Although diesel trains will probably operate on the line, the area is expected to be a centre of electrification – of the road network!

Construction work has begun on a Britishvolt car battery factory on the site of the former coal yard at Cambois, near Blyth, for a lithium-ion factory to produce electric vehicle batteries.

The government has agreed to invest £100 million into the Britishvolt factory via its automotive transformation fund.

Britishvolt is one of two major UK battery factory projects that have secured funding, as well as expansion of an existing factory at Sunderland owned by China's Envision that supplies the Nissan car factory.

Betrayal? No! IRP is a vote of confidence

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
By Christian Wolmar

The reaction by many rail commentators to the publication of the Integrated Rail Plan in November was uncontrolled fury.

They ranted against the "betrayal" by the government because it involved scrapping part of HS2, and nitpicked over details of the report which made claims about over-optimistic journey times.

The government had presented IRP as the biggest ever investment programme in rail and a crucial part of the levelling up agenda.

This, too, attracted criticism from northern politicians who felt it did not go far enough.

As I argued at the time, in articles both in *RAIL* magazine and *The Guardian* (available on my website) the key point about IRP was that it was an endorsement of the railway.

Yes, the £96 billion promised included money already allocated or even spent, and the sums did not quite add up. Yes, the plan for HS2 was changed but actually, with a link to Liverpool and half way

across the Pennines (a rather strange proposal admittedly), there were some welcome improvements, such as the reinstatement of the electrification of the Midland main line. The railways were subsidised to the tune of around £17 billion in the 2020/1 financial year, and will receive a similar amount in the current financial year. Despite this huge subsidy, the fact that the government is prepared to commit large amounts of money to the industry is a vote of confidence in the railway. Of course there are contradictions in government policy, with short-term cutbacks negating the value of long-term commitments.

But this is not an era of Beeching type cuts. Therefore, the reaction of some commentators was clearly over the top. That did not go unnoticed. In an online conference

call -with about 20 members of the trade press in February, Network Rail boss Andrew Haines was asked about the reaction to the IRP. He is a generally mild-mannered fellow but is not afraid to be blunt when necessary. I have never seen him so angry. He said: "Those people who have been prepared to say that the £96 billion investment is a 'kick in the teeth' and an insult are doing an enormous disservice with the Treasury, particularly at a time when the economics of the railway are really challenging. I just don't get it. I think people have lost the plot absolutely big time on this." He highlighted the fact that the overreaction was damaging to the railway cause.

"The rhetoric that has developed around that nationally has been profoundly unhelpful, imbalanced and wrong ... somehow, the dialogue on IRP

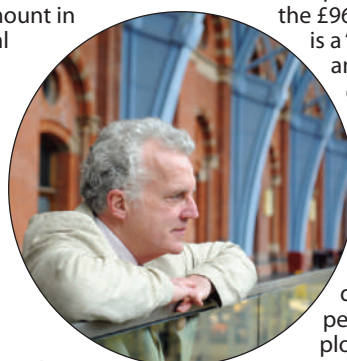
has become one of 'catastrophic disaster of cataclysmic proportions' and created the view that the future of our industry is utterly dire."

He said that many of the investment plans in the railways "were never grounded in anything like a business case that could stand alongside all the other demands for infrastructure investment".

There is a lesson in this for campaigners. Haines is no enemy of the railway. Quite the opposite. He is one of its biggest and most important supporters. He should be listened to and his words have resonance. Of course we should, at times, complain in our campaigning, and inevitably this can arouse antagonism. But, and this is a big but, we must also be careful about how far we go.

We should be ready to claim even partial victories as wins. Occasionally agreeing with ministers, Network Rail bosses or even the Department for Transport is not a betrayal. It's sensible.

Yorkshire view of IRP: Page 6



Christian Wolmar



POIGNANT: Nigel catching the train at Kemble on the way home to Gloucester in October, after one of his last campaign meetings

By Derek Lucas
Stationmaster's grandson Nigel Bray died in December after a lifetime campaigning for improvements to rail services.

Nigel, who was a railway author, was also the power behind Railfuture's Severnside branch for nearly 20 years. He was 69 when he died.

"His knowledge was encyclopaedic, and he was always so positive," said fellow rail campaigner Graham Ellis. "He enriched the rail campaigning world."

Born in Reading, Nigel started his crusade for the railways while studying at York University. Nigel also made his career on the railways, for many years in the Western region starting at Barnstaple and later at Weston-super-Mare, Paddington and Cardiff.

As a teenager, he was shocked by the savage cuts to the railways inflicted by Dr Beeching.

Nigel knew more about the railways, in particular the threatened lines, than Dr Beeching himself.

Nigel was concerned that his rail career might end with privatisation but his new employers, Wales and West, found him a new job for which his knowledge made him eminently suited.

He investigated delays to trains, ensuring that penalties were applied to the organisation which had caused the delay.

Nigel took early retirement in 2007.

His series of histories of rail lines in the South West were well received, as were his

lectures. He also enjoyed model railways, and worked as a volunteer for the Gloucestershire Warwickshire steam railway.

It was hoped Nigel had recovered after surgery for a malignant melanoma in 2020. The care home staff where he died described Nigel as a true gentleman.

Railfuture's Bruce Williamson said: "Nigel was a dedicated and conscientious man who almost single-handedly kept the branch together."

East Anglia

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■ ■ Soham station opens

The Cambridgeshire town of Soham rejoined the national passenger train network on Monday 13 December 2021, giving 10,800 people direct access to the network once more. The station opening ceremony was performed by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor Dr Nik Johnson. The station was funded by the CPCA and built on the site of the original which closed in 1965.

The mayor unveiled a plaque and expressed the importance of the reopening, saying "public transport really matters and here it delivers affordable frequent links to opportunities in education, employment and fun! We are making sure our communities can move freely between our areas and thrive".

Network Rail Anglia route director Ellie Burrows paid tribute to all those who delivered the station.

A second plaque was unveiled by Ellie Burrows, Jamie Burles of train operator Greater Anglia and Network Rail Chairman Sir Peter Hendy, on behalf of the railway community, dedicated to the memory of the four railway workers caught up in the Soham wartime ammunition fire disaster on 2 June 1944. Relatives of the railway men were present to see the dedication unveiled.

Soham is now served by one of the best train fleets in the country, calling there every two hours from early until late on the run from Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds through to Ely and Peterborough. It must be seen as the first part of a longer term vision of a train every hour that will become possible when the eagerly awaited capacity enhancements are carried out to the junctions at Ely. The final pieces of the jigsaw will be the doubling of the line into Ely from Soham and the restoration of the West Curve at Newmarket that will allow the operation of a second train every hour from Soham to Newmarket and Cambridge direct.

■ ■ Haverhill-Cambridge

In spring 2021, Railfuture East Anglia submitted a bid to the Department for Transport Restoring Your Railway fund to reconnect Haverhill to the national rail network, sponsored by Matt Hancock, MP for West Suffolk, with the results being announced in the autumn budget statement.

In a letter to Mr Hancock, the proposal was found "suitable for Restoring Your Railway funding in principle" and "a good case for future development", but disappointingly was turned down for funding in the third round of the Ideas Fund because of the number of other applications and the limited funding available. We have been advised that other sources of funding are available and the DFT team have been asked to "keep the scheme



CELEBRATION: Guests, including Network Rail chair Sir Peter Hendy, gather for the reopening of Soham station in December, putting the town with a 10,800 population back on the network

under review for a future point". The RYR summary of our bid noted that "the applicant presents a strong proposal, compelling narrative and clearly outlines significant wider benefits".

However, since the RYR fund decision was made earlier in the year, the transport landscape has changed. The Cambridge Autonomous Metro which was diverting the support of local authorities is no longer being planned following the election of the new Cambridgeshire and Peterborough combined authority Mayor, Dr Nik Johnson.

In the past few months we have seen an increasing interest in the idea of reopening the railway, unfortunately too late to influence the RYR bid, but putting the scheme in a strong position to be achieved using alternative sources of funding. We are now working with local MPs and authorities, and are seeing strong support reflected in the 5,000 people who have signed Rail Haverhill's petition for restoring the railway. We are confident we will be able to drive forward this scheme, which will transform Haverhill with fast high-quality public transport to jobs, healthcare and leisure in Cambridge, alongside significant new housing planned for the town.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Haverhill

■ ■ Operator helps Meldreth

The village stations of Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton on the line from Cambridge to Royston and King's Cross have been badly affected by the temporary timetables. The pre-Covid half-hourly service was reduced to hourly, then reinstated, only to be reduced again by Omicron staff shortages.

However, in response to representations from the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group, GTR have come up with help during the vital weekday peak by inserting a stop at Meldreth on three existing non-stop services.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia
Twitter: @RailfutureEA

Soham back on the map

By Phil Smart
phil.smart59@gmail.com

Soham's railway history can be told in four events that are about both misfortune and eventual triumph. The first misfortune came in 1847 when the Newmarket and Chesterford railway, having obtained authorisation to continue its line north westward to Ely, abandoned the project upon reaching Newmarket. No further extension was made until 1854 when the line to Bury St Edmunds was opened instead. The people of Soham were left frustrated until the Great Eastern Railway eventually completed the line on 1 September 1879. Soham could at last celebrate its place on the railway map after a wait of 32 years!

The second date that put Soham on the map came on 2 June 1944 when the leading wagon of a wartime ammunition train caught fire. The courage of the train crew and the signalman in detaching the burning vehicle from the rest of the train saved the town from a much greater explosion than the one that killed the driver and fireman. The bravery of the men was recognised by awarding the George Cross to the locomotive crew as well as the naming of local streets in their memory.

The third date was the one that took Soham off the railway map when local services between Newmarket and Ely ceased on 13 September 1965 under the infamous Beeching cuts, a bitter blow to the town after 86 years with a rail service.

History is full of beautiful ironies, however, and another event that happened in the mid 1960s ensured the eventual return of the

railway. British Railways was not the only nationalised industry to undergo a modernisation plan – the Post Office was about to embark on the mechanised sorting of mail and with it the invention of the postcode. Although its significance was not realised at the time, the fact that Soham was given a Cambridge postcode meant that the 21st century would see it visited by housing developers and its population grow beyond recognition. The motor car, which had contributed to the station's closure in the first place, was also becoming obsolete as a convenient method of commuting into the city. The campaign by Railfuture and others for the station to be reopened was taken up by local councils and championed by the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority, which helped to fund the project to establish a new station.

And so we come to the fourth and final date, the 13 December 2021 when, after an absence of 56 years, trains began calling at Soham again. It is a sobering thought that in its 174-year relationship with the railway, Soham has spent over half that time, 88 years in total, waiting for a rail service, but its patience won out in the end! By population, Soham is now the largest rail-served settlement on the Anglia network to have a less than an hourly service. The campaigning goes on.

Currently Greater Anglia trains go to Ely, March and Peterborough or to Bury St Edmunds, Stowmarket and Ipswich. And of course there are many freight trains, many of which are heading to and from Felixstowe.

Picture: GREATER ANGLIA

Tarka team on target for Bideford



Picture: ACE Rail

RESTORE OUR RAILWAY: (left to right) OkeRail's Kevin Ball, Bideford Railway Heritage Centre director Tim Steer, Railfuture's Roger Blake, Bideford Mayor David Ratcliff, Mayoress Philippa Ratcliff, BRHC volunteers Steve Trowbridge, Karen Harley and Spencer Taylor, and Andrew Toon with Torrridge District councillor Peter Christie of the Green Party

By Roger Blake

Bideford to Barnstaple Railway

MP Chris Heaton-Harris was rail minister until December and is now Conservative chief whip.

In October he had this message for unsuccessful Restoring Your Railway bidders:

"This is currently the last round of the ideas fund for the foreseeable future."

His "foreseeable future" comment suggests that a number of unsuccessful schemes have real benefits and are good cases for development.

He also said that "rail network enhancements pipeline" funding is fully committed, but he asked his team to keep the Restoring Your Railway scheme under review. I take that as a source of encouragement to rail reopening

campaigners. Over the next two years, campaigners should be preparing their cases to bid for funds in Control Period 7 (2024-29) because there could well be an ideas fund Round 4.

One campaign is already gearing up, following advice and guidance from Railfuture. ACE Rail, led by Councillor Tim Steer, wants to extend the Exeter-Barnstaple Tarka line service to Bideford, although the trackbed to Bideford has been taken over by the popular Tarka Trail for cyclists and walkers.

Tim Steer said: "I named our railway line the Atlantic Coast Express railway or simply

ACE Rail. We cannot be sure yet where the consultants will suggest the best line will be. We want active travel and sustainable public transport to work in harmony."

Kevin Ball explained how OkeRail's 14-year campaign culminated in the successful return of a seven-days-a-week passenger service between Okehampton and Exeter.

The population of Greater Bideford, which includes Northam, Appledore and Westward Ho! is now over 30,000. That is almost the same as Barnstaple, which kept its rail link when Bideford lost its final passenger service in 1965.

Freight continued to Bideford until 1982, when the last special rail tour ran.

The South West has done well in winning over a quarter of the successful bids to the Restoring Your Railway ideas fund.

Reopening to Tavistock from Bere Alston is also expected in the next 10 years.

Greater Bideford now stands out as the largest population in Devon suffering the injustice of having no rail services.

More information about the campaign can be found on the Railfuture website on the branch page for Devon and Cornwall. Search for Railway reopenings.

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

£250,000 Oxfordshire study to look at a new rail link for Witney

Despite their unsuccessful ideas fund bid, the Witney Oxford Transport Group press on, with advice and guidance from Railfuture, in their campaign for the Windrush line.

Named after the local river, it will be an entirely new line off the North Cotswold line into West Oxfordshire, to link Oxford and Eynsham with Salt Cross garden village, Witney, and Carterton with RAF Brize Norton.

More than 50,000 people live in these rail-disconnected communities along the A40 corridor, with more to come in the new Salt

Cross garden village. Oxfordshire County Council is now run by the multi-party Fair Deal Alliance and the Windrush line's prospects have improved.

The county council has allocated £250,000 for a strategic rail feasibility study to establish what it would take to advance the proposals for new rail links to Cowley, Grove-Wantage, and Witney, and to double the track on the North Cotswold line.

Use the link in the Railfuture website's Restoring Your Railway campaign page to

register support for these or other lines and stations. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has said: "Entries have been specifically judged on their ability to deliver real economic benefits and support left-behind communities, with investment targeted at regenerating local economies by supporting new house developments, opening up access to jobs and education, boosting tourism."

More information about the Witney campaign can be found on the Railfuture website in the branch page for Thames Valley.

Yorkshire view of integrated plan

By Mike Rose
mikerose@gmail.com

The integrated rail plan announced in November seemed to be a government attempt to get out of promises of rail improvements it previously made to the North of England. It also appeared to be a desperate attempt to save money wherever possible.

The North West comes out of the IRP reasonably well, apart from trans-Pennine links, but Yorkshire feels very hard done by.

Although the effects of Covid may reduce rail traffic in the short term, demand is expected to grow for both passenger and freight traffic because of climate change. Increasing rail capacity is crucial.

Additional funds could be made available if the idea of land value capture, as proposed by Transport for the North, is accepted.

The HS2 extension from Crewe to Manchester and Wigan is obviously to be welcomed and the planned link from Liverpool to Manchester airport will relieve a little pressure on the Castlefield corridor in Manchester.

However, building the new line from Manchester to Marsden will be hugely disruptive.

There is nowhere to divert the traffic to. Both the Hope Valley and Calder Valley lines are full. The existing line could be upgraded, not to full high-speed status as proposed in the IRP, but as a stepping stone to building a new high-speed line.

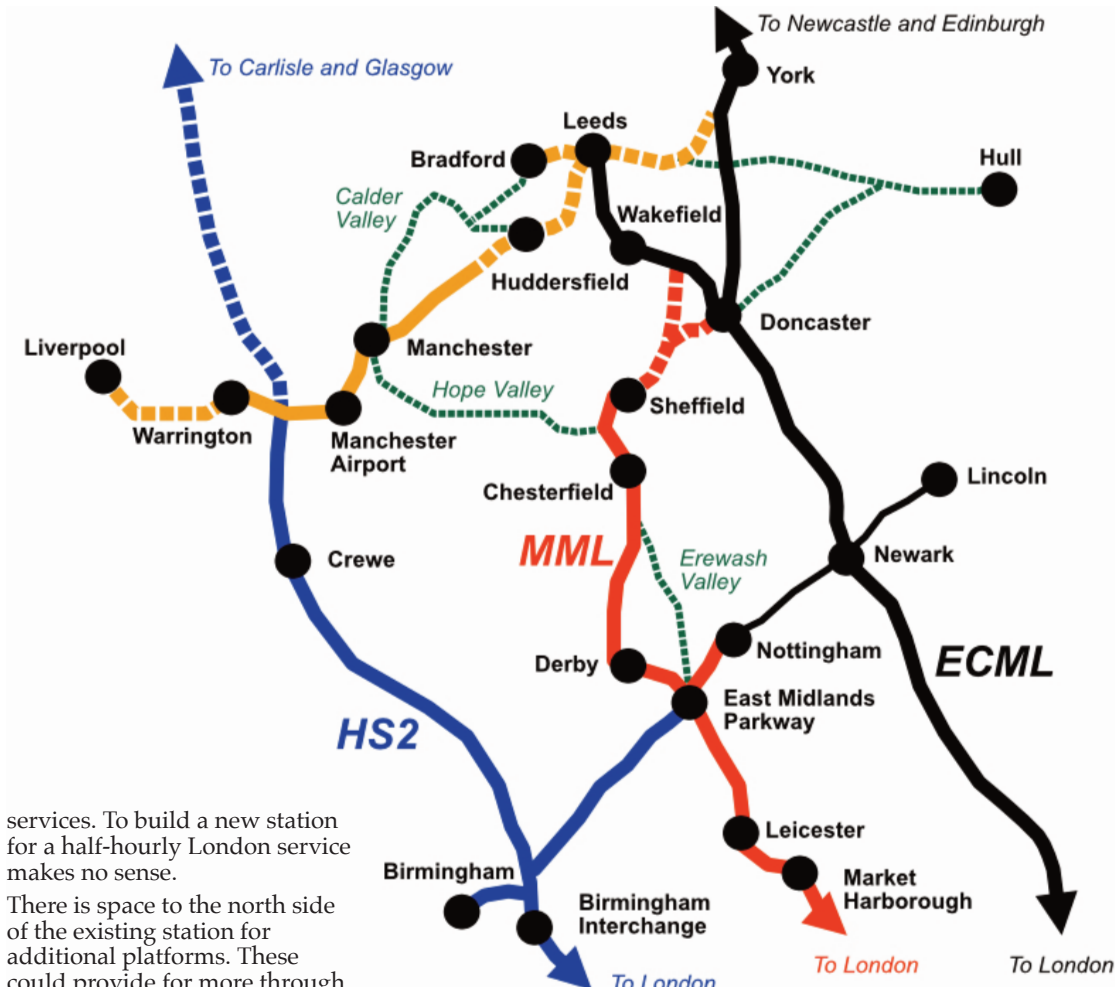
Four-tracking the line from Manchester to Diggle (Standedge tunnel southern portal), would be expensive but would reduce disruption and increase capacity. Without it, there will continue to be a shortage of capacity across the Pennines unless a new Northern Powerhouse Rail line is built from Manchester to Leeds.

The IRP proposal to provide the HS2 link to East Midlands Parkway is good.

Electrifying to Sheffield via Derby, but not via the Erewash line, saves money at the cost of slower services to Sheffield.

A minimum requirement would be to electrify from Sheffield to Doncaster and to South Kirby, which would allow electric services from Sheffield to York and Leeds (broken red lines on the map).

Leeds station is full to capacity. Building a new station on the south side is probably not the answer. There is a need for through running, not terminating



services. To build a new station for a half-hourly London service makes no sense.

There is space to the north side of the existing station for additional platforms. These could provide for more through trains.

There is also potential to create through platforms at the south side of the station. If Micklefield-Hambleton were electrified at the same time as Bradford-Leeds via New Pudsey, an hourly London to Leeds train could be routed via Hambleton and extended to Bradford Interchange.

Leeds would benefit from more platforms and Bradford could gain a good London service.

With LNER free bimodes, a London-Bradford service could be implemented immediately.

The suggested IRP journey times for Manchester-Leeds and Manchester-Sheffield appear unrealistic, without much greater investment. The plans for Manchester-Sheffield are poor and undeveloped. There is a need for passing loops in the Hope Valley and, combined with this, four tracking of the southern approach to Sheffield, where three tracks are proposed. The line used to have four tracks and it would not be difficult to reinstate these.

Improvements are also needed for the route to Manchester via Stockport, which needs a grade-separated junction at Edgeley south of Stockport and also at Slade Lane on the Manchester approaches. These

improvements would benefit many services. Instead, IRP suggests merely a second track on the junction at Hazel Grove. On the Yorkshire side of the Pennines, there is currently a pinch point north of Sheffield station, where trains for Retford and Worksop diverge at Nunnerly Junction – a flat junction in tunnel.

That problem could be solved by a separate pair of tracks as far as Nunnerly Junction. The length of track required is short, but being in tunnel and cutting would not be easy. As at Leeds, more through running would ease the capacity problem at Sheffield station.

Bradford has particularly poor rail connections for a city of its size, and would benefit from a faster link to Manchester. The Manchester-Leeds line via Bradford needs upgrading and electrification.

IRP's method of improving Bradford-Leeds does not mention upgrading the line on to Manchester. This upgraded route would provide additional capacity for the Manchester-Leeds upgrade.

It could also exploit the Huddersfield-Dewsbury

improvements which will increase freight capacity. In the long term, we need what was promised: Northern Powerhouse Rail – a new line from Bradford to Manchester.

The IRP proposal for the main Leeds-London service to be via the upgraded East Coast main line and HS2 via Sheffield is a sound approach.

Transport for the North, having lost its ticketing arm, has now been deprived of the team which was working on NPR.

There are fears that Transport for the North is to be abolished. This would have an adverse impact on local input into decision making on local services, as well as on taking a strategic approach to rail services in the North.

Overall the IRP looks like a money-saving exercise, exploiting the fact that the proposed Birmingham-Leeds HS2 route was flawed.

Transport for the North's board is disappointed by IRP, but has committed to working with the government to explore funding options for NPR, as well as to prioritise investment.

Mike Rose is a Railfuture director and vice-chair of Railfuture Yorkshire.

Map: RAILWATCH

Building on community rail success

Community rail has been crucial in transforming remote rural railway Cinderellas into success stories.

Now the man who came up with the concept of community rail says it can be used in forgotten areas of towns and cities.

Paul Salvesson, a former railway guard who is now an author and professor, is calling on Great British Railways to recognise the value of community engagement, and support developments in unwelcoming "hard to reach" stations in urban areas.

His *Building on success: future directions for Community Rail* paper stresses that the concept can apply to inter-city operations, large city centre stations and small inner city stations.

The paper is published by the Rail Reform Group, a network of independent rail professionals.

In his *New Futures for Rural Rail* paper in 1992, Paul invented community rail which has become a strong and mature national movement, proud of its independence but backed by the government and the rail industry.

The new paper proposes some radical but deliverable solutions, including more station facilities being operated by community enterprises, supporting local economies.

He said the movement faces major challenges with major restructuring of the rail industry combined with continuing reductions in rail patronage.

But this period is also an opportunity for the dozens of community rail partnerships and hundreds of station friends.



COMMUNITY RAIL INITIATIVE: Passengers on board a Great Western train from Paddington to Cornwall were treated to a quintessentially English tea party complete with the world's largest fully-functioning tea pot, which brews over 300 cups. It also helped launch Tregothnan tea – grown in Cornwall – for onboard catering services

He argues that investment in Britain's local railways and their partnerships offers good value for money, not just for railways but for hard-pressed communities in both rural and urban areas.

Community rail has a huge role to play in helping rail recover post-Covid. Working with the rail industry, local government and the emerging Great British Railways, it can bring creativity and innovation to the industry.

Today, there are more than 70 community rail partnerships and hundreds of station groups, and the movement is no longer a purely rural initiative. It already includes inner urban areas.

They offer the rail industry partners for developing integrated bus links, promoting walking and cycling schemes including bike hire, as well as

station and on-train catering. Given some funding, community rail can take on mental health, hate crime, antisocial behaviour and loneliness issues, which have an impact on the railways.

Community Rail Partnerships can be more ambitious. Some train operators are ready to welcome CRPs into big-scale projects.

Great British Railways will dramatically change how railways are managed.

It will administer passenger service contracts where private companies run the trains with clear contract responsibilities. Community rail needs to be brought into the heart of the railway, because unlike the current system there will be little room for creativity by the train operating companies. Many community partnerships are

already working with the industry on service planning issues and this needs to be embedded in GBR, but they should not be expected to take over branch lines because they are not equipped to respond to such a challenge.

There is scope though for partnerships to have long-term agreements with GBR to develop specific services, such as work with schools, mental health, refugees and work experience.

Having a community rail partnership is not a substitute for having a frequent and reliable train service, but it can be a means of achieving it, helping to build the case for investment.

The partnerships can also work with the rail industry to establish retail facilities on stations, with station cafes doubling as local art galleries and bookshops.

Paul said: "Thirty years on from the establishment of the first CRP (in Devon and Cornwall), the lack of awareness of what community rail is among some in the rail industry continues to surprise and sadden me.

"It's far too important to be left just to a stakeholder manager or similar, however well-intentioned, and should be embedded across the entire industry."

Community rail partnerships are now well placed to support or lead on rail reopenings, particularly new stations along routes they cover. They can even act as a stimulus for more ambitious line reopenings.

GBR should be required to increase passenger numbers but also maximise railway assets.

The full report is available on the Rail Reform Group's website.

An ideal job for Saudi women

A job advert to recruit 30 female train drivers in Saudi Arabia attracted 28,000 applicants, highlighting the scale of pent-up demand.

The 30 selected women will drive high speed trains (pictured right) between the cities of Mecca and Medina after a year of paid training.

Women were not allowed to drive cars until 2018, the year the 281-mile rail line opened.

Services were suspended for a year because of Covid but restarted in March 2021.

Saudi Arabia announced in February that it plans to add

2,500 miles of railway to its existing 3,500 mile network.

The Saudi trains were supplied by Spain, which in December completed its high speed line connecting Madrid to Galicia.

In Germany, the new high-speed line between Berlin and Munich is reported to be making serious inroads into the domestic flight market.

In Britain, work continues on the London-Birmingham leg of HS2. Rail enthusiast Pete Waterman unveiled the HS2 tunnelling machine named after Dorothy Hodgkin, the

first British woman to win the Nobel Prize for chemistry.

The Bill for HS2 from Crewe to Manchester was laid before parliament in January.

The government says part of the line will in future be used for "powerhouse" rail services from Liverpool and

Manchester to Leeds. China meanwhile announced that it had built 1,600 miles of high speed line in 2021, giving it a total of 25,000 miles of high speed line.

China's overall passenger rail journeys increased by 17% and freight by 4% in 2021.

Your views

Speed up Access

It was a very interesting article in *Railwatch* 170 on the need for ramping up the Access for All project.

I have had my mobility restricted for some time thanks to a combination of a trapped nerve in my back and a heart condition.

Trying to deal with long flights of steps and long passages on the Underground had become very difficult as I would have to stop frequently to get my breath back.

When travelling from my home station of Tipton to anywhere south of London I have tended to make use of the West London line to Clapham Junction, which avoids a lot of the steps and walking associated with crossing London directly.

I now have a mobility scooter, which is a considerable benefit. West Midlands Trains are very good as I can simply turn up and go. The staff at Birmingham New Street are also very helpful. I have not tried anything further afield yet but that will come.

Having read the article, I am wondering if there is scope for Railfuture to set up an accessibility group? Railfuture has clout and may be able to apply more pressure in certain cases.

It should not take 10 years to get improvements like those at Dorchester. Finsbury Park is a shocker. Ayr has only a footbridge between the platforms and currently no toilets. Locally, Dudley Port is expected to be linked to a new stop on the West Midlands Metro extension but I have been told that there are currently no plans to create step-free access to the Network Rail station.

If a Railfuture access group was set up I would be interested in joining it, but I shall be 80 by the time this letter might be published and I do not want to take on any fresh responsibilities.

Donald Payne, Dudley Road Tipton, DY4 8EE donpayne@btinternet.com

Bournville blues

After a few years living in South Africa, I have returned and now live in Bournville, Birmingham.

I love to receive *Railwatch* but I must tell you that rail and tram services in the West Midlands are in a very bad way.

The Tory mayor of the West Midlands won re-election but he has failed to deliver on his promises.

On trams, he was warned months ago that the system was unsafe but inaction led to the suspension of the system. Metal cracks were



2021 WINNER: Glenfinnan Viaduct by Malcolm Blenkey won the Lines in the Landscape category

This beautiful winning picture was displayed at a series of British rail stations, along with other stunning landscape pictures.

This year sees the 15th Landscape Photographer of the Year competition. Entries close on 5 May. Network Rail is supporting the Lines in the Landscape category, which aims to find photography that captures the spirit of today's railway as it relates to the landscape around it.

The prize fund is worth over £20,000, with £10,000 for the overall winner and additional

found but we were not told where. Many services were reinstated but not to New Street or the library. Projected extensions, including to Edgbaston, have been put on hold. On trains, regular passenger trains and four rebuilt stations were supposed to be reinstated on the Camp Hill line but nothing seems to have happened since the original plan of 2019. Why?

We are not told anything. When working properly, the Cross-city line is an excellent, safe, quick and comfortable ride. The Camp Hill line could be similar, serving other car-intensive areas of south west Birmingham.

I believe we need a special report on the West Midlands – a key area politically – from *Railwatch* as soon as possible.

Rowland Dale, Oak Tree Lane, Birmingham B30 1TU

Healthy way ahead

I read the letter by Peter Solomon in *Railwatch* 169 and thought it was misleading to regard active travel

special awards. The 2021 Lines in the Landscape winner said: "Glenfinnan Viaduct is a really special location to capture."

Other categories are Classic View, Urban Life, Black and White, Your View and under 18.

An exhibition of winning and commended entries will tour stations from November.

The images will also be published in a book, Landscape Photographer of the Year: Collection 15, published by Ilex Press in October. More information: lpoty.co.uk/competition

such as walking and cycling as pious waffle.

Every effort should be made to encourage these modes of transportation for the sake of personal fitness, which results in better well-being and a healthier environment with cleaner air and reduced carbon footprint.

Mr Solomon states that people are not going to be persuaded to cycle for 45 minutes on dangerous country roads to get to a station.

I regularly cycle on country roads and never feel threatened. Many country roads have much less traffic than main roads.

Many of the claims that cycling is dangerous are presumptions made by those who do not ride a bicycle. In any event, with the right political will much improved cycling provision can be provided. We just have to keep campaigning.

Even though there is over 70% car ownership in the area, if there is adequate cycling provision then many would potentially cycle the distance. Providing cheap car

parking is just pandering more to car culture.

David Bailey, Dawlish EX7 9QD davidpbailey1@gmail.com

Economical lifts

In *Railwatch* 170, a wheelchair user complains that the lifts at two new Northern line stations are too small to permit him to turn his chair and calls for bigger lifts. Does he have any idea of the extra costs?

There are escalators at these new stations so a small lift – for prams, wheelchairs or oversize luggage – should satisfy this limited demand.

The demand for public money is huge so Railfuture should think carefully. If we ask for the moon, we will be ignored.

David Bosomworth SE9 3RQ

Party line error

The article about the Heart of Wales line problems in *Railwatch* 170 struck a chord.

In June 2021, I was part of an organised railway holiday, staying

in Llandrindod Wells. We arrived from Shrewsbury on a crowded, but hardly overcrowded, train.

There were around 20 in the group and one of the highlights was to be a rail journey to Llandeilo from Llandrindod Wells.

We were not able to make this journey because Transport for Wales would not allow the organising company to book a party ticket, so they had to book a road coach at short notice. Yet another sum of money lost to this beautiful line.

Dennis Hemsley, Hopwood Close, Leicester LE4 0LY

Electric incentive

In his article on the future of rail freight (*Railwatch* 170), Ian Brown summarises the priorities of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. These include:

- Remove all diesel-only trains from the network by 2040
- Commitment to a sustainable, deliverable (but not quantified) programme of electrification that delivers a higher performing net zero railway

By 2040, all existing diesel-only locomotives and railcars will be almost 20 years older than they are now and would almost certainly have to be replaced anyway, so they are likely to be replaced by bi-mode rolling stock as and when required. However by not making any firm commitments on electrification, the result could be more carbon dioxide emissions than at present.

A bi-mode locomotive will contain the diesel engine and generator to be found in an existing diesel-electric locomotive. It will also have to have a pantograph and transformer which will add weight, so more fuel must be burned per mile travelled in diesel mode. For railcars, which usually have a torque converter and mechanical propulsion, the weight increase per vehicle will be even greater, and diesel-electric drive is less fuel-efficient than drive through a torque converter and geared final drive.

If electricity supplies on existing electrified lines are not very quickly upgraded, the new bi-mode trains might have to run in diesel mode on electrified lines as well as non-electrified. At present, on the East Coast main line north of Newcastle, the power supply cannot cope with demand. TransPennine bi-mode trains are often required to operate in diesel mode between Alnmouth and Edinburgh, and there are plans

Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups. Send material (as early as possible) to: The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk



Picture: STEVE JONES

Signal respect for historian

Historian John Orton made a big impression when he featured on BBC local radio talking about the times he spent in the Narborough signalbox as a boy.

When he died, John's family wanted his ashes to have a railway home.

Railfuture member John Harrison was asked by the family whether his ashes could be laid at the station, perhaps a nice spot under a tree. But then the family changed their minds and asked if the ashes could be placed under the steps leading to the signalbox, with a short appropriate religious service included.

After a few emails to Network Rail headed "An unusual request", it was agreed.

Railfuture's John Harrison, who is chair of the Friends of Narborough Station, said: "We

also enjoyed the bonus of having the signalbox opened, so that John's family and friends, and me of course, could see where John spent a fair amount of his youth."

Narborough station, on the Leicester to Birmingham line, is a delightful location, with its pretty iron lattice footbridge as well as the station buildings, signalbox and level crossing. It is also historically significant, being the very first station closed by Beeching to be reopened, on 5 January 1970.

The Friends are an active group seeking the promotion and development of the station, including community use of the former stationmaster's house and garden.

More information about FONS can be found at <https://fonsnarborough.wordpress.com/>

to run more services on this route. There might be other electrified lines with inadequate power supplies.

We need a schedule for electrification and supply upgrades on already electrified lines. This schedule needs to run ahead of diesel-only rolling stock replacement.

Damian Bell, Northbourne Street, Gateshead NE8 4AE lebnaimadwerdna@yahoo.co.uk

Electric myths

The article "electric cars a dead-end diversion" in *Railwatch* 170 makes the point that electric cars are not

emission free. However, it fails to mention the strongest argument against them – the colossal carbon emissions from the manufacture of lithium batteries, and the predicted scale of environmental damage extracting the many millions of tonnes of lithium that will be required to make them.

There is a widely held view that there is something virtuous in buying a brand-new electric car, whereas the reality is actually very different.

We are told to "reduce, re-use, recycle". It seems to me that we should be aiming to reduce the number of private cars and car journeys, choosing to use trains, which are reused again and again for 30 or 40 years. The idea that buying a new electric car, with very little recycled content, is somehow

going to save the planet, needs to be exposed for the myth that it is. Secondly, replacing every existing car with an electric one, and maybe some more besides, does nothing to make our country a more pleasant place to live, with ever more traffic congestion, parking problems, and pressure to lay more tarmac. Yet the Prime Minister recently referred to driving electric as "guilt free" motoring!

Electric cars should be seen for what they are – a partial solution to one problem – whereas a modal shift to public transport, particularly rail, has benefits all round.

Adrian Fawcett
Pontypool, South Wales
adrianfawcett@outlook.com

Need for toilets

I agree with J. Evered about the need for adequate toilet provision on trains (*Railwatch* 170). It is one area where rail scores over service buses that have no such facilities, or coaches with their single cubicle that is most uncomfortable to use.

Martin James (*Railwatch* 170) also makes sense when arguing for printed timetables. Those in authority must realise that not everyone is hooked up to the internet, and they should always provide an alternative if people are not to be electronically disadvantaged.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue Grimsby DN31 2JP

Passenger needs

It is clear from letters to *Railwatch* that in order to attract more passengers, improvements need to be made in safety and in toilet facilities.

There should be a toilet in every carriage and these should be standardised across the various rail companies.

Safety needs to be improved by having more staffed stations and closed circuit television. Women are sometimes deterred from using public transport because of unwanted attention.

One answer could be the fitting of a special alarm system next to seats so that the guard can be contacted where someone is creating a nuisance. The difficulty we face is that a government's first interest lies in cutting costs, whereas by failing to consider the overall situation there is likely to be greater expense in the future.

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

Wessex

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Cuts restored

Prime Minister Boris Johnson stepped in after Railfuture protested about South Western Railway cuts which isolated Dorset, Somerset, most of Wiltshire and Devon from its direct rail services to London. Railfuture media's Bruce Williamson warned in January that the decision marked a new low point in the provision of rail services by SWR on the Waterloo to Weymouth and Waterloo to Exeter routes. He said: "The changes will force passengers to change at Bournemouth or Salisbury, resulting in a loss of convenience and longer journey times."

Railfuture director Stewart Palmer added: "SWR seems to display a cavalier disregard for the needs of rail users. These changes will just drive passengers away to higher carbon means of transport. Rail users and their elected politicians, both local and national, need to make their voices heard to reverse this madness".

West Dorset MP Chris Loder said the cuts were unnecessary and took up the case personally with the prime minister, who announced in the House of Commons on 2 February that the service would be restored on 19 February.

■ ■ Draconian cuts

Although South Western Railway was not the only rail company to introduce further cuts to its services in January, the reductions across the SWR network were among the most severe. As soon as the new timetables had been published, Railfuture mustered all the resources at its disposal to challenge the reductions and alert MPs to the difficulties for rail users. Our campaign went right to the top, with questions being asked in the House of Commons, appearances on TV and articles in various journals. We also supplied details for Transport Focus in support of their analysis of emergency timetables.

Passengers travelling up from Weymouth and Dorchester were to suffer some of the worst effects of the reduced timetable, with only one train per hour, further loss of early and late trains, and the need to change at Bournemouth for onward travel. Oddly, the Saturday service was to remain at two trains per hour each way between Weymouth and Waterloo, which tended to disprove the company's assertion that their weekday reductions were prompted by Covid-related staff absences!

Despite there being absolutely no evidence of staff shortages on the West

of England line, the service up from Exeter was reduced to a single train every two hours. Consequently there were reports that some trains were "full and standing". Passengers also had the added inconvenience of having to change at Salisbury and wait 20 mins for an onward connection. Little wonder that many opted to go by car instead. It seems that years of effort to build rail patronage are being sacrificed on the altar of short-term cost savings, making the government's carbon-reduction targets that much harder to achieve. Altering a timetable at short notice carries the risk that vital connections with other transport services suddenly become void. For example, after Wightlink stopped running its two late evening ferry crossings from Portsmouth, it has meant that the two last trains to Ryde Pier Head now trundle up the pier and back to meet a non-existent catamaran.

■ ■ Crumbs of comfort

The campaign to restore timetables to pre-Covid levels continues, but meanwhile we can report some success stories.

First, Southern announced in January that most of their trains between London Victoria and Portsmouth would once more run through to Portsmouth Harbour station. We had complained when they decided back in December 2020 to terminate the service at Portsmouth & Southsea station on weekdays, arguing that this would be very inconvenient for people travelling to waterfront attractions or on to the Isle of Wight.

We were also delighted to learn that CrossCountry would be reinstating a number of stops at Winchester after pressure from Railfuture. This goes some way towards our aim of getting station calls at both Winchester and Brockenhurst restored on all XC services through Hampshire.

■ ■ Anniversary year

Community rail partnerships covering stations between Southampton and Dorchester are getting ready to celebrate the 175th anniversary of passenger services along the railway through Hampshire and Dorset. Some exciting events are being planned for June, and the organisers would like to hear from anybody willing to share photographs, film footage or personal recollections for an exhibition about the history of the line. Email them at southamptontodorchester@swanagerailway.co.uk

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

Railfuture webinar *Probably the biggest single block to a rail recovery is the price of tickets. A national railcard as advocated by Railfuture is a good option to bring rail passengers back. But ticketing is one of the major challenges for the transition team clearing the way for Great British Railways. This was also one of the questions discussed at Railfuture's Rail Recovery webinar in January. You can catch up with a YouTube recording of the event: <https://youtu.be/ui-rZ2hM1ds>*

Sevenside



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

PORTWAY: Bristol City Councillor Don Alexander, Network Rail's Richard Cole, Great Western's Tom Pierpoint and city council planner Andrew Davies

95-year wait for Bristol station

Work started in earnest in February on the first new railway station within the city of Bristol for 95 years.

Portway will be a £4.2 million park-and-ride station on the Severn Beach line.

The Shirehampton site is part of wider plans to enhance the local rail network through the MetroWest programme.

The station is jointly funded by Bristol City Council, the West of England Combined Authority and the Department for Transport.

Portway is the first new station in Bristol since Parson Street station in 1927.

Network Rail completed preparatory work for Portway in December. Much of the work is being done overnight to reduce disruption to rail passengers, but the line closed for eight days in February for signalling and drainage upgrades.

When it opens later this year, the station will be served by the half-hourly services between Bristol Temple Meads and Severn Beach.

Bristol City Council is expanding the 500-plus car parking and supporting bus link improvements.

"Portway park-and-ride station will improve connectivity to the rail network for the local

community, allowing many more people to choose to travel by rail to work, study and for leisure," said Councillor Don Alexander. "It will help us to ease congestion on the roads in a sustainable way and reduce air pollution, as we work towards our ambitious goal to be carbon neutral and climate resilient by 2030."

West of England Metro Mayor Dan Norris said: "The combined authority is investing over £1 million here. Improving our public transport network is crucial."

The overall MetroWest project aims to transform rail travel in the South West, and to generate a million new rail journeys. MetroWest includes reopening the Henbury Line with new stations at Henbury, North Filton and Ashley Down.

Also included is providing half-hourly services between Bristol Temple Meads and Gloucester via Yate, with a potential new station at Charfield.

Another key component of MetroWest is reopening the Portishead line.

Clamour for rail: Page 12
Sevenside branch contact: sevenside@railfuture.org.uk
www.railfuture.org.uk/SevensideBranch
Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide



Railfuture bargains

Tote bag (left) for £3 (reduced from £3.50) or 2 bags for £4, rail track cufflinks for £12 and lapel pin badge for £2. Prices include post and packing. You can order and pay here: www.railfuture.org.uk/shop

Does rail face a war of attrition?

By Stewart Palmer

The government's position on Covid is that we need to get back to normal and to learn to live with the disease.

Without doubt there is a steady return to the office and leisure activity is ramping up. The need to reboot the economy in city centres is clear.

The government's much-publicised agenda on "levelling up", "building back better" and tackling climate change should all be good news for Britain's railways.

Whatever you think about the integrated rail plan, it does point to a more rail-based future for the country's transport needs.

However, when you compare the rhetoric with what is actually happening on the ground you get a very different picture.

Many operators are still providing a service well below pre-Covid levels and in some cases further reduced their timetables from 17 January 2022.

There have been many reports of overcrowding on trains as a result of reduced frequency.

Sometimes even first and last trains have been axed.

We have also seen the loss of through services, loss of on-train catering and an overall loss of system connectivity.

To be fair, the picture does vary across the nation, but there seems to be a depressing lack of a "can do" attitude from train operators.

So why is this happening? It is easy to blame the Treasury, but let us remember that the government (taxpayers in reality) have pumped billions of pounds into the railways to keep them going through the pandemic.

Nobody believes that it makes sense to transport fresh air around the country, but at present it seems the rail agenda is being driven by cost reduction, rather than bottom line loss reduction.

This displays a fundamental lack of understanding of railway economics. Railways have high fixed costs in terms of the infrastructure, including train leasing costs.

The variable costs associated with running more services, in proportion to fixed costs, are low.

The train service currently on offer in some parts of the country is simply unattractive, not only to existing rail users but also to potential customers. The off-peak cuts in service save very



Picture: JOHN GORDON

LONDON'S EUSTON STATION: An electric train for the first direct service on 13 December 2021

Positive action as first direct train starts running

The first direct train from London Euston to St Albans Abbey started running in December. One direct evening train runs to Watford Junction and then down the single-track line to St Albans.

The 21.10 direct train from Euston uses a short stretch of track at Watford Junction to connect to the 6.5 mile long semi-rural Abbey line.

There is no direct train in the opposite direction and rail experts say the direct train is merely for operational convenience.

During the pandemic, trains along the electrified Abbey line were often replaced by buses because of a shortage of train drivers. Train operator London Northwestern is keen to encourage potential passengers to check timetables before travelling. The stations along the line are usually the least used stations in Hertfordshire, with How

Wood being the quietest. The Abbey Flyer Users Group (Abfly), which represents passengers on the line, has campaigned for many years, for more frequent services with a restored passing loop at Bricket Wood.

They have been supported by local councils, MPs and other local organisations.

A bid to fund the passing loop is currently being considered by the Department for Transport as part of the Restoring Your Railway programme.

Watford and St Albans councils, St Stephen's Parish Council, Hertfordshire County Council, and St Albans Business Improvement District (BID) are keen to get more people to use the line.

Their campaign coincides with a wider campaign across Britain to promote scenic railways and the way that they



Picture: NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

serve the country's diverse tourist landscape in a sustainable way.

Denise Parsons from the BID said: "The Abbey Line is a fantastic service connecting Watford Junction with St Albans in minutes."

little cost and are attacking the key growth market that almost everybody agrees needs to be centre stage in a rail renaissance.

There is no point in saving £1 in costs and losing £2 in revenue.

I worked in the rail industry in the early 1970s when there was a spiral of cost cutting, lower revenue, followed by more cost cutting.

It did no one any good. But have we, as a society, learned nothing from that time?

Railfuture believes in a bigger and better railway, while the rail industry needs to focus on

revenue generation – and protection. We need a much more positive product that will make people choose rail as their preferred means of transport, not a distressed purchase because there is no alternative.

There are great opportunities out there to grow the business and to adapt it in line with the national objectives on climate change, modal shift, improved access to employment and education, as well as levelling up.

Obviously, at the same time, costs must be controlled and modern working practices embraced, including removing

people who add little value to the core product. To do that you have to have a good quality service at the right price.

It is time to stop making excuses and focus on an action plan that actually delivers what customers want.

There is tremendous affection for the railways in Britain, but unless the industry gets its act together very soon, I fear a return to the "dark ages" of rail in the 1960s and 1970s.

■ Stewart Palmer is a Railfuture director and former rail manager

THE CLAMOUR FOR RAIL Can Restoring Your Railway cope with demand?

The government's Restoring Your Railway scheme was launched to wide acclaim from the media and rail campaigners.

But can it ever meet the public appetite for reversing the Beeching cuts?

In 2017 the government said it wanted to reverse some of the cuts made in the 1960s, and later cuts by British Rail.

In 2018, the Department for Transport confirmed that it was investigating a number of proposals to restore old lines.

In 2020, the £500 million Restoring Your Railway fund was launched.

There is a long list of suitable schemes and some have attracted funds to investigate business cases.

Amazingly some are actually happening, including the Northumberland line, featured on page 1.



Aylesbury fights back

Even when a major scheme such as East West Rail is going ahead, campaigners are having to fight to have Aylesbury included in the scheme.

The picture shows Aylesbury MP Rob Butler receiving a petition from Aylesbury councillor Mark Winn, urging Parliament to ensure that Aylesbury is put back into EWR as a priority.

Mr Butler said: "The Aylesbury rail link is vital to the future prosperity of our town."

Milton Keynes Council is backing Aylesbury's campaign.

Chris Wright of Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee said it was urgent that funding for EWR to Aylesbury and South Buckinghamshire is found to provide a foundation for the future growth of the town and South Bucks.

Portishead is still waiting

By Bruce Williamson and Dave Chillistone

After years of campaigning, work should have been starting this year on a new station for Portishead, near Bristol, to be served partly by an existing line still used by freight trains running alongside the Avon Gorge to Portbury.

But yet again, a delay has been introduced into the already long and winding process which campaigners have been forced to take part in.

This time, the prospect of a busway has reared its ugly head, with a local group proposing a shared use busway and freight railway along the Portishead line, operating on a timeshare basis. Buses would run during morning and evening rush-hour periods, with freight trains using it in between.

The Portishead Busway campaign proposes adding panels similar to those used at level crossings to create a combined road and railway, claiming that it would be significantly cheaper than running trains.

Railfuture-affiliated Portishead Railway Group has presented a detailed rebuttal of the proposals to the planning inspectorate, pointing out, among other things, that the system is unproven and untested, a new signalling system would have to be developed and approved to allow buses and trains to safely share the same route, and, of course, buses are simply not as effective as trains in attracting people out of their cars.

The busway would not be guided, but the buses would have only 18cm leeway on either side, so a bus driver could not safely steer a standard full sized bus. Clearly, overall it is a ludicrous proposal, but it once again shows how rail campaigners have to remain vigilant.

Portishead is one of the fastest growing towns in the South West, and the Portishead reopening, as part of an overall MetroWest scheme to improve rail services in the Bristol area, will be key to the town's future. The town's population has risen



An impression of what Portishead station will look like

to approximately 30,000 residents and pressure on the area's road network continues to increase.

The main commuter routes from Portishead to Bristol (A369 and M5) are regularly congested during peak times.

The original budget for the reopening was £58 million but was based only on a desk study, which did not take account of the topography of the Gorge.

A subsequent study was undertaken, with site visits and detailed technical work, with the price increasing to £116 million.

To meet the aspiration for a two-trains-per-hour service from Bristol Temple Meads to Portishead, it would be necessary for the trains to run at 50 mph along a part of the Avon Gorge which at present has a 30 mph speed limit, and to run at 75 mph on the reopened Pill to Portishead section.

Doing the necessary engineering work is complicated by the lack of road access along a five

kilometre stretch of the Gorge, together with the environmental considerations, including protected species such as great crested newts, bats and whitebeam trees. Because it is an active freight line, Network Rail says the work can be done only at weekends. Because of this, they estimate that 50 weekend closures would be necessary, with rails put down again at the end of the weekend to allow the freight to run during the week.

A passenger train frequency of two trains per hour, plus the freight traffic on the level crossing at Ashton Vale crossing, would be difficult to accommodate.

After lots of ducking and diving, all the funding is in place.

The Portishead project is considered to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, so requires a Development Consent Order.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps was expected to make a decision on the DCO in October 2021. He has delayed it until 19 April 2022.



DELAY: Delays have hit the scheme to get passenger trains running through the Avon Gorge to Portishead. At present, the line is used only by freight trains to Portbury Docks

Arboretum bid for rail link



ALREWAS FOR THE ARBORETUM: MP Michael Fabricant (foreground) with Philippa Rawlinson, chief executive of the National Memorial Arboretum, and Malcolm Holmes, chief executive of the West Midlands Rail Executive

MP Michael Fabricant is backing plans for a rail station to serve the National Memorial Arboretum.

The station would be on the freight line between Lichfield and Burton upon Trent, and would allow people to travel by rail from Birmingham.

Birmingham's electrified Cross-City rail service links 24 stations, but stops at Lichfield Trent Valley, four miles short of the arboretum which currently can be reached only by road. It would be a short walk from Alrewas station.

Lichfield MP Mr Fabricant, who said he suggested a reopened station four years ago, added: "We visited the signal box, which is adjacent to where a new station might be. Initially, trains will be non-electric and may be

hydrogen powered, fuelled from a small hydrogen production plant already planned to be opened in Birmingham. If the route is a success, the line might eventually be electrified and the Alrewas station moved adjacent to where the signal box is sited and with two platforms.

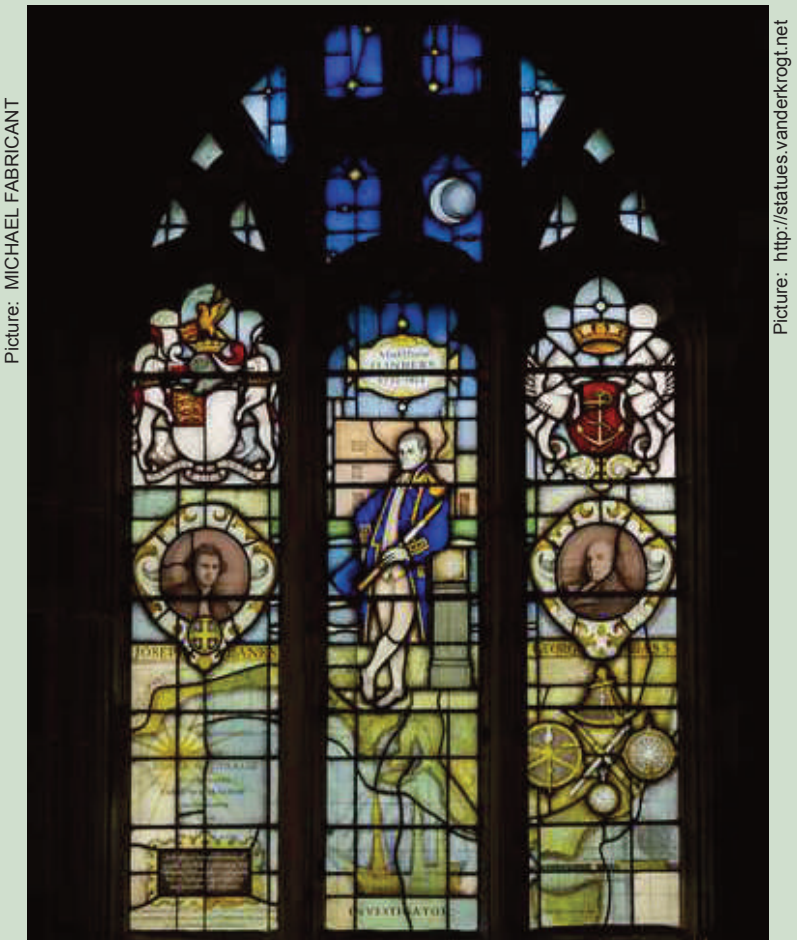
"An overhead pedestrian crossing will eventually connect the station with the village of Alrewas. It makes good sense to use an existing railway line and provide direct access to England's second city."

Of course, Burton upon Trent has been waiting for 28 years for the second stage of the Ivanhoe project to be implemented – reopening from Leicester via Coalville and Ashby de la Zouch.

Wales combats years of neglect



The Welsh government's ambition to see the neglected North Wales line electrified was supported by the Union Connectivity Review published in November. But north-south rail connections in Wales are poor. Extending south from Bangor is important, as is reopening the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth line



The Flinders window at St Mary's church in Donington, Lincolnshire. The window was given to the church in 1980 by the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian States, the Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts Association and local people

Australia's non-railway Lincs

Railfuture member Graham Lilley is a man with a mission. When the weather improves, he will be taking another trip to the village of Donington in Lincolnshire.

Graham will be armed with a clipboard, a notepad and a yellow waistcoat. He said: "I need to see the state of the station that remains, the view from the humpback bridge and potential alternate sites west of Northorpe and at South Ings."

Donington does not have a station, but 75% of the people living in and around it believe it should. So they have started a campaign to get a station reopened on the Lincoln to Peterborough line – and they have asked Graham for help.

They believe Donington has a special claim to be on the tourist map because it is a pilgrimage spot for Australians in search of a national hero.

They also know that locals want a station for work and leisure too. Graham said: "A business woman called Marrison told me that every morning she drives her husband to Peterborough to catch a train to London, where

he worked, before she could start her own work."

Donington lost its station in the 1960s Beeching cuts and is now badly served by public transport, but freight and passenger trains pass through the village.

A trip by bus from Graham's home in Ruskington to Donington takes more than three hours. A chance meeting with Jane Pearson, who masterminded the return of the remains of explorer Captain Matthew Flinders to the village of his birth, Donington, inspired Graham.

Flinders was born in Donington in 1774, but became famous for circumnavigating Van Diemens land and renaming it Australia.

In 2024, for the 250th anniversary, villagers believe thousands of Australian tourists will want to travel to Donington and to see the Flinders statue in the market place, but there are few public transport choices.

Donington missed the boat with Restoring Your Railway funds. But it would like to see Great British Railways give it another chance to get back on track.

RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2022

Nominations for Railfuture Campaigner of the Year 2022 are now open

The award will be presented at our AGM in Bristol on Saturday 16 July 2022

Do you know someone who has contributed to the success of Railfuture or someone who has raised the profile of Railfuture? Perhaps they work behind the scenes, helping their local branch? If you think they deserve recognition we want to hear about them

Send a written statement of no more than 500 words identifying how the nominee has contributed to Railfuture's mission to be number one advocate for rail users and the rail industry and how they have enhanced Railfuture's campaigning for a bigger, better railway

- Nominations may be made by any Railfuture member
- All Railfuture members are eligible to be nominated
- You may nominate yourself
- The nominee must be a member of Railfuture
- The deadline for nominations to be received is 10 June 2022

For further details or to submit a nomination email Membership Director Wendy Thorne wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk



They're back! Due to overwhelming popular demand Railfuture's Awards for Rail User Groups will return in 2022, with presentations to the award-winners at our next national annual general meeting on Saturday 16 July. The awards were last held in 2018.

The venue will be St Michael's Church Centre which is only a short walk from Bristol Parkway station. Since their inauguration in 2012, the Awards have sought to recognise and reward the campaigning

Railfuture Lottery winners

November M Colquhoun, G Smith, D Fleming, J Ward, P Rowland, M Breslin

December W Morton, R King, R Goring, R White, B Buttigieg, G Smith

January P Chandler, R Goring, D Allard, P Chandler, A McFie, P Clatworthy

Queries: lottery@railfuture.org.uk

efforts of volunteers in local rail user groups up and down the country.

The six categories in which nominations are available are: social media promotion, website, newsletter, new group, campaign and also campaigner.

There is also a judges' special award which is given entirely at their discretion. The judging panel comprises Railfuture vice-presidents, and our honorary president Christian Wolmar who will present the awards to the winners in Bristol.

In order to give panel members the opportunity to visit as many nominees as possible, the closing date for nominations is Easter Saturday 16 April.

This allows a couple of months for such visits and associated discussions.

Details can be found on the dedicated website page: www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards

Be active in the campaign for a better railway

Railfuture seeks to recruit more active campaigning members to ensure it continues to have influence within the railway industry, and is also looking for people with specific skills to help us in our day-to-day business.

If you have specific skills in areas such as event management, member recruitment or social media then we would love to hear from you.

We are currently looking for members to join our conference organising committee. You will be joining a small team who will oversee the organising of Railfuture's 2022 AGM and Annual National

Conference. So if you are experienced in event management, enjoy the challenge of finding interesting speakers and venues or are willing to help with tasks on the day, then do please get in touch.

We also wish to ensure that our branches have the support and training they require in all aspects of social media, so if anyone is able to provide this much-needed resource, again we would love to hear from you.

Please contact Membership Director Wendy Thorne by email. wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk

Thames Valley

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Coventry model for Oxford tram line

Railfuture Thames Valley is floating the idea of a West to East light rail line in Oxford, running between Seacourt park-and-ride, the railway station, city centre, John Radcliffe Hospital/Headington and Thornhill park-and-ride. A conventional street tramway with deep track foundations and overhead wires is out of the question, but with modern traction technology and light rail track, Very Light Rail on the Coventry model might be ideal for an Oxford Metro.

Western entry and more capacity for Oxford

Network Rail plans to start work in the summer on Oxford station's new western entrance, an extra platform and an additional through track. The work should be completed in December 2024, before the introduction of a two trains an hour East West Rail service into Oxford. Design work is under way on other improvements to expand capacity in the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor from Banbury and Hanborough in the north to Cowley and Didcot in the south. The Hanborough-Wolvercote Junction section will be doubled and Hanborough station rebuilt. A third line will be installed south of Oxford from North Hinksey to just north of Radley station, giving three bi-directional main line tracks between North Hinksey and Radley. At the Cowley branch terminus, a separate siding into the BMW works will be installed, avoiding the turnback line for terminating passenger trains.

New option for Witney-Oxford

Twenty years ago in 2001, the Mott-MacDonald pre-feasibility study on restoring the rail link to Witney was submitted to Oxfordshire County Council. The report ruled that restoration of a heavy rail line between Yarnton Junction and Brize Norton costing £107 million at 2001 prices would not be viable, but recommended further studies into the alternative light rail options costing £79 million, or guided busway costing £74 million. The county council, which was busy promoting a plan for a guided busway between Peartree and Redbridge, was not interested in light rail, and no further studies were commissioned.

Now the Witney-Oxford Transport Group, which is campaigning for restoration of the rail link, has commissioned a study from SLC Rail, a well-respected firm of railway consultants involved with new stations at Kenilworth and Worcestershire Parkway (among other projects). It is now generally accepted that reconstruction of the original rail line is not feasible, so a completely new line is necessary. The proposed new route would leave the North Cotswold line at or near Yarnton, and run mostly parallel to the A40, serving stations at Salt Cross (Eynsham North), Witney South, and ending in a field on the outskirts of Carterton. (Shades of Fairford!) The county council is already planning a major park-and-ride transport hub at Salt Cross. The SLC study is purely a technical report, and does not attempt to estimate the cost. Frequency of services, passing loops, and traction mode are also outside the remit of this study. We hope we shall not have to wait another 20 years to see shovels in the ground.

Slow – but some progress at Bourne End

The plan to remodel the layout at Bourne End for a half-hourly service seems to be in abeyance. Network Rail now wants to re-engineer the entire branch from Maidenhead, having recently completed the Marlow extension. GWR is however planning to improve rail-bus-rail connections by funding a four-an-hour bus service between Bourne End and High Wycombe station.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames Valley Branch
Twitter @RailfutureTV

FREIGHT BELONGS ON RAIL

China's silk route boosts rail freight to Europe

China seems to be leading the world in boosting rail freight.

Although much of the freight from China to Europe still comes on giant container ships, more than ever is coming by rail.

In January, China celebrated its 50,000th freight train leaving for Europe.

The switch to rail started more than 10 years ago when the first China-Europe trains ran. By 2011, the number of trains using the "New Silk Road" had grown – but only to 17 for the whole year.

Over the years, the figures more than doubled every year, and more and more cities were added to the corridor.

Now the freight trains serve 180 cities in 23 European countries, with more than 15,000 trains in 2021, an increase of 22% on the previous year.

The latest 12,800 km rail silk route to be added – in January – is Xian (home to the terracotta army) to Mannheim in Germany. The journey takes 16-18 days compared to 30-plus days by ship.

The overall switch to rail has been so successful that the problem now is congestion on the route, and freight forwarders are being asked to consolidate loads to make more efficient use of the capacity available. In Britain, freight train capacity to Liverpool has been doubled thanks to an £8 million investment in the Bootle branch after it reopened to freight traffic last year.

The Department for Transport said the upgrade makes an important contribution to the national economy.

"It will do so without adding more lorry journeys, congestion and emissions to our road network.

"Moving goods by rail results in just one-quarter of the equivalent carbon dioxide emissions compared to road, and rail freight supports the country in meeting our targets for net-zero."

The traffic via Liverpool includes shortbread and whisky exported to American markets by DB Cargo.

415 miles of electric operation with just four miles needing diesel

A new refrigerated rail freight service has started to supply Tesco supermarkets. The trains run from Thames Haven, near Tilbury, to Coatbridge near Glasgow, more than 415 miles, using bimode class 88 locos which can draw electricity from overhead wires or run as diesels.

The new "chill" train service comes after Tesco committed to increase its use of trains by almost 40%, from 65,000 containers a year to 90,000 containers by the end of the year.

On a normal day, the new service runs on electrified routes for all but four miles of its journey. It makes use of the Barking-Gospel Oak line in London, which was electrified for Transport for London Overground

services in 2018. The bimode loco allows the train to be diverted to non-electrified lines if there are delays or blockages.

The service received national media attention over the Christmas period, when it was credited with delivering hundreds of festive products. Tesco said the train will take at least 17,000 containers off the road each year, saving 7.3 million road miles and 9,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

"We have been using rail to transport our goods since 2008 and this new service reflects our continuing commitment to rail, which has clear advantages for our business, our customers and the planet," said chief executive Jason Tarry.



GRANGEMOUTH: On the south side of the Firth of Forth

Forth freight upgrade for rail

Grangemouth, which claims to be the biggest freight hub in Scotland, has invested £3 million to improve its rail facilities.

The upgrade increases its rail capacity by creating an extended dual rail siding of 775 metres (from 200 metres) capable of handling the longest freight trains.

It is designed to help food, drink and perishables businesses meet increasing demand.

Regular container ships call each week from mainland Europe and south-east England.

"Investment in our rail terminal is part of our strategy to provide more resilient, cost-effective, greener and efficient options for rail freight transportation to our existing and future customers," said

Derek Knox, senior port manager at Grangemouth. "The unique advantage of the Grangemouth rail freight terminal is that it is directly linked to Scotland's largest container port. Existing services link Grangemouth and its sister port in Tilbury on the Thames with a connection through Daventry."



DIESEL ALL THE WAY: This regular freight train seen crossing the river Lea in London on a 350-mile round trip from Doncaster brings building blocks for the Stratford City development taking shape in the background

Cymru

Wales



CARDIFF PARKWAY: The £120 million station will be between Cardiff and Newport

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■ ■ Railfuture views future trains

Railfuture was invited to view the recently constructed mock-ups of the new rolling stock that Transport for Wales has ordered from Stadler and CAF. Four train types can be seen at a warehouse alongside Taffs Well station just outside Cardiff. Each mock-up comprises half a carriage and gives a flavour of the interior.

The largest order is for class 197 trains, which will operate medium and longer distance services in north and mid Wales, and from Wales to England. These will be two and three car units and are being assembled by CAF in Newport. Railfuture and others have campaigned for the provision of two toilets in the two car units but without success.



Picture: PETER KINGSBURY

Also on view is a mock-up of the class 398 tram-trains (pictured above) being built by Stadler in Switzerland for much of the Cardiff valleys network. The class represents the largest tram-train use in the UK to date although the initial deployment will involve minimal street running. The tram-trains will simply replace class 150 Sprinters on existing routes.

Shortly after the visit, new Covid restrictions meant public access to the mock-ups was suspended. However, Railfuture hopes to arrange a visit to the site for members once restrictions are lifted.

■ ■ Railfuture Wales AGM

The Railfuture Wales AGM will be on Saturday 23 April, starting at 14.00. We hope to have a guest speaker, but this is still to be confirmed. At the time of writing, we do not know whether the meeting will be face-to-face in Shrewsbury or online via Zoom.

Please keep an eye on www.railfuturewales.org.uk

■ ■ North Wales loses out

TfW has produced updated maps showing priorities for initiatives to be delivered by 2029 and for those to be deferred to the next

decade. Railfuture is disappointed that little is promised for North Wales over the next seven years.

On the South Wales Metro, an extension from Aberdare to Hirwaun and a link penetrating deeper into Cardiff Bay are among the schemes prioritised. Elsewhere in South Wales, speed and capacity enhancements between Severn Tunnel Junction and Swansea are also due this decade (although these have been previously announced), as well as electrification between Cardiff and Swansea. These main line initiatives, along with 11 new stations, would help bring more frequent services between Bristol and West Wales.

North Wales, however, is promised only improved frequencies along the North Wales main line as far as Bangor (again previously announced) and three new stations near Shotton (Broughton, Deeside and Greenfield). Other enhancements, such as electrification of the North Wales main line and reopened lines between Gaerwen and Amlwch, and from Bangor to Caernarfon and beyond, are deferred until at least 2030.

Railfuture has written to TfW to ask why almost all the early development favours South Wales, leaving North Wales waiting another decade for significant improvements.

■ ■ Plans for Cardiff Parkway developed

More detailed designs have been released for a new station between Cardiff and Newport, and new images show what the station could look like. A planning application for the station is currently with Cardiff County Council. A decision was expected in February.

The £120 million station is to be financed privately by the developers of a planned business park at Hendre Lakes, on the eastern edge of Cardiff. It is expected to open in 2024, when eight trains per hour in each direction are expected to call at its four platforms.

Cardiff Parkway, midway between Cardiff and Newport, is one of six stations between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction proposed by the Burns Commission (which was set up to look into transport alternatives following the cancellation of the M4 relief road). The Hendy Union Connectivity Review has also endorsed the station.

■ ■ Cambrian line promise

An hourly service is needed on the Cambrian main line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth. In its 2022 vision statement, the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association renewed its call to Transport for Wales to implement this plan, promised 23 years ago.

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■ ■ Passenger hope for Reddish and Denton

Friends of Reddish South and Denton are celebrating getting funding in the third round of Restoring Your Railway bids. Local MP Andrew Gwynne was behind the bid, supported by MPs from adjacent areas (Navendu Mishra, Angela Rayner and William Wragg) as well as the user groups, local authorities, and Transport for Greater Manchester. The stations are currently served only by one Parliamentary so the first aim is to have passenger trains from Stockport to Manchester Victoria via Reddish South and Denton. The line through the stations is still used by freight trains. Later, tram-trains could run to Ashton, with a separate tram-train service from Rose Hill Marple to Stockport via Reddish South.

■ ■ Middlewich line funding

The Sandbach-Northwich freight line (known as the Middlewich line, the Mid Cheshire Rail Link or the Northwich-Crewe railway) closed to passengers in 1960. Now a £50,000 Restoring Your Railway grant will help fund a business case study into reopening. The Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association is a stakeholder in the project.

■ ■ Consultation on new Cheadle station

A public consultation has taken place on a planned station for Cheadle on the Altrincham-Stockport line.

■ ■ The Bentham line

A new study into developing the trans-Pennine rail route from Leeds to Morecambe and Heysham Port has been commissioned by the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership. The line has enormous potential for Leeds and Bradford and existing stations such as Keighley. Funding for the Stantec UK and Allen Rail study has come from the Community Rail Network and Northern Trains.



Picture: MERSEYRAIL

HEADBOLT LANE: Artist's impression

■ ■ New station for Kirkby

Work was set to begin in January on building a new station on Merseyside at Headbolt Lane, Kirkby, after planning permission was granted by Knowsley Council in December for the £80 million project. The station should be open next year. The Merseyrail network will be extended beyond the existing station at Kirkby but third-rail electric will not. The new Merseyrail trains will run on to the new station using batteries. Headbolt Lane will also be served by Northern from Wigan and Manchester.

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is already working on plans to build a new railway to Skelmersdale.

www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthWestBranch
Twitter @RailfutureNWest

Access: 14 million disabled people in UK

There are 14 million disabled people in Britain and many of them do not find it easy to travel by rail, even though they are often reliant on public transport because they cannot or do not want to drive.

The rail industry has made progress in helping them but it seems hesitant to accommodate the needs of parents with buggies, holidaymakers with enormous luggage, let alone people with wheelchairs, and older people needing easy access to toilets.

The government is starting to talk the talk while being very tight with the money needed to provide Access for All.

In January, it launched its latest talk initiative – a charter for disabled passengers.

The charter will be drawn up jointly with the charity Scope and will cover rail, bus, coach, taxi, and private hire vehicles.

Accessibility minister Wendy Morton said the aim is to encourage people to travel easily, with dignity and more confidently.

The charter will collate existing information for passengers and publish it online with the aim of providing a one-stop shop on passenger rights and complaints procedures.

The government says it is committed to making the transport network more inclusive and to making travel easier for disabled people.

The charter follows last year's unveiling of the government's National Disability Strategy – a range of initiatives to improve journeys for disabled people including an accessibility audit of all rail stations.

Let's hope real action – with proper funding – will follow.

Campaigner Ian Cook, who wants step-free access to stations, has contacted the Department for Transport several times since 2018 and reports getting the "same generic reply" each time. He has now asked the Prime Minister to intervene, after being ignored by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer.

He said: "It would be nice to get an acknowledgement that this is not being ignored and that the Labour Party is actively looking into making level boarding a priority."

Ian has also managed to persuade his local MP Nadine Dorries to meet him for an online briefing.

He believes a major problem is that it is not clear whether train operators or Network Rail are responsible for station upgrades.

A steep challenge for local councils

Attempts to make Pokesdown for Boscombe station more useful to people with mobility problems should now go ahead after being mired for years in a row over costs.

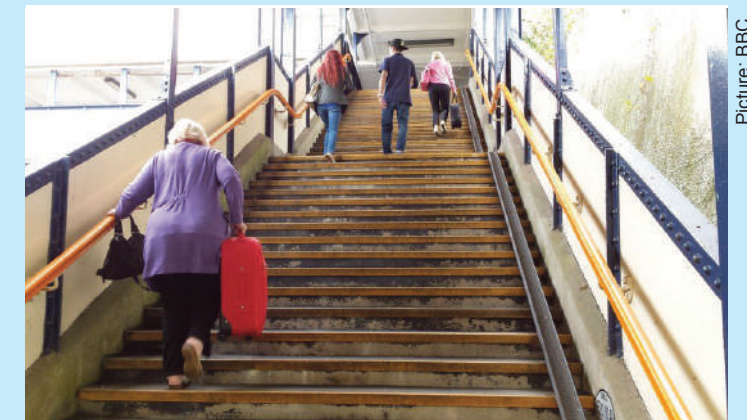
This local case highlights similar situations all over Britain where cash-strapped councils are being asked to contribute to making the rail network accessible.

Network Rail and train operator South Western Railway will pay £3 million to install two lifts (goods-only lifts will be replaced by passenger lifts) at Pokesdown and make improvements to the footbridge. But the plan could



Picture: TOBIAS ELLWOOD

Another burden for parents



Picture: BBC

LONG CLIMB: Passengers with luggage struggle up the stairs at Pokesdown for Boscombe station

not go ahead until Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council agreed to contribute £2.6 million by taking out a long-term loan which will have to be paid back over 50 years by local taxpayers.

Before the deal was agreed, Councillor Steve Bartlett told the *Bournemouth Daily Echo*: "It is not reasonable to ask council taxpayers to fund this. The station is an asset which the council does not own."

Councillor Andy Headley, however, said: "This is a blatant example of why the privatisation process is a really expensive and poorly performing way to run essential services."

About 350,000 passengers use Pokesdown Station a year, and it has been at the centre of a decade-long campaign to

improve its accessibility. There have been reports of people being injured after falling at the station, where passengers have to negotiate 42 steep steps between platforms and street level.

Tobias Ellwood, MP for Bournemouth East, presented a 1,200-signature petition calling for station improvements to the then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2014.

South Western Railway should have reinstalled the lifts by December 2019 as part of its rail franchise agreement, but said that degradation of the lift shafts had increased costs by more than the £1.6 million it had initially allocated for the project.

How likely is it that the creation of Great British Railways will provide enough cash to make rail stations accessible?

Video tour of stations to reduce passengers' anxiety

A new video initiative is designed to help people with mobility problems check out stations before they use them.

Train operator Greater Anglia's Rebecca Richardson said the virtual tours of 10 of its busiest stations are designed to cut anxiety among passengers.

Cambridge was the first to go live in December, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The tour shows lifts, toilets, customer service desks, platforms, meeting points and tactile paving.

Similar tours will be available for Bishops Stortford, Broxbourne, Chelmsford, Colchester, Ipswich, Norwich, Shenfield, Southend Victoria and Stansted Airport.

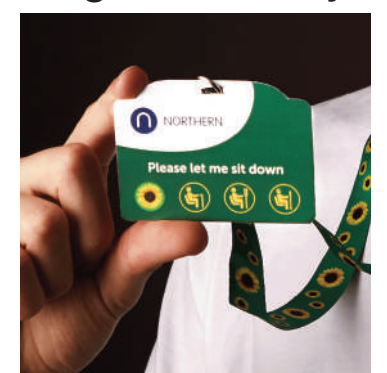
Greater Anglia has an accessibility panel, a group of disabled customers who meet with the train company, and they have been told that more stations are to be added in the

future. The tours can be viewed at www.greateranglia.co.uk/virtualtours This is a welcome initiative by Greater Anglia but many problems remain.

When *Railwatch* inquired why inadequate lifts were installed at Bedford station (not on the GA network) in a recent upgrade, a lift manufacturers' spokesman replied: "Unfortunately we did not install the lifts at Bedford station, we are the lift service provider. I will keep your comments in mind if we do install any lifts in railway stations in the future."

Down the line from Bedford, Luton station, which in normal times sees 3.5 million passengers a year, has lift access to only one of five platforms.

Luton councillor Sian Goding commented: "A station upgrade will require agreement from key stakeholders. Trains are supposed to move fast. Rail companies don't."



Train operator Northern has launched a new priority seating card for people with disabilities.

The Sunflower Lanyard card (pictured above) is aimed at giving people the confidence to ask other passengers to give up a priority seat.

"We want to make our trains – and our wider network – as accessible as possible," said Mark Powles of Northern.

The card can be obtained at some stations or online.

LEISURE: It's the way to GO for rail

Can the rail industry adjust to meet the demands of an increasing emphasis on leisure travel? Ian Brown examines the opportunities

My pre-Christmas visit to Canada's second largest city was a wake-up call in understanding how railways need to change their emphasis from the daily commute to all-day integrated travel – and holiday travel.

Toronto has retained its streetcars (trams) and modernised them into a comprehensive grid system, allowing trips between any two points with one change.

There is a two-line subway system too. Both these networks are being added to with extensions and new lines, a massive investment programme.

There is also a commuter rail system of seven lines radiating from the city station, Toronto Union. Commuter rail grew as people travelled further to the capital of Ontario province.

Expressway roads were initial attempts to cater for commuting, but are now clogged with road traffic, even during Covid.

In line with what Railfuture advocates here in Britain, the provincial government is implementing a transformational upgrade of the GO rail network. GO Transit (Government of Ontario Transit) operates trains, buses and trams in the province of Ontario. It was set up in 1967 and was Canada's first regional public transport system.

A low frequency commuter service is being upgraded and 12-car bi-level trains are also operating.

The plan is to electrify and provide frequent (up to 15 min) services all day and at weekends, and to create new interchanges so that the rail network can access all parts of the city.

Niagara Falls by train

Toronto has a population of 6.8 million and is bigger than any British city other than London.

Niagara Falls is Canada's top tourist draw with 9 million visits per year (pre-Covid), about twice the number visiting Edinburgh. Niagara is 93 miles from Toronto and the train takes two hours. Market share with a single train per day was less than 1%, so Metrolinx, the GO operator, put



SPECTACULAR: Niagara Falls and an awayday double-deck GO train from Toronto

Picture: METROLINX

on a four-trains-a-day service at weekends.

So, on a wet off-season spare Sunday in November with everything closed, I took an awayday to Niagara Falls on a comfortable 900-seat bi-level train full of day trippers, including many families with bikes.

The journey to Niagara was made at a time we in the UK were, and still are, contemplating the changed emphasis on leisure travel.

At the same time, Britain's rail industry strategy is being scrutinised post-Covid and plans are being laid for the Great British Railways era.

National parks

It begs a big question: How well do existing British trains serve three significant leisure markets – national parks, heritage railways and seaside travel?

There are 15 national parks in the UK: 10 in England, three in Wales, two in Scotland and none in Northern Ireland. Each has a national park authority responsible for planning.

Local district and unitary councils do not have planning control over national parks. The park authorities have the dual



IMPRESSIVE: Bike parking takes up an entire coach on the Toronto to Niagara train. There is a toilet in the same coach

Picture: IAN BROWN

role of protecting the park and promoting its use by visitors. Some authorities focus on the former rather than promoting visits and they effectively fail to promote sustainable travel, such as rail, for park visitors. In addition to the parks, there are 33 UNESCO world heritage sites in the UK, 18 of which are in England.

Our railways were not built with the geography of national parks in mind, being focused on freight from mines and quarries and also passengers.

Ironically many current quarries are very close to national parks, with park boundaries drawn

tightly around them, such as the Buxton quarries. The quarries may be just outside the park boundary, but the park authorities should take more interest because transport is important in overall strategic planning. Perhaps a change in official attitudes is long overdue.

The 110 million visitors to English and Welsh parks each year add up to a substantial potential market for rail.

For example, the total parks visitor number is equivalent to double Northern Rail's existing passenger numbers.

Rail's market share nationally is usually quoted at around 10%

which, if applied to national parks, would suggest about 20 million single journeys to national parks would be by rail. Quite a target. Sadly, the actual figure is less than 1%. Some individual parks have great potential to promote the second national objective for the parks.

Attracting visitors to them is important for the mental and physical health of the nation. Of course visitors should be encouraged to use sustainable transport – including rail.

Peak District Park

At 555 square miles, the Peak Park is enormous. It is one of the most visited national parks, and is surrounded by the major cities of Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham and Stoke-on-Trent, with a quoted one hour catchment area (by car) of 20 million people. The park is not easily accessible by rail, except in the Hope Valley where there is rail access to Edale and other stations. The trains and stations are busy with people visiting the park sustainably.

Access to whole swathes of the park, however, is dismal. The authorities seem to be focused on the first objective of preserving the park, but not the second, attracting visitors.

Hints of congestion charges to deter motorists are evidence of this. If the park authority were replaced by the Niagara Falls authority, I wonder if the emphasis would be different.

This also begs the question of whether a competent authority should be looking at developing railheads, such as at Bakewell from the south and Millers Dale from the north. These rail access points could be provided at minimal capital cost.

A recent visit to the Lake District national park on a through, very full train from Manchester to



UK national parks

Map: NationalParks.gov.uk

Windermere, illustrates the potential for railheads. At Windermere, all manner of buses, tours and cycle hire were available, giving access to off-rail tourist destinations including Ambleside and Keswick.

Keswick itself is rammed with cars most of the year and should surely qualify as a potential railhead.

Snowdonia National Park is probably viewed by many as more progressive than the Peak Park in promoting sustainable travel within the park, but yet again does not seem too concerned about establishing sustainable rail access to the park including railheads, the emphasis being on car parks. Some parks such as Dartmoor and Exmoor are starting to address the second objective (attracting visitors) more seriously, including catering for those with disabilities, people who really deserve to benefit from our national parks.

If there was an audit of sustainable access by public transport from cities, national parks overall would probably score between 2 and 5 out of 10. So the scope for campaigning, particularly on railheads, is significant. Maybe the composition of park boards is an issue. Diversity is rightly represented, but it is not clear whether transportation expertise exists to optimise sustainable visitor access projects. Railfuture campaigners can help here.

Heritage railways

There are 150 heritage railways in Britain, attracting 13 million visitors a year. That is a significant number, because many will have a higher than average propensity to use rail to gain access if possible. Some lines have realised the commercial potential of a main



RAIL ART: A Great Western Railway poster

Picture: NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

British resorts may continue to benefit over the longer term. Blackpool has clearly weathered well during Covid, and for the future now has the benefit of a high-capacity electric railway.

Southend and South Coast resorts have good electric railways for leisure passengers to replace lost commuters. Our railways can adjust easily and quickly to promote leisure, including day travel.

Our privatised railway, and for that matter BR before it, has not been good at catering for peaks on sunny days.

Weekends allow the railway to be dug up, and the popular Lincolnshire resort of Skegness has summer weekend peaks completely overwhelming rail service capacity.

East Midlands Railway, the current operator, has tried harder than its predecessors to cater for peak demand by running inter-city trains to Skegness when demand is at its height.

Our railway must be flexible to meet peak demand. There are also however horrific examples of inland festivals completely overwhelming local rail services without access to a 900-seat commuter train.

Some seaside locations gaining in prominence have a poor or low capacity rail service – or even no rail service.

Rising stars include Newquay and other Cornish resorts, Whitby and Skye.

Rail must find ways to provide an attractive and feasible service with good equipment to popular resorts.

Where new bimode trains have been introduced in East Anglia to Cromer, Yarmouth and Lowestoft, the reward is more passengers, improved local economies and less environmental damage. The demand is there.

Summary

Railfuture members are aware that 25% of all UK's emissions are transport related. The scope of our railways to adjust and invest in sustainable leisure is enormous.

With the right leadership, rail can play a much greater role rather than simply cut back and lament the loss of commuters.

■ Ian Brown is Railfuture policy director and also a former railway manager

West Midlands

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■ ■ Prospects for the future

Railfuture West Midlands has responded to major official initiatives which will affect our area: the Great British Railways transition team and its Whole Industry Strategic Plan, plus the all-party parliamentary group's inquiry into the integrated rail plan for the Midlands and the North.

Our main concerns are the need to maintain the involvement of the West Midlands Rail Executive and Midlands Connect in decision-making on local and regional service developments, and to ensure freight transport gets a fair slice of the capacity available.

There is much to commend the integrated rail plan, especially connecting the West Midlands to the North West, but we have concerns about truncating HS2's plans to go East towards Leeds. The proposals offer an improvement between Birmingham and Nottingham, but do nothing for other major flows – Birmingham to Leicester and Coventry to Leicester, the latter currently having no direct service. Nor does the plan provide much, if any, improvement from the West Midlands to Derby, Sheffield, Leeds, York and Newcastle.

■ ■ Railfuture's Midlands link

Railfuture West and East Midlands have begun a process to ensure

inter-regional liaison and joint campaigning on issues of common interest, including joint discussions with the regional transport body Midlands Connect. An initial meeting was held in January to agree scope for common campaigns and a number of route-specific working groups are to be set up.

■ ■ Online meetings

Railfuture West Midlands is continuing with online meetings. Francis Thomas, recently retired corporate affairs director of West Midlands Trains, was the speaker on 9 March on the theme: "The challenges of running a modern railway".

■ ■ West Midlands rail services

Rail users have complained about the poor reliability of West Midlands Railway services. We contacted West Midlands Rail Executive, which has oversight of the train operator, and the West Midlands Mayor. The complaints prompted a meeting with Malcolm Holmes, executive director and senior managers.

A recovery plan was discussed in detail which recognised the delay in training drivers. Reliability subsequently improved with reduced cancellations of trains achieved by January.

www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch



Picture: STEVE WRIGHT

Birmingham's University station: Getting ready for the Games

■ ■ Stations playing key role in the Commonwealth Games

Railfuture West Midlands has been consulted on the rail plans for the Commonwealth Games. Large flows of spectators are expected at venues, especially Sutton Coldfield, Rugeley Town, Smethwick Galton Bridge and Langley Green stations. Of course, stations near football stadiums such as Villa Park regularly have large crowds.

Perry Barr station has been closed while being rebuilt and is on track to be ready to serve the Alexandra Stadium, where the Commonwealth Games opening and closing ceremonies and athletics will take place.

University station is progressing well, with the bridge in place across the canal providing direct access to the venue at Birmingham University and a new canopy on platform one.

North East



Picture: LNER

LNER London service and Middlesbrough's Transporter bridge

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■ ■ TPE steps into breach

A second southbound Trans train now calls at Cramlington, helping to fill a two-hour timetable gap. The South East Northumberland Rail Users Group, which negotiated this change, continues to lobby for all five TPE Newcastle-Edinburgh trains to include Cramlington in both directions. The long-term aim is to increase the TPE frequency to hourly, and to link it to existing Newcastle-Liverpool services.

■ ■ George Stephenson House

MP for Stockton South Matt Vickers is continuing to campaign for the Great British Railways HQ to be in Stockton. A suitable building has become available in Stockton town centre – George Stephenson House. A government consultation to decide where GBR HQ should be was launched on 5 February.

■ ■ Middlesbrough direct

LNER is reported to be ready to expand its new Middlesbrough-London service to provide a train every two hours. However, reports elsewhere suggest that the main change will be to introduce more stops, in addition to Thornaby and York.

■ ■ Middlesbrough revamp

Planners are being asked to approve a big range of improvements to Middlesbrough station and track layout, including a bi-directional full-length third platform and a turn-back siding, long enough for Azuma 10-coach trains. Work was expected to start in February and take a year.

■ ■ Railfuture lobbies MPs

The unacceptable May 2022 timetable has been postponed by LNER for modifications to be considered. Railfuture North East has sent a detailed analysis of the proposals to every MP in our area. We want the present pattern of two trains each hour from the three existing operators to continue. This

would involve more CrossCountry services. Railfuture's Wessex branch also wants the return of services linking Newcastle, Yorkshire and Birmingham with Reading and Southampton, to complement those to or from the West Country. Our main point is that no train should be cut back to terminate at York in place of running onward at least as far as Newcastle.

■ ■ Rail strategy for North East

Transport North-East has compiled a North East Rail and Metro strategy for public consultation. Railfuture's Dave Shaw examined the draft which covers from now to 2035. The draft supports:

- 1 South of Tyne and Wearside loop (Metro) linking South Tyneside, Washington and Sunderland via the Leamside line
- 2 Cobalt and Silverlink – a new Metro line connecting Northumberland Park and Percy Main
- 3 West Gateshead and Newcastle, including reinstatement of Bensham Curve, to give Newcastle and Gateshead links to Team Valley and Chester-le-Street
- 4 Ferryhill (a new station) and the Stillington line, with more direct passenger links to Teesside from Tyneside
- 5 Restoration of rail service to Consett, by either or both of two possible routes

There are also calls for more electrification, covering local, regional, and national trains, including electrification to ports, freight terminals, and depots.

Railfuture NE has been invited to discuss these proposals and to take part in the public consultation.

More info:

<https://northeastca.gov.uk/>
www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch
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East Midlands

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■ ■ Fight for a better railway

The environmental benefits of reinstating the railway link from Matlock to Manchester (via Buxton and Chinley) were explained at Railfuture East Midlands' November meeting. Stephen Chaytow of MEMRAP told us how the benefits were quantified by the Modal Shift and Carbon Reduction (MOSCAR) modelling commissioned from Nottingham University. It is hoped the MOSCAR data will persuade Derbyshire County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority to be more supportive.

The meeting also heard from Harry Burr of Sustainable Travel Midlands about the proposal for a Daventry Parkway station on the West Coast main line at Weedon on the A45 road, four miles from Daventry. It is also proposed to have a light rail connection to the town. Both Harry and Stephen are Railfuture East Midlands members.

■ ■ Stanton Park and Toton

Two new freight terminals could be built in a plan to create a 200-acre industrial and warehouse development at New Stanton Park, between Ilkeston and Toton, on the site of the former Stanton Ironworks. Railfuture East Midlands secretary Steve Jones attended online meetings of the community liaison group for the park, which would be adjacent to the Erewash Valley (Chesterfield-Long Eaton) line.

Railfuture believes the Erewash Valley line is an underused asset with great potential to develop regional services. Now that the government has decided Toton will not be an HS2 interchange, we believe a regional hub station should be created there. Railfuture supports the new strategic masterplan drawn up for the regeneration of Toton marshalling yards site (two miles south of Stanton) and nearby Chetwynd Barracks. An extension of the Nottingham tram network to Toton along with better bus, cycling and walking facilities are also important, linked to existing and proposed transport interchanges.

■ ■ Stakeholder conference

EMR's annual conference in November was the first to be held in person for a couple of years because of the pandemic. Several members of Railfuture attended, in some cases as representatives of local user groups or community rail partnerships. Speakers from the Department for Transport and Network Rail attended, and there was an online presentation by Transport for the East Midlands. Workshop sessions also took

place, dealing with timetables, performance, the new Aurora bi-mode inter-city fleet and the existing train fleet.

■ ■ Railfuture AGM in April

The Railfuture East Midlands AGM will be held at 12.30 on Saturday 2 April at the Midland Hotel, Derby (opposite the railway station). It will be followed by an Open Meeting at 14.00 with a guest speaker. See the branch webpage for more details.

■ ■ Integrated rail plan

The integrated rail plan, announced by the government in November, contains several positives for our region. We welcome the electrification of the Midland main line from London to Nottingham and Sheffield. Better late than never. It was promised by the Cameron government but was cancelled in 2017. The decision to take HS2 into East Midlands Parkway, allowing trains to run directly to the city centre stations in Nottingham and Derby rather than requiring passengers to change trains at Toton, is also broadly welcomed. This will improve connectivity between the East and West Midlands, with a claimed reduction in journey times from Birmingham to Nottingham from 74 to 26 minutes. We await details and a timescale.

Regeneration and transport improvements at Toton are still intended to proceed, subject to external funding. However, the plan's suggestion of reopening the Maid Marian line (Ashfield to Erewash connection) and the Robin Hood line extension (to Ollerton) are vague.

East Coast upgrades will benefit our region if the flat crossing at Newark is replaced with a flyover. Midlands Connect has coincidentally launched a consultation on short-term improvements needed to the Nottingham-Lincoln service.

The plan is disappointing in not addressing connectivity from Leicester or Nottingham to anywhere north or west of Sheffield, in particular to Manchester. It does not mention that capacity improvements will be needed at Trent Junction.

Mott MacDonald's technical report on Strategic Alternatives to HS2 Phase 2b was not published until 24 January, despite Freedom of Information requests from a Railfuture member. We now need time to analyse this report to understand how the claimed benefits of the integrated rail plan are justified.

■ Yorkshire view of IRP: Page 6

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

◆◆◆ Recruit a new member for Railfuture

Yorkshire

■ ■ S&C stalwart Peter dies

The chairman of Railfuture Yorkshire from 1997 to 2008, Peter Davies (pictured right), died in January. Peter, a former history teacher with a meticulous attention to detail, lived in Brighouse and was also membership secretary of the Friends of the Settle and Carlisle Line and secretary of the Halifax and District Rail Action Group.

He wrote regular reports for *Railwatch* magazine while he was secretary and chairman of Railfuture Yorkshire. Peter was a keen walker and led many rail-related guided walks for FoSCL, including the "Shanty Town Walks" at Ribbleshead. He devised the "Brighouse Boundary Walk" for the Brighouse Civic Trust. He was involved in the fight to save the line even before FoSCL was formed, and one of his ancestors was a contractor who helped build the line. Peter took over as chairman of Railfuture Yorkshire branch when Settle and Carlisle hero James Towler retired from the post. Peter was born in 1945, the only son of one of the last members of RAF Bomber Command to be killed in the Second World War.

After Peter retired early he took a degree at Huddersfield University



Picture: JOHN CAREY

and worked in West Yorkshire Archives and for the National Archives.

■ ■ Haxby station

Land has been purchased by City of York Council for a new station at Haxby after a long campaign to replace the town's station which closed in 1930.

Haxby and Wigginton ward councillor Edward Pearson said: "Residents have been waiting patiently for a much needed new railway station for decades."

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■ ■ **Model campaigning in Glasgow**

Railfuture Scotland attended the Model Rail Scotland event on 25-27 February (Friday-Sunday) at the SECC, Pacific Quay, Glasgow. Our latest "50 Stations" campaign proposals were on display.

■ ■ **New threat to ticket offices**

Scotrail is proposing to cut ticket office opening hours, based upon reduced usage, even pre-Covid. One of the problems, though, is that closing the ticket office also means closing the waiting room and toilets in some stations. Railfuture Scotland is making a submission voicing our concerns.

■ ■ **Rail missing from transport strategy**

The Scottish government is consulting on its Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) proposals. An initial look reveals somewhat lukewarm support for rail, with a lack of specific rail projects, compared to generous support for road schemes. For instance, in the South West there is no mention of new stations at Beattock, East Riggs or Thornhill, with only a suggestion to move Stranraer station out of the abandoned ferry berth into the town. Ferries last called at Stranraer at the end of 2011 so it has taken Transport Scotland 10 years to get round to considering relocating the station.

Worryingly, the chapter about increasing safety and resilience on the strategic transport network does not mention rail at all. A truly strategic transport approach would include rail connections such as Dumfries-Stranraer extended to the ferryport of Cairnryan, Edinburgh-Perth via Kinross, the Dornoch Bridge and the missing link between Garve and the port of Ullapool.

■ ■ **Fences are first step to Levenmouth railway**

Network Rail is installing 19 km of fencing required along the Levenmouth route and night-time deliveries of ballast are arriving at Thornton three times a week. During early phases of the work, existing pathways and crossing points will be maintained. However, it will be necessary on safety grounds to cordon off parts of some of the bridges. The new line will be double-track with two new stations, at Leven and Cameron Bridge, and there will be provision to electrify the line. The project is also looking at options for connecting the line to the nearby Fife Heritage Railway at Kirkland and to support future freight aspirations. Renovation of the 65-year-old Bawbee Bridge, which carries the road link between Methil and Leven both over the River Leven and the

railway, anticipated for several years, is also to go ahead before the line opens, at a cost of £8.15 million, £5.7 million more than originally expected. Fortunately, Fife Council has agreed to contribute to this.

■ ■ **Options for a better St Andrews**

The Scottish Transport Appraisal Guide process (STAG) include four options to mitigate the traffic problems in and around the town:

- 1 Heavy rail including St Andrews to Edinburgh service and St Andrews to Dundee shuttle
- 2 New fixed off-road St Andrews to Leuchars light-rail connection timed to meet train arrivals and combined with a new park and ride facility where the line meets the A91 near Seggie
- 3 New Leuchars bespoke bus services timed to meet train arrivals, combined with an expanded Leuchars park and ride facility/mobility hub
- 4 New Leuchars bespoke bus services timed to meet train arrivals, combined with new park and ride site on the A91 road east of the River Eden

The findings are now out to consultation and then the detailed options appraisal, the last part of the STAG, will be completed by the end of June.



Picture: TOM DICKSON

■ ■ **Coming soon: Two new stations**

The construction of Reston station (pictured above), expected to open this year, is well under way. At East Linton station site, groundworks have begun, with the station scheduled for completion by 2024.

Scotland

The level crossing at Markle, near East Linton on the East Coast main line, is expected to be replaced by a road bridge. Work will be carried out in conjunction with the station works, half a mile away.

■ ■ **ScotRail**

The Scottish government will take over control of Scotland's trains from 1 April. Scottish Rail Holdings will oversee ScotRail Trains Ltd which will operate the trains. Chris Gibb will serve as chief executive of SRH. Existing ScotRail staff are expected to be transferred to the new organisation.

■ ■ **Petition for South Sub line**

More than 5,000 people have signed an online change.org petition calling for the reopening of Edinburgh's south suburban line through Morningside with a tram-train service. You can sign the petition at change.org/EdSouthSub

Contacts:

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES): www.rages.org.uk/

Beattock Station Action Group: www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/ facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign: www.levenmouth.co.uk/ facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/

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

Newburgh Train Station campaign: <http://newburghtrainstation.org.uk/>

Thornhill Station Action Group: facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/

Bonnybridge Railway Campaign: <http://bonnybridgerailway.scot> www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway

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

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

London & South East

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■ ■ **Members' annual meeting**

An in-person annual meeting, with guest speaker as well as brief formal AGM, should take place on Saturday 30 April (11.00 to 16.00). A speaker from the Rail Safety and Standards Board has been invited, to discuss recent research on the safety implications of extensions to the third rail network. Old Street is the nearest station to the venue on City Road – Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission.

■ ■ **Campaigning through influencing**

Responding to consultations and calls for evidence is part of our campaigning. We have responded to Brighton & Hove Council's local transport plan, Gatwick Airport's second runway, Medway Council's second consultation on "Future Hoo", the all-party parliamentary group for the South East inquiry "Financing for the future – what does levelling up mean for South East England?", Ebbsfleet

Development Corporation's Ebbsfleet Central East development, Hertfordshire County Council's HERT (Hertfordshire-Essex Rapid Transit), sub-national transport body Transport East's draft regional transport strategy, Great British Railways transition team's whole industry strategic plan, Transport for London's priorities for future step-free Tube station schemes, and House of Lords inquiry "Public transport in towns and cities".

We also monitor developments for which consultations have closed and we have previously responded.

In November, Lewes District Council refused permission on an outline planning application for up to 97 new homes in Ringmer, to which we had objected, overturning their officer's recommendation to approve. It was a site which might be needed to take a station on a new railway line between Uckfield and Lewes.

In December the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, again contrary to officers'

recommendation, refused permission on a planning application for a development which would have included provision for step-free access to the sub-surface lines at South Kensington Underground station.

In December two more applications for outline planning permissions, for up to 100 and up to 200 homes respectively, in Ringmer were lodged with Lewes District Council, and again Railfuture objected on planning policy grounds. See our branch website for our Uckfield-Lewes campaign.

More information on the Railfuture website. Search for "library/consultation responses" and "rail dates".

■ ■ **Railfuture updates**

All Railfuture members can subscribe free to the branch's monthly newsletter *inter-railse*. The newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East [Twitter: @RailfutureLSE](https://twitter.com/RailfutureLSE)

Chair's column by Chris Page

The only way is up

Railfuture welcomed the proposed outcomes of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail in May 2021, while recognising that achieving them would depend on capable leadership, and expressed confidence in the appointment of Andrew Haines to lead the process of creating Great British Railways.

The GBR transition team, comprising people seconded from within the rail industry, was set up in October 2021 to develop a 30-year strategy for the management and operation of the entire railway network. The objectives set by the government are:

1. Meeting customer needs
2. Financial sustainability
3. Long term economic growth
4. Levelling up and connectivity
5. Environmental sustainability

It will be an incredibly challenging task to meet these potentially conflicting objectives, particularly when starting from the low post-Covid demand base. The GBR transition team therefore launched a call for evidence, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders both inside and outside the rail sector, to ensure that the "whole industry strategic plan" will be based on robust, evidence-based foundations.

The hardest part of creating a 30-year strategy is predicting what is likely to change over that period of time. Passenger expectations are likely to change in line with improved performance of other modes, but how quickly will that happen? Changes will also happen in wider society, the economy and the environment that will affect the five objectives. For example, to what extent will attitudes change in favour of active travel and public transport or against conspicuous consumption? Will a balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability be achieved, and will road

pricing and "mobility as a service" make the real costs of travel more apparent and comparable?

The strategy will have to plan for various scenarios and be reviewed regularly to compare the scenarios to actual outcomes.

In February, Railfuture submitted a response to the call for evidence, including feedback from branches and from people who took part in our recent webinar "Rail Recovery - how to realise the potential". Our view is that there is considerable scope for increasing the part our railways can play in meeting these objectives to improve their value to users, stakeholders and the taxpayer, in financial, environmental and quality of life terms.

Over the next 30 years, GBR must double (from pre-Covid levels) the traffic on

the railway by modal shift of passengers and freight from road and air, so that the railways can deliver financial sustainability, help decarbonise transport overall, improve air quality and level up disadvantaged communities. Achieving this is dependent on the railways offering an attractive service, with frequent, clean, comfortable trains, good connections and reasonable fares, and on government policies which support rather than conflict. For example, a funded rolling programme of electrification is needed along with capacity enhancements, effective coordination of rail enhancement programmes, regeneration projects and housing/commercial developments with planning authorities, and integration of rail and bus services not being prevented by competition law.

You can read the complete Railfuture submission at: www.railfuture.org.uk/display2939

You can also watch a recording of the Railfuture webinar where GBR transition team commercial director Suzanne Donnelly spoke:

<https://youtu.be/ui-rZ2hM1ds>



Railfuture's annual conference will be held at Leeds St George's Centre on 15 September with the theme: A turning point for the railways



railwatch

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campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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An unremarkable train but a giant step forward

By Steve Jones, Ian Brown and Ray King

Gantries being installed at Market Harborough in January marked a major step forward in the campaign for electrification of the Midland main line.

The work, which should have been carried out years ago, has been a victim of stop-start policies from the government.

As the wires advance northwards, diesels trains can be replaced by more efficient electric trains, or for an inter period bimode trains.

The first step forward was 50 miles with the Bedford-St Pancras (Bedpan) electrification scheme under Mrs Thatcher's government in the early 1980s.

Last year the wires – and an electric train service – made it to Corby, 33 miles north of Bedford.

Now they are going further. The much-criticised Integrated Rail Plan launched in November says it should go "all the way" to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield.

For the moment, Railfuture is pleased to see work progressing on the 11-mile section from Kettering to Market Harborough.

There is an indication that wires could soon be extended another 12.5 miles to Wigston South Junction.

We await an update of the Department for Transport's late-running Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.

One consideration is the need for track remodelling between Wigston and Leicester, as was studied by Network Rail in its 2020 Leicester area strategic advice document.

Authority has now been given to upgrade the existing electrification south of Bedford for 125 mph operation.

There will be seven weekend all-line blockades during 2022 to do this, with the timing planned to coordinate with the Market Harborough works.

The Network Rail board has approved funding for completion of the outline business case for electrifying the rest of the MML to Nottingham and Sheffield. This is apparently based on unit cost reductions that have been achieved in recent UK electrification projects.

For years, Railfuture has argued the case for electrification of the Midland main line. It is good to see belated progress.

Now though we are having to re-focus our campaigning.

With the expected emergence of Great British Railways, the planned state-owned public body that will oversee rail



A diesel passenger train nearing the platform at Market Harborough station, past recently installed electrification masts

transport in Britain from next year, a transition team is already working on its strategy for the next 30 years. Covid shattered the rail industry's finances, with fares revenue dropping from £9 billion a year to £1.8 billion. Franchises were ditched and the government injected £16.9 billion to keep the trains running.

Train operators have to obey the contract requirements from the Department for Transport, which has also warned them to expect cuts of at least 10% in the year starting in April.

Some commentators warn of whole routes being closed and train fleets mothballed.

That is the background as the Great British Railways transition team attempts to finalise its Whole Industry Strategic Plan.

Railfuture responded to public consultation on the plan which closed in early February.

Railfuture supports WISP's five strategic objectives, which were set by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps: meeting customer needs, financial sustainability, long term economic growth, levelling up and connectivity, plus environmental

sustainability. Railfuture also supports the aim to double passenger and freight traffic over the next 30 years, but the principal potential barrier to achieving the objective is lack of funding.

The opportunities are there, but achieving the objectives is dependent on wider government policy. A 1% shift from car to rail represents a 10% increase in rail demand.

Rail must contribute to the government's overall transport objectives by modal shift, rather than simply depending on economic growth projections.

Rail must be considered as the backbone of a proper integrated transport system for Britain.

Passengers expect rail to be able to deliver reliable, comfortable (proper seats, window alignment, space for pushchairs and luggage as well as accessible toilets and bike spaces), sensibly priced transport in association with other transport modes.

Rail must remove barriers to travel such as the present half hearted approach to accessibility at stations. Real progress on this will be made only if specific

objectives are set, such as five year target (system 25% accessible), then a 10 year target (50% accessible), and a 30 year target (fully accessible).

The environmental advantages of conveying freight by rail are well documented. For example, one train typically produces six times less carbon dioxide than its equivalent – 76 lorries. For freight customers, pricing and capacity are key.

GBR should plan to increase rail freight: +25% in five years, +50% in 10 years and + 100% in 30 years. Freight facility grants should be reinstated.

An international freight initiative is also required because so much freight is international, capitalising on the under-utilised Channel Tunnel.

To deliver financial stability, the industry structure must be simplified and a continuous investment programme needs to be implemented for enhancement projects and renewals, using systemised processes to build up team delivery skills. A key reason for continued investment in railways is rail's contribution to economic growth, including the economic benefit of sustaining Britain's cities and towns.

Levelling up is crucial. For example, all three links to south, central and north Wales are not fulfilling their potential. South Wales electrification stops at Cardiff, the Cambrian Coast rail link is poor and slow and the North Wales link, formerly a main line to Holyhead, is run down. The most important issue for passenger services, however, is a rolling programme of electrification based on skilled teams, not starting from contractual scratch each time.

The full Railfuture response can be viewed at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2939>

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