

railwatch

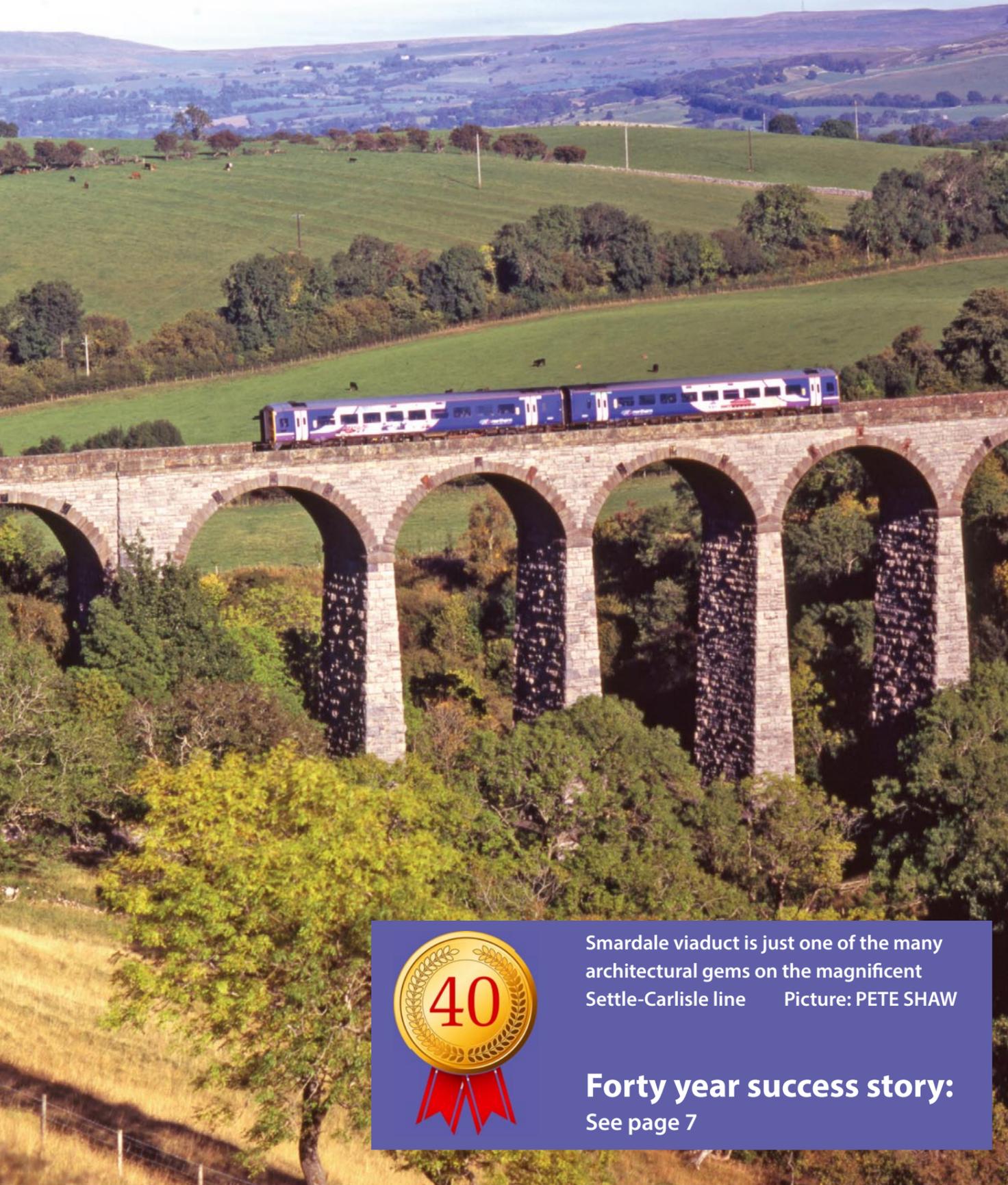
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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Smardale viaduct is just one of the many architectural gems on the magnificent Settle-Carlisle line Picture: PETE SHAW

Forty year success story:
See page 7

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Lumo challenge to airlines

A low-cost London-Edinburgh service is launching this month, stopping only at Stevenage, Newcastle and Morpeth.

With some single fares starting at £15, the new Lumo trains aim to attract some of the 74,500 people who fly between Edinburgh and London every month, as well as offering an environment-friendly alternative to Newcastle and Luton airports.

Lumo managing director Helen Wylde said: "We will be more affordable and kinder to the planet."

Lumo is reported not to accept some railcards which give a third reduction on rail fares, but does appear to accept the 16-25, 26-30, Disabled Persons, Family & Friends, Two Together and Senior railcards.

It does not issue paper ticketing and has no first class, although it says there will be more leg room and larger tray tables than usually found in standard class.

From 27 October, the open-access operator is offering two services a day each way between King's Cross and Waverley, with the frequency increasing to five daily trips as new trains are delivered.

By contrast, LNER operates 25 London-Edinburgh services each day.

Lumo (illumination and motion), which is owned by Aberdeen-based FirstGroup, said: "We take our passengers' wellbeing extremely



seriously and want everyone to arrive refreshed and ready.

"We aim to reimagine what it means to travel by rail and Lumo brings that together in one word." Its slogan is: "Trains. But Nicer."

Mark Smith, the international rail expert, said: "Finally, a London-Edinburgh train will take on easyJet at their own game, offering low-cost competition on one of the UK's busiest domestic air routes. A ticket from London to Edinburgh on one of these new trains can be cheaper than a ticket from central London to Heathrow, Luton or Stansted.

"People are beginning to realise that climate change is real and they are looking to reduce their emissions, so I have no doubt that this new service will be a success. It could set a precedent for other inter-city routes across the network."

Lumo uses Hitachi trains (the same as LNER) which are unpopular with cyclists because bikes have to be hung up in a confined space.

A Lumo spokesman said: "Bicycles are welcome on board Lumo trains. However, as space is limited, reservations (which are free of charge) are mandatory as we are unable to guarantee that we can convey your bicycle without one.

"We recommend reservations are made at least 24 hours prior to your journey and at the same time as you purchase your ticket."

Rail is recovering from its bout of Covid



Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell watches the sun rise for rail traffic

There have been so many false dawns during this pandemic that I am very conscious that these words may look inappropriate by the time you read them. But here goes.

The Department for Transport's weekly scoreboard of the percentage recovery in the use of various modes of transport during the pandemic has shown the return of rail passengers making significant progress during the summer.

The percentage of national rail passengers compared with the corresponding day in 2019 finally crept past 50% in late May. Though it dipped below 50% to record 47/48% for a week at the end of June, the percentage then recorded steady growth to reach 60% in mid-August.

Rail travel over the August bank holiday exceeded pre-Covid levels, according to press reports.

Underground recovery slower Although the numbers have doubtless been boosted by visitors, Londoners apparently prefer the Underground at weekends, when the percentage has regularly been passing 50% since late May and touched 72% over the Bank Holiday at the end of August. By contrast the weekday Underground percentages remained firmly stuck in the 40s until they finally started to pass 50% in mid-August.

London buses, with percentages consistently in the 60s all the way through from May, have shown a more enduring recovery than buses elsewhere in the country. Having been in the 60s before the school holidays, buses outside London recorded a drift down into the 50s from mid-July.

Yes – more traffic on the roads Any perceptions you have about there being more traffic on the roads are explained by the statistics. Admittedly the figure for weekday car use has still not quite reached 100%, the 80s in April turning into 90s in May and staying there ever since. In contrast the weekend figures for car use passed 100% at the end of May – typically around 105% but with 110% being reached on two Sundays in mid-August. Readers will not be surprised to learn that the figures for both light



COVID COMEBACK: Passenger numbers are steadily growing again as this picture at Leeds on 3 September 2021 shows



BLAST FROM THE PAST: A diesel Pacer in 2015 at Crow Nest Junction where masts and wires will be installed after the approval of the Bolton-Wigan electrification scheme. Wigan is behind the photographer, Bolton (left) and Manchester (right)

commercial vehicles and heavy goods vehicles were above 100% throughout the period from May, often approaching 130% on Sundays.

Television fightback begins

Forty years ago I was taught during a marketing course that television advertising was often tailored to a particular ITV company's area. With the proliferation of television channels in recent decades I am not sure that this is still the case, so I hope that the advertising promoting rail travel in general terms that I am seeing during commercial breaks is being transmitted on a national basis and not just in Yorkshire.

But it must be backed up by specific offers to tempt people on to actual trains.

Passenger revenue down £8.5bn

The latest figures for rail passenger journeys published by the Office of Rail and Road carry a health warning.

There is some uncertainty in comparing them with previous years because an alternative

methodology has been used when estimating the number of journeys made with some ticket types.

The published figures record 388 million passenger journeys made in 2020-21, a mere 22.3% of the 1,739 million journeys recorded for 2019-20.

The percentage of passengers retained varied across operator, from a high of 32.5% for Transport for London Rail to lows of 15.8% for Transport for Wales Rail and 14.9% for ScotRail.

The full statistics for passenger journeys can be found on the data portal section of the ORR website.

The figures for passenger revenue should be less vulnerable to uncertainty and may give a more accurate measurement of the fall in traffic. Using this measure, the decline was even more marked.

The £1.9 billion passenger revenue recorded for 2020-21 was only 18.3% of the £10.4 billion in 2019-20 (adjusted to

2020-21 prices), and left an £8.5 billion hole in railway accounts nationally.

Freight rebound already

The ORR figures for freight traffic reflect a happier 2020-21 than do the passenger figures. The tonnage of freight moved fell 8.6% compared with the previous year, but in football parlance it was a game of two halves, a fall of 17.2% compared with the previous year in the first half of 2020-21 being followed by an actual increase of 0.5% compared with 2019-20 in the next six months.

ORR is happy to report bright spots that were visible by quarter 4 of 2020-21 (the first three months of the calendar year 2021). This quarter saw traffic rise in both metals and construction categories, among other things reflecting an increased demand for iron ore. There was also an increase in the "other" category, explained by continued demand for biomass and an increase in the volume of household waste produced during lockdown.

More electrification announced

Originally approved in 2013 but then shelved, the electrification of the Bolton-Wigan route was approved in September as a £78 million project, targeted to be completed in 2024/25.

Strictly speaking, the stretch which needs electrifying is from Lostock Junction to Wigan, but even these 6.5 miles of double track will require 450 overhead line stanchions and modifications to 17 bridges.

In addition platform extensions at Westhoughton, Hindley and Ince will accommodate six-coach trains. This will improve the operational efficiency of the upgraded maintenance depot at Wigan Springs.

Sheffield? Leeds? Bradford?

As a Lancastrian I cannot quibble with the fact that there will soon be three electrified routes between Manchester and Preston (Chat Moss, Westhoughton and Chorley). However Railfuture campaigners (especially those in Yorkshire) may well have preferred to see electrification announcements for the hilly Manchester-Leeds main line or between Manchester and Sheffield.

Surely it is about time we had an electrified replacement for Britain's first electric main line – via Woodhead.

There are also campaigners who will point out that electrification of the Calder Valley line between Manchester and Leeds could easily be extended to Bradford.

Pictures: PAUL ABELL

Dennis wins the battle for Blyth & Tyne

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

So why do we battle away? It is, at times, easy to feel that all our efforts are in vain and we are bound simply to be baying at the moon given the way railway campaigners are sometimes up against so much. That would be a fundamental mistake, as it is plain wrong.

Sure, some battles are lost, some very worthwhile schemes never come to fruition and many hours can be wasted in thankless tasks. But those of you who, like me, support a not very good football team (QPR in my case, and there's big hopes they will go up this year!), the good moments make it all worthwhile, and here's a couple of recent examples.

First, it was my pleasure to see the award for Railfuture Campaigner of the Year going to Dennis Fancett, who has tirelessly and successfully campaigned to restore passenger services on the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line. It is a magnificent achievement after years of plugging away. The battle is not over, of course, as the full

reopening through to Woodhorn is not yet envisaged and moreover the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, which he chairs, is now having to fight a defensive battle over proposed changes to the East Coast main line timetable which will severely reduce the number of trains serving Morpeth. Nevertheless, despite the need to keep on campaigning, a win it is. A big one, and passenger trains should soon be whizzing down the newly named *Northumberland line*. There has, too, been recent success with the campaign to save various disused historic railway bridges which have come under attack from the Highways Agency. I use the word attack advisedly since those misguided roads people had earmarked various bridges around the country for infilling. The Highways Agency has claimed that many bridges which it inherited from Network Rail – one

could ask why – are in a dangerous state and therefore need demolishing or infilling. The surprising aspect is that much of this seems based on assessments that are not backed up by evidence. The number initially in the agency's sight was more than 100, but this was later reduced and the latest figures suggest around 75 are still at risk. This

reduction was largely thanks to campaigning by a group of civil engineers and rail enthusiasts calling themselves the HRE group who tried to get this strange scheme by the agency reversed. The Great Musgrave Bridge, a fairly innocuous 159-year-old little masonry bridge located between two heritage railways in Cumbria, got the full double-barrels of

shotcrete. The mess made of this unassuming bit of countryside could not have been worse had the agency actually tried to make it

look awful. The picture of the lake of ugly concrete, with a couple of plastic barriers thrown in for good measure, ensured that the HRE Group, which had been fighting an uphill battle, was suddenly clean through on goal with the keeper nowhere in sight. I wrote a column in *RAIL* magazine about the infilling and soon was contacted by several national newspaper journalists who covered the story. It even got up to the Prime Minister who said the infilling would stop.

In fact, the HRE Group is worried that some bridges are still at risk and the agency seems set on destroying them, despite public opinion being firmly against it. The campaign continues, but given the publicity there are unlikely to be further disasters as at Musgrave.

To keep the football analogy, convincing wins with a clean sheet do not occur that often. There are often compromises and deals before the three points are chalked up, but that does not stop them being wins. And the hope that arises from such victories makes it worthwhile for the rest of us to plug away.



Rail campaigner Dennis Fancett: See Page 12



OPEN UP: Wisbech's level crossing gates survive from the 1960s

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Big problems – timid response

Railfuture is calling for a two-track flyover to be built at Ely to solve a long-standing bottleneck that is delaying enhancements to both passenger and freight services. The flyover would allow freight trains to cross the West Anglia main line without delaying passenger services. We are worried that Network Rail's latest plan (the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement) lacks ambition and fails to recognise the phenomenal growth of the Cambridge area economy. Already more than 1,000 containers a day are travelling by road through Ely that could transfer to rail if there was sufficient capacity through Ely, according to Julian Worth of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Freight demand keeps on growing but while repeated "studies" have been carried out over the years, little is done.

Railfuture East Anglia has responded to several consultations proposing rail improvements. More rail services are needed from Norwich (to run into East West Rail), an additional train each hour to/from King's Lynn, two trains an hour from the planned reopened railway to Wisbech, services towards Soham and Bury St Edmunds, and a restored piece of railway to run via Newmarket and east Cambridge.

Railfuture's briefing can be found at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display/28> and makes it clear that Network Rail's proposals are timid, exacerbated by breaking the project into two distinct elements.

Only a much more extensive intervention, such as our proposal at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display/29>, will solve the problem once and for all, and make a major contribution to the urgent issue of decarbonising transport. Reopening to Wisbech consistently shows a good cost benefit ratio but is caught up in the Ely project because rail planners do not want Wisbech trains causing more delays at Ely. There are however huge benefits for the Cambridgeshire economy. Wisbech has become another endless series of studies that have gone on for years while freight customers are queuing up to use the restored line. The

delays cast doubt on the government's Restoring Your Railway policy.

Cambridge South

Railfuture has urged the Department for Transport to get on with opening Cambridge South station. Another consultation has just closed with opening proposed for 2025. Railfuture highlighted the needs of the 30,000 people at the adjacent Cambridge Bio-Medical Campus and the five specialist hospitals and huge regional general hospital within 10 minutes walk of it. 10 million users are expected at the station each year but Network Rail has followed Treasury green book rules and will build facilities for just 1.5 million users. This crazy planning has upset a great many local people. Cambridge South will have trains from Norwich, Ipswich, Birmingham, Stansted Airport, London and Brighton. Trains will also come from the South Midlands via Milton Keynes and Bedford once progress is made on East West Rail.

Switch it off initiative

Greater Anglia and Network Rail recently launched a very timely campaign in partnership with the Community Rail Partnerships in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk, aimed at encouraging car drivers to switch off their engines while waiting at level crossings. The launch was timed to coincide with the annual Clean Air Day in June. Other departments of government – environment, health and transport – should be cooperating on a driver education campaign against engine idling in general, particularly in the light of COP 26.

Soham all set for green

Signalling work over the August bank holiday was going on at the new Soham station to clear the way for services there to start from December – the first for 56 years.

Katch Wickham Market's e-bus

A new on-demand all-electric Katch bus service was launched this year to serve Wickham Market station. www.katchalift.com

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

anthony.kay@railfuture.org.uk

Leicester to Coventry

Railfuture members joined an online Midlands Connect seminar on how to improve Leicester-Coventry rail services with a new Nuneaton dive-under so direct services between the two cities are again possible. Leicester and Coventry are only 25 miles apart but the journey takes around an hour by rail. Not surprising that only 3% of travellers use rail. The £100 million project would return a benefit cost ratio greater than 2. Delivery is targeted for 2025 and a strategic outline business case has been submitted by Midlands Connect. Still being debated is whether the dive-under should bypass Nuneaton station or whether it should take trains into the station. Politicians in Nuneaton strongly favour the station option.

Meeting with Stakeholder Manager

East Midlands Railway stakeholder manager Laura Etheridge was guest speaker at the Railfuture East Midlands meeting in July. After Covid, loadings are recovering to 38% on Liverpool-Norwich services, but only 22% on services to London. Cleanliness is the first priority for passengers. Laura said an operational delivery improvement plan was implemented after the near-collapse of the May EMR timetable. There are not enough staff or trains to extend services to Leeds, although there may be a few services to York via Pontefract in future. Timetable constraints are blocking Railfuture's request for more calls at Belper on Sheffield trains.

Leicester Local Transport Plan consultation

Railfuture East Midlands is collating a detailed response to the consultation by Leicester City Council on its draft local transport plan, setting out its vision for transport up to 2036. Improvements to public transport include improved access to the main station. Promoting active travel and achieving decarbonisation are overall aims.

Ambitious fusion of heritage and modern rail

Railfuture East Midlands chair Ariadne Tampion and secretary Steve Jones attended a community event at Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre at Ruddington in July by invitation of the East Midlands Railway Trust. This followed a presentation to Railfuture East Midlands by the trust's David Rae in April. Ruddington is operating and preservation base of the northern section of the Great Central Railway. The event, which included an address by MP Ruth Edwards, launched a major fundraising project for the development of the site. The trust aims to restore the northern section of the GCR and link to the southern section at Loughborough. With a link to the national network at Loughborough, the railway aims to resume commercial freight operations and provide a test-track facility, as well as a heritage service. It has submitted a Restoring Your Railway bid for a local passenger service. Railfuture supports this ambitious fusion of heritage and modern operations.



A restored Class 20 locomotive at the Ruddington community event

Picture: STEVE JONES

MEMRAP explains its case to freight operators

Manchester & East Midlands Rail Action Partnership's efforts to gain support have continued with an article in Railfreight Group magazine. The article explains why, even after recent improvements to the Hope Valley line, it is important to provide a direct route southwards from the quarries in the Buxton area.

AGM for this year and next

Railfuture East Midlands AGM on Zoom on 25 September is around the time of *Railwatch* publication. The meeting is followed by an open meeting at 1400 with CrossCountry Trains speaker David Jones. The 2022 AGM will be at the Midland Hotel, Derby.

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

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The great Aylesbury train robbery

By Chris Wright

The Prime Minister replied to a parliamentary question on East West Rail by Rob Butler, the MP for Aylesbury, on 23 June.

Mr Johnson said that "the Department for Transport is looking at the design and construction of the Aylesbury spur but I have to caution that the cost of constructing that spur is currently very high and we need to look at the numbers to ensure they come down."

Up until then, the Aylesbury link had been a crucial component of East West Rail.

The line from Aylesbury to Claydon Junction (East West Rail) already exists and was seen as an integral part of the EWR project.

Although now single-track, it is still used by freight trains.

Mr Butler pointed out that new houses need new infrastructure and that Aylesbury needs better transport links to cope with its growing population.

"The business case for the Aylesbury link is better than HS2 and has the great advantage of being the railway we want rather than one that we do not," he said. "The Aylesbury spur of East West Rail is essential to the success and prosperity of the town, particularly as Aylesbury continues to expand."

"This vital link will cut congestion, improve journey times and reduce air pollution." Mr Butler resolved to continue to press the Department for Transport and ministers to approve this crucial piece of infrastructure.

On 24 May, Mr Butler had been joined by Buckingham MP Greg Smith, who represents Winslow, in an adjournment debate on the link.

Mr Butler emphasised that there was support for the line, including from Buckinghamshire Council, the Bucks local enterprise partnership and Business First.

Chris Heaton-Harris, the transport minister overseeing both HS2 and EWR, responded by accepting that a compelling case had been made and said the line was to be included in the DfT submission to the government's spending review.

He said it was important, however, to improve the economic case as it competes for funds. The "levelling up agenda" was seeing a need to prioritise spending.

The government is supposedly committed to improving national and regional connectivity, but it

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



AYLESBURY VALE PARKWAY: The station opened in 2008. The next logical step would be for trains to continue north to the East West rail link and Milton Keynes

seems this may not apply to Aylesbury and South Buckinghamshire, even though they have poor strategic connections to other parts of the UK. In July, Bucks Council responded by resolving to "urge the government to commit to building the spur line between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury and the associated work to dual the track between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury."

Aylesbury has seen major population growth and a resultant increase in rail use. In 1999/2000, the urban area of Aylesbury had a population of 67,000 and 893,701 rail journeys. By 2019/20, the population had grown to 89,000 and rail use to 1,207,764, with a further 206,834 using Aylesbury Vale Parkway which was opened in 2008. Further major growth is planned.

Meanwhile, Aylesbury rail users travelling to the North and Midlands must travel into and across London to join train services that then travel to Milton Keynes.

This is expensive in both fares and time.

The Aylesbury to Milton Keynes rail service would link prosperous South Bucks to Milton Keynes.

Currently, Milton Keynes to High Wycombe takes two hours and costs £42.80 with two changes in London, but this would be slashed to £15.70 with one change with the EWR Aylesbury link.

The regional planning body, English Economic Heartlands, has proposed a Northampton to Old Oak Common service and the DfT was originally planning a service from Milton Keynes to Marylebone.

If Great British Railways is to put the customer first, Aylesbury and South Bucks rail passengers

should not be robbed by paying excess fares and facing extra journey times.

How can the government not see the logic of funding the upgrade of an existing 10 mile railway?

The Aylesbury link should be a part of Build Back Better.

Aylesbury East councillor Mark Winn wants the existing single-track Chiltern line from Princes Risborough (plus the

section to Claydon Junction) to be renamed the Buckinghamshire line and to be double-tracked. He said: "The track is there. The need is there. We need the government to put in the investment to get the trains running."

Chris Wright is secretary of the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee, formed by Railfuture in 1987.

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Campaigner joins train to the future

Railfuture Campaigner of the Year Dennis Fancett joined one of the special trains in August as plans to reopen the Blyth & Tyne line took shape.

Dennis and his allies have fought a 15-year campaign to get the freight route, now renamed the Northumberland line, reopened for passengers.

Northumberland County Council and Northern hosted events involving trains travelling on part of the line where five of six proposed new stations will now be built.

As well as the new stations – Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Blyth Beside, Bedlington and Ashington – the Northumberland line will have 18 miles of track upgraded.

The scheme has been made possible thanks to the government's Restoring Your Railway fund. Work starts next year and passenger trains should be running from 2024.

The Department for Transport provided £34 million towards detailed design and preparatory works. Full funding and a Transport and Works Act order are awaited. Then regular passenger services between Ashington and central Newcastle, with several stops in between, can begin. Northumberland County Council leader Glen Sanderson travelled on one of the special services and said: "It was fantastic. Passenger services on the Northumberland line will



FURNACE BRIDGE: One of six new stations is planned near the River Blyth at Bedlington

provide a huge economic boost. It will also help to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions, contributing greatly to our climate change targets in Northumberland." The line is intended to provide a real incentive for potential employers to relocate to the area. There will be a seamless transfer on to the Tyne and Wear Metro at Northumberland Park. Northern will operate all passenger services and is already developing a timetable.

Kerry Peters, regional director at Northern, said: "Rail plays a vital role in the economy of the north of England. "We expect to offer two trains per hour on weekdays and Saturdays between 0600 and 1930, with an hourly service after 1930 and on Sundays."



Kerry Peters of Northern Trains

Progress in Railfuture campaign to make rail more accessible

By Roger Blake

Railfuture is continuing to campaign for a bigger, better railway, and we have adopted the slogan: "100 more by 24" to highlight the need for more accessible stations.

Whether we get action to make 100 more stations fully accessible by 2024 and to build essential rail infrastructure will depend on whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes public funds available for rail improvements in his October financial statement. Accessible improvements have been achieved at Patchway (Bristol) and Eridge (East Sussex), £3.3 million improvements are also under way at Barry, South Wales, with accessible upgrades being

completed at West Drayton and Southall, London, in July, and more work is planned at Hayes & Harlington and on other Crossrail stations in the same area.

In association with electrification work, a new footbridge is expected to be provided at Strathbungo, Glasgow.

An accessible footbridge was completed in August at Ferry Boat Lane, Mexborough, South Yorkshire, and £1 million has been allocated to make Thirsk station (North Yorkshire) step-free. Network Rail has also made progress on providing accessible footbridges such as at Suggitt's Lane, Cleethorpes, and has recently demonstrated a new light-weight, quick-and-easy-to-

assemble bridge recently at Long Marston, Warwickshire.

Railfuture has continued to make detailed contributions to official consultations which have implications for rail. The submissions included projects at Tunbridge Wells in Kent, Cornwall and Northern England, and covered local plans, transport strategies and infrastructure projects.

The submissions can be found on the Railfuture website in "campaigns consultation responses" or in "library submissions". Current consultations can be found in "what's on/rail dates".

■ Roger Blake is chair of Railfuture's infrastructure and networks group

On board the train to Bedlington

By Dennis Fancett

I was delighted to join the special "route familiarisation" trains round the Northumberland (Ashington Blyth & Tyne) line with special invited guests on board.

To enable social distancing, guests were split over the different trains. I was invited to join the Friday train, along with fellow South East Northumberland Rail User Group committee member Dave Shaw who was representing Railfuture.

On board our train were North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll and Wansbeck MP Ian Lavery, along with people from Northumberland County Council, Network Rail and various consultants and contractors.

Other invited guests such as Blyth Valley MP Ian Levy travelled on different days. We left Newcastle, ran round the Northumberland line as far as Bedlington, then travelled on the branch line to Morpeth from where we retraced our steps back to Newcastle.

It was a very enjoyable afternoon and our thanks go to NCC and Northern. We know from our own 2008 charter that these things are not straightforward to organise, and special thanks are due to Northern project manager Paul Henry for all the hard work he put in.

It is so good to see our flagship campaign over the past 15 years gradually but surely turning into reality.

Picture: NORTHERN

40-year story of S&C success

By Allison Cosgrove

This year marks 40 years since the creation of the Friends of the Settle & Carlisle Line, a group which arose from the number of campaigners working to save the line from closure during the period of threat to its existence.

This included Railfuture (then the Railway Development Society), which was represented by Richard Watts on the Joint Action Committee, comprising a large number of different groups and representing huge numbers of volunteers, all with the one aim of saving the line in the period between 1983 and its reprieve in 1989.

Today, almost 40 years later, volunteers are still the lifeblood of the S&C, carrying out an enormous variety of tasks from keeping the buildings of the Midland Railway in good condition to providing activities for visitors to the area.

Martin Pearson, in his book *The Settle to Carlisle Railway, 1850-1990*, provides an extensive list of the works carried out since 1990. These range from the restoration of buildings on the line, some of which were in advanced stages of dereliction but have now been refurbished for modern day use; the creation of two shops within the station buildings at Settle and Appleby; rebuilding of waiting shelters in various locations; reinstatement of the northbound platform at Ribbleshead; restoration of signal boxes, and many other activities.

This work has meant that the stations and buildings have been preserved in the Midland Railway colours and style as they were before any threat of closure.

Those who know the line today will also know of the letter from Michael Portillo, then Minister of State at the Department of Transport, dated 18 April 1989, reprieving the line from closure. An enlarged version of this is on display in Settle station today.

Mr Portillo is now the honorary president of the Friends. His latter-day career presenting railway programmes has lasted



A PLACE IN THE SUN: Restored Ribbleshead station with Wharfedale in the background

almost as long as his time as a politician.

Key to the restoration of the buildings was the formation of the Settle & Carlisle Trust, which took on several derelict buildings and brought them back into everyday use.

Bryan Gray from the trust said: "Creating the trust enabled several sources of funding to be accessed to preserve, restore and maintain the historic buildings and structures on the line."

The trust contributed £625,000 towards the repair work on Ribbleshead viaduct, the cost of which had originally been put forward as the main reason for closure. Kirkby Stephen station and the station master's house at Ribbleshead have been restored by the trust as holiday lets, and the rebuilt Ribbleshead station now operates as a visitor centre.

A subsidiary of the trust, the Settle & Carlisle Property Company, today operates and maintains the letting properties on the line. Another organisation, the Settle and Carlisle Development Company,

was set up to provide commercial activities to promote the line, and today one of their tasks is the operation of refreshment trolleys on trains, which are very welcome to visitors.

The chair of the development company, John Moorhouse, recalls that he noticed an error in the original closure notice in 1983, thus allowing more time for campaigners to lodge objections and to "get their act together" as he describes it. Having a keen eye for the official jargon obviously paid dividends! Other volunteers act as station gardeners, on-train line guides for day visitors, carry out guided walks in and around the shanty town sites at Ribbleshead viaduct, volunteer in the shops and visitor centre, act as guides in two restored signal boxes, work to support local bus links and many other activities.

Up to a hundred people regularly engage in activities to promote the line and some have been doing so for many years.

Two long-standing members are

Pete Shaw, a vice-president, who provided the cover photograph for this issue, and Edward Album, who is still the Friends' legal adviser.

Travelling on the line today, your eye is drawn to the beautifully kept gardens, the meticulously restored buildings in their cream and red Midland colours, and the atmosphere of care that is expended along its length.

No structure is too small to be considered worth preserving, whether it be a redundant signal box or a water pump, a reinstated running-in board or a repaired bench.

Even the Northern timetable contains a line-guide map, so passengers can identify some of the structures they are passing over and the stations they are visiting.

All the different organisations have their own part to play in promotional activity, and the dozens of volunteers ensure that they do this superbly well.

■ Allison Cosgrove is a director of Railfuture and vice-chair of Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line.



THEN: Ribbleshead station in various stages of disrepair. It is now a welcoming visitor centre in the Yorkshire Dales

◆◆◆ Increase Railfuture's lobbying power: Recruit a new member

railwatch October 2021 7

Picture: SETTLE-CARLISLE ARCHIVE

Bikes and trains

Please, Railfuture, support and actively campaign for the scheme that the Transport and Health Science Group advocates: Cycle vans on all trains.

It would be a bonus if there could be adequate space so that the cyclist is not forced to have to hang up their bike by its front wheel, which is not only an added stress if one is not particularly strong or has a loaded touring bike. It can also damage the bike.

If it is a struggle for a cyclist to travel with their bike by train as a means of transport, not just for leisure, many people will simply return to using their cars again.

The article in *Railwatch* 166 by Stephen Watkins says it all for me: there should be active promotion of the rail-cycle combination as a distinct transport mode – and alternative to the car.

Catherine Barber

Inspiring UK visit

I received a letter with *Railwatch* 168: "Because of cost increases we are stopping posting free copies of *Railwatch* outside of the UK. This is the last free issue that you will receive by post."

I will say that is OK. Because of thrombosis and other diseases, I can travel only short distances and cannot use trains with facing seats.

I remember travelling in England in 1988 when Anne and I came across a leaflet entitled: "Beat road congestion with light rail rapid transport".

The leaflet was very inspiring and I advocated a tram-train system in my city, Aarhus. Back in 1988 a tram-train system was very much "rail future" in Denmark. But construction started in 2013, and sections opened in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Another 14 kilometre section, Odense Letbane, opens early next year. Other sections follow in 2025. When Trevor Garrod asked me to help with the launch of the European Passengers Federation, I decided to continue campaigning, especially for night trains.

France is on the right track in combatting carbon dioxide with taxes and restricting domestic air routes in favour of TGVs.

Switzerland has developed systems to shift cargo by rail-road combinations which must be models to other countries.

In 2016, I spent a lovely time in the French town of Mulhouse, using the sleeper train to Basel from Hamburg. In that year, Mulhouse celebrated a decade of tram-trains. Most Swiss cities of course have "good old trams".

Best wishes to Railfuture from a



Picture: KATIE PENNICK

Trains for a climate emergency

There was a time when civil servants and rail managers conspired to make trains fit first of all for bowler-hatted gents with rolled umbrellas.

Now, in the climate emergency age, that approach is far from acceptable. Trains have to be an alternative to the polluting and energy-wasteful private car.

Trains must provide space for buggies, bikes, luggage and wheelchairs, as well as the well-dressed person on their way to a business appointment needing a place for their laptop and facilities to charge phone, camera and other accessories, and everyone needs a respectable and convenient toilet.

Sadly, with a few notable exceptions, trains are NOT suitable for all these uses. The picture above was taken by a wheelchair user denied a space by a surfeit of bikes (see page 17) and there is dissatisfaction at the reduction in facilities in the very latest trains. Passengers are collectively marking the authorities' performance evaluation with: "Could do a whole lot better."

grumpy old man who now prefers to sit in an armchair and watch a cycle race. The 2022 Tour de France grand depart will be from Copenhagen.

Erland Egefors, Rundhøj Allé 76D
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Good connections?

I was dismayed to see the map of the East West Rail Link in *Railwatch* 168. This suggests there will be two physically separate stations at St Neots, not permitting easy connections between trains on the East Coast Main Line (from York, Newcastle or Scotland) with East-West connections to towns such as Milton Keynes or Oxford.

Another "near miss" from our strategic planners, to add to Stratford and Stratford International, Northfleet and Ebbsfleet, Birmingham New Street and Curzon Street. Historic disconnections such as Newark North Gate and Castle, arising from lines originally being built by different, competing companies, are something we have to live with, but should we really be adding more to the list? Perhaps the most alarming thing about the piece

however was the *Railwatch* caption for the map, titled "Good Connections". Really? Is it not too much to ask that our orbital links connect with our radial links? Or must we continue to expect everyone to travel into London and then back out again, failing once again to "level up"?

Dennis Fancett, Bedlington NE22
Chair, SENRUG: The South East
Northumberland Rail User Group
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Campaign lessons

As the co-founder of Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways, I celebrate the fact that England still has a rail network.

Thanks to the July issue of *Railwatch*, I now know we are half way through the 2021 European Year of Rail and that there will be a COP 26 conference in Glasgow in November.

We should use the expertise of Railfuture members. Every Railfuture group could make sure that councillors and MPs take or send pro-rail, pro-electricity and pro-clean air messages to the conference. What an opportunity for us to try our language skills and our creative skills. As for a

campaigning strategy, I suggest you have a look at weownit.org.uk/our-public-services/railways. At the age of 24, Cat Hobbs negotiated the half-hour train campaign and succeeded in persuading every councillor of every political view on Bristol City Council to back the campaign. They paid for three years of investment. Although we still have only a 40-minute frequency, passenger numbers increased massively as a result of adding two trains which made the whole service more reliable.

Julie Boston, Friends of Suburban
Bristol Railways
jboston@jboston.plus.com

Eastern appeal

I am a local independent councillor from a deprived seaside town, the most easterly in the UK. Trains to London are fine, but cross-country travel is deplorable – slow and uncomfortable, with multiple changes. There is plenty of government hot air about "levelling up" and "Northern Powerhouse", but what about those of us on the coastal fringes?

The business case for HS2 promises economic benefits for the Midlands and the North, but according to a report by the House of Lords economic affairs committee, HS2 will suck 0.9 to 1.1% of GDP out of remote towns such as Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth.

Colin Butler, Wayne Close, Lowestoft,
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lothingcb@icloud.com

Letter power

I don't think that Cyril Cowland (*Railwatch* 168) should feel at all disheartened by the fact that the letter to his local paper about rail improvements only resulted in a single printed reply, which was largely negative. Do not give up hope.

I have written thousands of "Letters to the Editor" over the past 40 years. I recall a letter to the *Nuneaton Tribune* in the early 1980s calling for the reopening of the Nuneaton-Coventry line. No-one replied, though the paper itself repeated my views in a subsequent article and the railway eventually reopened later that decade.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue,
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timmickleburgh9@gmail.com

BR growth

While, for some reason, many ex-British Rail managers regard their former employer as a failure, I cannot let my old chum Ian Brown get away with his claim that "it was not until privatisation in 1995 that rail ridership started growing". As

the graph with his article shows, the recovery started in the 1980s with BR chairman Sir Robert Reid's business-led railway.

From 1983, passenger miles grew year-on-year, peaking in 1988-89, before dropping back as the recession began to bite. With the economic recovery, ridership picked up, with the annual growth rate similar to that which BR achieved.

Roger Ford
roger.ford9009@gmail.com

Speak up for HS2

I know that most MPs are in favour of HS2, but few say anything about it. I wish that more people, especially MPs, would come out of their shell to support and speak up for HS2.

I am fed up with hearing from the anti-HS2s which is all we hear from the BBC and other radio stations. They need to be countered by pro-HS2 arguments.

Railways have always been and will continue to be the most important form of transport in moving people and all kinds of goods around the country. In most of the 20th century the railways were overlooked and undermined. Now in the 21st century that all needs to be put right.

James Knight, Glebefield
The Bryn, Church Road, Basildon
Essex SS14 2LD

Toilet torture

I am confused by the Williams-Shapps report for Great British Railways.

Surely it should read Great ENGLISH Railways – as the Scottish Government will soon control the whole of Scottish Railways and it's likely that the Welsh Government will follow suit sometime in the future for the railways in Wales.

Also, when is the railway industry going to stop reducing the number of toilets in trains? The new class 701 five-car trains have only one toilet. What happens when that goes wrong? The new class 701 10-car trains have only two toilets. Compare that with the five toilets in a class 700 12-car train.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
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Aviation deficit

It is important to ram home the importance of taxing aviation fuel. Aviation is not only bad for the environment, it also creates a tourism deficit and is a drain on the

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: RAY SCHOFIELD

HS2 makes progress in spite of protests

This protest encampment near Offchurch, Warwickshire, shows that some protesters have not given up their struggle even as the line between London and the West Midlands is being built.

Two viaducts will be needed near Southam and a tunnel will take the line under Long Itchington Wood. After Offchurch, the line goes into a "green tunnel" to minimise impact, before moving on to the interchange station at Solihull which will be the heart of Britain's high speed rail network.

It will have two island platforms, with four platform faces, plus two through lines. Work also started in June on the £1.7 billion HS2

national finances. No wonder the Spanish were anxious to open their borders to us in the summer, despite our aviation-imported Covid variants being rampant here. They want British tourists spending money there, not in the UK.

John Davis, Harpenden, Herts
davis.john@mypostoffice.co.uk

Route anomalies

There are many anomalies on the rail network, such as that pointed out by Harry Burr (*Railwatch* 168) that to go by train from Northampton to Banbury requires a devious route, to Coventry and then back down again. To go from Llandoverly to Carmarthen, one has to go to Llanelli and back again.

Bournemouth to Yeovil requires going into Weymouth, yet the lines from Poole and Yeovil both pass through Dorchester.

Colin Bricher, Broadmead Avenue,
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Walk up and go

York and Doncaster are 21 minutes apart by rail and compulsory seat reservation makes no sense.

A hospital consultant I know travels from York to Doncaster Hospital. The nature of his job means that he can rarely be sure of being able to leave to catch a particular train. Retaining the flexibility of "walk up and go" is essential.

John Gilham, York
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More seats please

Electrification schemes are often

station at Old Oak Common, London. Six platforms will be for HS2 trains, four for Crossrail and four will be used by Great Western.

■ France's first TGV service started 40 years ago, from Paris to Lyon.

■ Egypt is planning a high speed rail line along the Suez Canal from Alexandria to the Red Sea.

■ Test running has begun on the 400-mile long high speed line between Madrid and Spain's north-west Atlantic coast cities of Vigo and La Coruna, after the completion of the 70-mile long section from Pedralba de la Praderia to Ourense which includes several new viaducts.

seen as the answer to overcrowding. But longer trains are also important.

TransPennine Express between Leeds and Manchester now operates a new fleet of five-car bimode trains in lieu of the previous three-car diesel sets, but until recently the reduced daytime frequency meant there was no increase in capacity. Having once worked at Leeds travel centre and customer services for many years, dealing with complaints, the feedback from passengers travelling on this route was usually very positive, especially regarding the frequency and journey time between the two cities.

There just were not enough seats.

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BEDMINSTER: The desolate station was a temporary stand-in for Bristol Temple Meads during engineering work but lacked care and attention. Our picture shows the unappealing subway

nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Railfuture to the rescue

During certain phases of the Bristol East Junction upgrade, many trains from the West have started or terminated at Bedminster instead of at Temple Meads. Platforms at Bedminster have been resurfaced to increase the length available to passengers and solar lighting has been used. However, the ambience of the station entrance remains very poor. Railfuture member David Wood has called on Bristol City Council, GWR and West of England Combined Authority Mayor Dan Norris to clear vegetation from the subway and the steps to the station, as well as the shelter on platform 2 to repair and clear of graffiti. The GWR station manager said his staff visit Bedminster station every day but can only do essential tasks because of financial constraints. Andrew Davies, principal transport planner at Bristol City Council, believes a proposed housing development nearby may present opportunities to improve the station including installation of CCTV. However, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways are concerned that the siting of the new homes may prevent the building of a northern entrance to the station. Railfuture has therefore written to the council asking for a plot of land to be safeguarded for this entrance.

David Wood wrote to Network Rail to report the dumping of needles by drug addicts on the lineside close to Bedminster station. He was concerned at the danger posed to track workers and also to rail users because some needles had been dropped near a ventilation shaft above the station subway. He has also asked for CCTV to be installed at neighbouring Parson Street station to discourage trespass and vandalism.

■ ■ Food for the traveller

I am pleased to report that my pessimistic outlook for station catering (*Railwatch* 168) has been disproved. Pumpkin has reopened its outlets at Cheltenham and Gloucester, so there are now two buffets at Gloucester. For the first time in many years, there is a cafe at Kemble, open in the mornings. Outlets at Bristol Temple Meads have also reopened. Great Western is believed to be seeking a tenant to

open a cafe in a vacant room at Bridgwater, to replace the one displaced by the rebuilding of the station forecourt in 2019. All this is evidence of a recovery in passenger numbers, although not yet to pre-Covid levels.

■ ■ Cancellations

Train crew shortages caused some cancellations of GWR local services in August. I have received reports of passengers from Gloucester and Cheltenham having to travel via Worcestershire Parkway when a direct train to Worcester was cancelled. Even without cancellations, connections via the Parkway are a useful fallback, albeit with a 30-40 minute wait, because direct trains between Gloucester and Worcester run only every two hours. Railfuture continues to campaign for an hourly service. On 25 August two round trips were cancelled between Bristol and Taunton, leaving a gap of about three hours in services to Highbridge and Bridgwater. It is to be hoped that the creation of Great British Railways will encourage CrossCountry Trains to make additional stops.

■ ■ Another new station

In early August images were released of Filton North station which will open when passenger services are restored to Henbury in MetroWest Phase 2, hopefully in 2023. The station will serve the 17,000 seat Brabazon Arena being built on the former Filton airfield site. Network Rail was reportedly seeking planning permission for the station later in August, with a view to starting construction in 2022. Phase 2 of MetroWest will also see new stations at Henbury and Ashley Down. Our affiliated group Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways held a demonstration at Constable Road, Lockleaze, on 31 July as part of its campaign for an additional station between Ashley Down and Filton Abbey Wood. 1,200 new homes are being planned for the Lockleaze ward of Bristol City Council.

■ ■ Portishead shortlist

Network Rail has begun the process to engaging a contractor to reopen the Portishead line. Four shortlisted firms were expected to tender in July.

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■ ■ Island Line

Infrastructure upgrades on the Island Line were completed by early August, with just a few snags to iron out. The new trains had been out accumulating test mileage. Then came a rainstorm of biblical proportions, washing out ballast at 16 sites along the line and injecting fresh uncertainty into the reopening date. The busy summer season on the Isle of Wight has passed before passengers are back on the trains. Following on from the Island Line rebuild is a project to improve the station and surrounding area at Ryde Esplanade, the cost of which is being met from Transforming Cities funding centred on Portsmouth. We are promised a complete overhaul of Esplanade station, a remodelled forecourt giving easier access for pedestrians, and alterations to the bus interchange. The prospect of a minor loss of car parking space stirred up some local opposition, so Railfuture submitted a letter of support which was much appreciated by the scheme promoters.

■ ■ New opportunities

SWR's timetable review heralds the elimination of awkward peripheral services such as Waterloo-Salisbury-Bristol and Salisbury-Yeovil-Weymouth. This simply adds to the number of direct services lost across the South over many decades. Long gone are direct trains between Brighton and Plymouth, and trains from Portsmouth to the Midlands and North. Surely there is scope for open access operators to step in with a premium product that would appeal to leisure travellers of the future. The question is: Will such innovations be permitted in the brave new world of Great British Railways? Plans for improved transport infrastructure in the Waterside area west of Southampton continue to evolve, and we recently responded to Hampshire County Council's consultation on their overall strategy by expressing our strong support for a rail passenger service to Marchwood and Hythe.

■ ■ Timetable proposals

Wessex branch is coordinating the Railfuture response to South Western Railway's timetable proposals for December 2022 and our final response will be published on the Railfuture website in due course. Our initial thoughts are that the document is far too thin on detail to be able to comment constructively. Service reductions are planned across the network compared to 2019 levels, but it is impossible to assess the full impact since no timings are shown, only the general pattern of service. There are no indications of first and last

trains or even which days the pattern will operate: Monday to Friday? What about Saturdays and Sundays?

Railfuture will focus on the impact of SWR's proposals on rail users, but it is hard to see how a reduced frequency on many routes fits with the need to attract people back on to public transport. We continue to suffer from cuts to CrossCountry services across our region, and have yet to receive a satisfactory explanation as to why station stops at Winchester and Brockenhurst have been erased. Railfuture's final response is at: www.railfuture.org.uk/display2771

■ ■ New opportunities

SWR's timetable review heralds the elimination of awkward peripheral services such as Waterloo-Salisbury-Bristol and Salisbury-Yeovil-Weymouth. This simply adds to the number of direct services lost across the South over many decades. Long gone are direct trains between Brighton and Plymouth, and trains from Portsmouth to the Midlands and North. Surely there is scope for open access operators to step in with a premium product that would appeal to leisure travellers of the future. The question is: Will such innovations be permitted in the brave new world of Great British Railways? Plans for improved transport infrastructure in the Waterside area west of Southampton continue to evolve, and we recently responded to Hampshire County Council's consultation on their overall strategy by expressing our strong support for a rail passenger service to Marchwood and Hythe.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex-branch

Twitter @RailfutureWessex



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

Esk Valley rebellion over timetable revamp

Users of the Esk Valley line in England's North East region reacted with amazement to proposed timetable changes (planned by Northern from May) which will force many people to revert to using their cars.

They say the changes will undermine the viability and sustainability of the whole Esk Valley line.

Badly affected would be patients and visitors to James Cook University Hospital which treats people from all over the area.

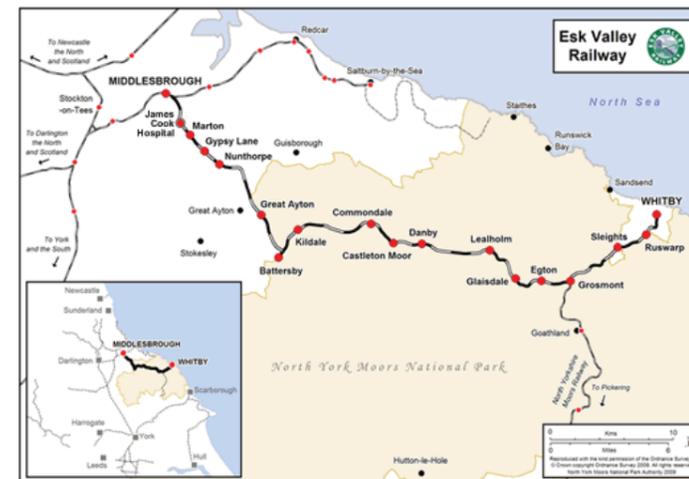
Also affected would be people travelling from cities in the North East to the North York Moors National Park, and the North Yorkshire Moors steam railway.

People who currently travel to the Metrocentre on through trains from the Esk Valley will have to wait 40 minutes to change trains at Middlesbrough.

"These proposals will clearly disadvantage and inconvenience many hundreds of passengers every day, make journey times substantially longer and are both operationally and financially inefficient," said Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership.

Railfuture vice-president Alan Williams is chairman of the partnership which called for the cuts to be withdrawn and the present through services retained and improved.

It said the information justifying the changes was inaccurate and misleading, especially as seven trains each way would be reduced to five, and all through



services withdrawn. The partnership has become increasingly concerned that the consultations before each timetable renewal were much too late for any meaningful influence on the process.

Northern says the changes are to enable an additional fast Connect service from Middlesbrough via the Durham coast to Newcastle but it is unable to introduce it yet. However any time gain from the Connect service will be cancelled out by the need to change at Middlesbrough.

Northern plans to withdraw all 12 current weekday through services from Whitby, the Esk Valley, Nunthorpe and James Cook to all destinations beyond Middlesbrough in the rest of the Tees Valley and on to Hartlepool, Sunderland and Newcastle, and to replace them with shuttle services requiring a change at Middlesbrough, with waiting times varying between 6 and 10 minutes for morning commuters

to as much as 54 minutes during the rest of the day. Some shuttles have no onward connection, creating three separate two-hour gaps in what is now essentially an hourly service. All 10 daily southbound through services are similarly withdrawn, replaced by waits at Middlesbrough generally ranging from 5 to 19 minutes, but also with three "connections" of nearly 40 minutes, including the last train to Whitby. The industry generally recommends allowing around five minutes for connections.

The proposals raise a time and physical barrier to services at Middlesbrough. In future, everybody faces a change at Middlesbrough throughout the day. In the absence of any other justification, there is a growing concern that the cuts are a precursor to the proposed introduction of hydrogen trains, which reportedly have a significantly shorter operating range than diesel trains and will rely on a single refuelling point in the Middlesbrough area. Research shows that one of the greatest disincentives to rail

travel is the necessity and delayed additional risk and delay of changing trains en route, particularly among the disabled and elderly.

For passengers from Whitby and the 12 intermediate stations to Nunthorpe, the proposals are even worse, with the morning connection from Whitby to the Newcastle train at Middlesbrough rising from the current 16 minutes to no less than 53 minutes. Some overall journey times are to be further extended to 95 or 97 minutes.

When the Esk Valley line was revived from closure under the Beeching proposals in 1965 the service was identified as "slow and in need of improvement". The overall journey time then was just 82 minutes!

None of the proposed services will in future serve Metrocentre, so for all passengers a change at Newcastle Central will be necessary. From all 17 stations south of Middlesbrough to Nunthorpe and Whitby, currently with through trains, two changes will be required in future.

The Esk Valley line has been voted "the prettiest line in England", running through the North York Moors National Park with a similarly popular destination at Whitby, but it has the worst train service of any serving an English national park. It has tremendous untapped tourist potential, limited by the current poor train service compared to Scarborough.

Now even the through trains into the national park from Newcastle and Darlington will be axed in the face of vehement opposition from the tourist industry. A wait of 46 minutes at Middlesbrough is hardly an attractive end to a day trip.

Can Northern really afford to treat passengers in this way?



WHITBY: Where North Yorkshire steam trains connect with Esk Valley trains from the national network



Picture: TRAMS FOR NEWHAVEN

PROGRESS: Newhaven tram terminus taking shape in July with the harbour in the background
Edinburgh tram reaches out to Newhaven

Work has continued during the Covid emergency on the three-mile Edinburgh tram extension to Leith and Newhaven. Construction started in 2019 and the £207 million extension is now expected to open in early 2023. The latest threat to completion is from a national shortage of concrete and Covid has already pushed up costs.

The existing line is nine miles long and was built from 2008. It opened in 2014 and cost £776 million, more than double the original estimate. An ambitious plan in 2001 for three lines was cut back. In 2011, city councillors decided the tram would run only from the airport to St Andrew Square. Edinburgh trams became the first light rail network in the UK to permit the carriage of bikes on a permanent basis. An investigation into soaring costs was entrusted to Lord Hardie. The report is still awaited. Railfuture is keen to see light rail play an increasingly important role in public transport and welcomes the commissioning in July of a new report on trams



and light rail by the Urban Transport Group. The group, which brings together the transport authorities responsible for all but one of England's tram and light rail system, has called on transport consultancy Steer to provide a comprehensive analysis and summary of the benefits of light rail as a mode, as well as setting out the economic, environmental and social benefits that tram and light rail systems have brought to the UK. The report is being commissioned in the knowledge of the financial challenges that light rail systems face as fewer people have been travelling on them during the pandemic. It will also help inform the group's response to the government's comprehensive spending review.

Metro expansion is a significant part of West Midlands Mayor Andy Street's plans for an enhanced rail network. Malcolm Holmes of the West Midlands Rail Executive outlined the plans in his address to the Railfuture AGM in July. Metro enhancements include the Wolverhampton city centre extension, Wednesbury-Brierley Hill, Birmingham Westside to Edgbaston and Birmingham Eastside to Solihull. More information is available in an attractive 35-page downloadable presentation available on the Railfuture website. Search "Holmes" in the search box at the top of the Railfuture website.



Picture: DAVE SHAW

SUCCESS TRACK: Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove presents Dennis Fancett with the Railfuture Campaigner of the Year trophy

The signals seem to be set at green for the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line to be reopened for passengers under the government's Restoring Your Railway programme, but campaigner Dennis Fancett is not taking anything for granted. Dennis, who is chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, said: "It is difficult to conceive it will not now go ahead, but the balance of funding even for phase 1 has still not been announced by the Department for Transport/Treasury. We certainly do not consider it in the bag yet, though we are very close." Railfuture's Allison Cosgrove made the Campaigner of the Year presentation to Dennis on Bedlington North station, one of

the stations on the line, in July. Nearby on the banks of the River Blyth at Bedlington was the Bedlington Iron Works. It was here that "malleable rail" was first invented and patented, said SENRUG member Trevor Watson. This made it commercially viable to make railways that could go round curves. Before the Bedlington patent, wagonways could go only in straight lines. The Stockton-Darlington railway followed soon after Bedlington's patent was taken out. Bedlington also built the first steam engine ever to leave London King's Cross. So Bedlington considers itself to be the town where railways were invented. And also now maybe re-invented.

Railfuture Campaigner of the Year



Picture: CROSSRAIL

OUT OF THE BLACK HOLE: A Crossrail test train emerging from the tunnel at Stratford, London
An end at last to London's Crossrail blues?

Up to 12 test trains an hour were passing through the central London Crossrail tunnels in July. It gives rail campaigners hope that Crossrail might emerge into the sunlight next year operating fully as the Elizabeth line. Indeed Crossrail expect to open to the public for the stretch from Paddington to Abbey Wood "in the first half of next year" with 12 trains an hour. Eventually there will be 24 trains per hour on the central section. Crossrail has been handing over completed stations to Transport for London during the summer. Paddington, Custom House, Farringdon, Tottenham Court Road, Woolwich, Liverpool Street and Whitechapel have been handed over with Canary Wharf imminent. The earliest date for the full line service, including Reading, Heathrow and Shenfield, is expected to be autumn next year but the full timetable is unlikely until May 2023, five years later than planned. This autumn Crossrail plans to commission the much-developed operating software, known as ELR100. But one of the benefits will be

accessibility improvements at many of the historic stations that are becoming part of Crossrail. The 41 stations on the 100km line are step-free from street to platform, with level access to trains at the new stations. Crossrail will increase central London's rail capacity by 10%. Combined with increasing restrictions on through road traffic and the extension of the Mayor Sadiq Khan's low emissions zone this month, the Elizabeth line could deliver big environmental benefits. Theoretically the extra rail capacity could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 2.5 million tonnes. London recovers Two new Tube stations on the Northern line extension opened in September – Nine Elms and Battersea Power Station. Walthamstow MP Stella Creasey has asked to be kept informed after she was told there were plans to introduce a Chingford to Stratford and Meridian Water service via reinstated curves at Hall Farm had been downgraded by Walthamstow Council, even though the council claims to

"prioritise public transport improvements in the north of the borough". Roger Gilham of Chingford Line Users Association alerted Ms Creasey and has told her that several councillors are keen to see Hall Farm go up the agenda. Rail campaigners are keen that modest enhancement schemes, such as Hall Farm, are given the go-ahead, because big schemes such as Crossrail 2 are being pushed back by the present financial attitude of the Treasury (with the exception of £27 billion for road building). Both the Mayor and local councils need to be reminded that smaller schemes provide genuine and speedy benefits. There are reports that the government is considering scrapping improvements to the Brighton line which would have included rebuilding East Croydon station and unblocking the bottleneck at Selhurst Triangle with new bridges and flyovers. Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines told a press briefing that some schemes would be delayed and Brighton line improvements could be "mothballed".

Railfuture AGM 2021

After missing an AGM in 2020 because of Covid, Railfuture's 2021 AGM was held in Birmingham on 17 July.

In his president's address, Christian Wolmar highlighted the example of Louth in Lincolnshire, which was a victim of the Beeching cuts. He said: "It is an absolutely magnificent place with a beautiful church and Georgian houses. It would be much more prosperous if it still had its railway. Every town needs its railway."

The government's talk of reversing Beeching is very much just a slogan in pursuit of a policy. It has committed only tiny amounts of money. Instead it has committed £28 billion on roads! "It's incoherent and difficult to stomach," he said. A national railcard, like Germany's BahnCard, could be useful in attracting passengers back to rail after Covid. Chairman Chris Page pledged that campaigning for electrification would be key for Railfuture. Finance director Jerry Alderson said Railfuture had continued to operate during Covid but had been unable to meet members of the public in person. However, having Zoom meetings had reduced expenditure on hiring rooms. In future a combination of Zoom and physical meetings would be useful.

In the election, Wendy Thorne (275 votes), Ian Brown (262 votes) and Chris Page (259 votes) will be Railfuture directors for the next three years, Mike Rose (162 votes) for two years and Neil Middleton (104 votes) for one year.

The AGM voted 25 to 15 not to reinstate former Railfuture general secretary Trevor Garrod's membership despite Mr Garrod making an impassioned personal plea and outlining some of the sacrifices he had made in campaigning for rail.

He said he was a founder member of the European Passengers Federation and had

recently been elected as chairman of the East Suffolk Travel Association.

The AGM saw a video presentation by Dennis Fancett, who was voted Railfuture Campaigner of the Year for making enormous progress towards reopening the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line. He was presented with the award earlier that week.

Railfuture vice-chair Allison Cosgrove said the main challenge for the year ahead is to encourage passengers back to rail. Even though we know trains operate to high standards of cleanliness, some passengers are reluctant to return. She added: "We need members to be a source of influence in local areas. Members should contact local councillors on rail matters. They will not know about rail unless we tell them. We need to remind them when things need to be addressed. Use your rail knowledge to talk to your local MPs at surgeries."

In the afternoon, Malcolm Holmes, executive director of the West Midlands Rail Executive and director of rail for Transport for West Midlands, said rail demand was lagging because it is mainly used by white collar workers who can do their job at home during the Covid emergency.

He outlined the many projects and challenges for rail in the West Midlands.

The second speaker was Sarah Spink, strategic partnership lead at Midlands Connect, who said her organisation acts as a conduit between government and local authorities.

She added: "It takes years or even decades to get a station or a new line. We need a pipeline to activate projects when there is funding available."

"But at the moment we are all waiting for the government's integrated rail plan."



Re-elected: Wendy Thorne
Railfuture membership director

Come and be active by joining a Railfuture group

Railfuture Groups develop policy on national and company-wide issues.

A year ago the governance group advertised two vacancies. It is disappointing that nobody came forward to be considered as a potential member. Any Railfuture member who is interested in joining the group is invited to apply to the chair of the group for one of these vacancies. The terms of reference of the group are at

www.railfuture.org.uk/display2199 and the process for selection is available on the Railfuture website.

While governance is perhaps not considered the most exciting subject, you will be helping to perform a vital task in keeping Railfuture on the right side of the law and ensuring we are operating transparently, ethically and fairly. If you have a working knowledge of best practice in

governance, or useful practical experience in these matters, with an eye for detail, this could be the place for you. Participation in any group will give you an insight into the workings of Railfuture at a national level. If you are interested, please send a CV and contact details to Stewart Palmer before 31 December 2021:

stewart.palmer@railfuture.org.uk

Thames Valley

martin.smith@railfuture.org.uk

Go-ahead for Oxford station

Railfuture is happy to see the Department for Transport announcement of £69 million funding for the first phase (or rather the first part of the first phase) of rebuilding Oxford station, with a new western entrance and an additional through track for down trains. Platform 4 will be converted to an island platform with subway access from the new entrance. Presumably this would not involve making use of the original narrow subway. In the long term Network Rail has plans for extending the track of bay platform 1 as a through track for up trains, making platform 1 into an island platform. This would entail the demolition of the existing booking office and concourse, but we hope that it would not involve making the new western entrance the only entrance, defeating the object of increasing circulation space for passengers. With Chiltern and Oxford Metro trains proceeding to Didcot/Reading and Cowley, bay platform 2 should be adequate for any remaining terminating services.

Progress on East West Rail

Railfuture is pleased to see steady progress on the reconstruction of the line from Bicester to Bletchley and the new station at Winslow, but is unhappy about the omission of the connection from Aylesbury. We note that the operation of Bicester London Road crossing is being updated to give quicker responses and shortened barrier-down timings. However, when eventually train services are extended to Cambridge, the problem of London Road crossing may have to be looked at again. Railfuture is also concerned about some of the ideas being floated to deal with the level crossings on the Marston Vale line. There are proposals for closing or moving some stations to a different site, and most improbably for dropping the line into a cutting between Bow Brickhill and Aspley Guise with a tunnel under the A5130 road at Woburn Sands. Railfuture is opposed to the closure of stations, even if lightly used, and deplores the imposition of unnecessary civil engineering, while overhead line electrification is rejected. One suspects that the Department for Transport still nurses the mistaken belief that future development of hydrogen or battery technology will render electric overhead line equipment superfluous.

Rail corridor recommendations

Network Rail published a new study in June highlighting opportunities to expand Oxfordshire's railway to cope with government-backed large-scale house building in the area.

The study cites a predicted 70% increase in services across Oxfordshire, which was calculated before the emergence of Covid.

The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study recommends improvements to increase interconnectivity across Oxfordshire. Subject to future funding and viable business cases, these include increasing capacity through Oxford station, reopening the Cowley branch line, and additional services to Hanborough. It also recommends additional infrastructure to provide greater capacity in and around Didcot, including the proposal for a new station at Wantage/Grove, subject to additional main line infrastructure.

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

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

THE CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL FREIGHT

Rail freight is the only climate-friendly solution

Covid has created volatility and uncertainty for passenger rail and the wider economy but rail freight volumes have recovered to near pre-pandemic levels, Railfuture's freight group has been told.

In fact the resilience of rail freight and its importance to the economy have been highlighted.

Cutbacks in passenger services have even created opportunities to run more freight trains and there is now a greater understanding of the importance of rail freight.

Railfuture has held talks with Maggie Simpson of the Rail Freight Group to discuss the implications for freight arising from the Williams-Shapps review and the Department for Transport's decarbonisation plan, which calls for modal shift to rail freight.

The government appears to recognise that decarbonising transport will place a huge burden on the rail network.

Brexit has affected freight flows. Some European traffic that would have come through Dover is being landed in the northern ports on the Humber, Teesport and Liverpool. This has led to the introduction of new rail traffic flows.

HS2 construction is also expected to boost rail freight.

The Williams-Shapps review has many implications for freight, but RFG warns that any new framework must give rail freight companies the confidence to invest in replacement and new locomotives as well as provide fair access to efficient timetable paths.

Great British Railways is expected to have a statutory duty to promote freight but the regional structure may create problems for inter-region freight.

Longer freight trains produce an exponential reduction in emissions, contributing to decarbonisation and improved air quality.

RFG wants to see freight prioritised over some passenger services at pinchpoints.

In the light of more electrification, freight operators are considering what type of locomotives to buy to replace their ageing diesel fleets.

Bimodes may be needed because not enough of the freight network is electrified to justify buying straight electric locomotives.

Power upgrades and electrification of short gaps into reception sidings and in-fill schemes are crucial for rail freight. For example, three miles of track from the Tilbury branch into Thames Gateway port needs electrifying.

There are no ready-made road haulage solutions. Rail electrification is the only solution if we want quiet, clean trains that are fast, frequent and freight-carrying.

Increasing the proportion of freight able to run under the wires on end-to-end journeys is critical. Completing the Midland main line electrification to Leeds and Doncaster and electrifying the Joint Line from Peterborough to Doncaster via Lincoln will be critical.

Despite the transport decarbonisation plan emphasising the need for a rolling programme of electrification, and the success



EUSTON STATION, LONDON: Cargo bike meets parcel train, a converted class 319

Old trains for new parcels trade

High-speed parcel deliveries will soon be made by rail to satisfy a growing demand for faster freight, it is predicted.

Network Rail and distribution firm Orion showed how the concept works at London's Euston station in July.

Former passenger trains, like this former Thameslink class 319, are being converted to take goods directly into city centre stations.

As well as online retail, the flexible freight operation could transport other light goods needed quickly.

Increasingly, electric bikes are being used in London for local deliveries and they are expected to be the perfect environment-friendly partner for electric trains which already penetrate into city centres.

The trains, converted from passenger service, are cleaner than air and road haulage, and are easy to load and unload for the first and last mile of the journey.

"Parcel trains are by no means a novel concept, but more of us buying things online and efforts to get polluting vehicles off roads are revitalising rail as a cost-effective and fast way to get goods to consumers and businesses quickly and efficiently," said Daniel Fredriksson of Network Rail.

Karl Watts, chief executive officer for Orion, said: "The shift from road to rail transportation delivers economic, environmental and social benefits."

"Each eight-car train removes 24 diesel-powered vans from our roads, thereby



Room for plenty of parcels inside reducing congestion, lowering carbon emissions and improving inner city air quality."

Parcel-carrying companies have expressed interest in using the new high-speed logistics service the converted trains. The first will start running later this year between the Midlands and Scotland.

More routes could be added in 2022, dependent on customer need and available train paths.

The former Thameslink train is now fitted with a diesel engine to allow it to use non-electrified lines.

The inside has been re-fitted for logistics use and can accommodate roll cages, pallets and other containers.

One carriage can carry approximately the same amount of goods as one articulated lorry.

Royal Mail is building a new mail hub on the DIRFT 3 terminal at Daventry, Northamptonshire.

in Scotland, ministers are frightened to commit. Rail has a built-in carbon advantage over road for freight haulage, producing 76% less carbon even using diesel haulage.

Network Rail is already considering installing electric car charging points on its station estate. It should consider offering electric van and bike charging points too.

This would help to decarbonise local transport. Railfuture must campaign for

enhancements to increase capacity for freight traffic without having to cut passenger service frequencies.

Days after the decarbonisation plan was announced, Railfuture issued a statement calling for more rail electrification to be implemented quickly.

Railfuture director Ian Brown said: "We need to see targets for a year-on-year modal shift to rail."

◆◆◆◆ Increase Railfuture's lobbying power: Recruit a new member

railwatch October 2021 15

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■ ■ New super ministry for Wales

Railfuture has written to Senedd member Julie James congratulating her on her appointment to a key job which should lead to increased investment in rail. The First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, has set up a new Ministry for Climate Change which brings together environment, energy, housing, planning and transport portfolios. Swansea-based Ms James will lead the super ministry with Lee Waters, previously deputy minister for economy and transport, as her deputy. Railfuture outlined its campaigns which will help her. These include reversing the cancellation of wiring between Cardiff and Swansea, a very busy line carrying significant freight which is a carbon generator while the traction is diesel. Electrification of the line between Holyhead and Crewe is crucial as it would allow north Wales to benefit fully from future HS2 services. Railfuture also advocates reopening disused routes to provide Wales with a strategic network.

Railfuture congratulated the Welsh Government on the start that Transport for Wales has already made in improving Welsh railways. The content of the franchise, which began in 2018, is well regarded within Railfuture, in particular the proposed transformation of rail services in south-east Wales, which will result from the Metro project, is commended.

Railfuture reminded Ms James of our substantial rail knowledge and experience, which could help the Welsh Government in its decision making. This has led to an offer of a meeting between senior civil servants and Railfuture.

■ ■ Surprise Manchester upgrade

Transport for Wales introduced refurbished mark 4 coaches on the Cardiff-Holyhead route in June. An additional 30 vehicles have been purchased, which will enable TfW to run four daily Swansea-Manchester return services with the same rolling stock from December next year. Trains on both routes will be in rakes of five coaches, including one of first class. Dubbed Premium services, other upgrades include free wifi throughout, a buffet car, accessible toilets and baby changing facilities. There will also be wheelchair and priority seating.

James Price, chief executive of TfW said: "The Swansea-Manchester route is one of our most popular, providing key links between the cities of south Wales and north-west England. By introducing these high-quality trains, we are recognising its importance as an inter-city route and providing a more attractive alternative to travelling by car."

The upgrade on the Swansea-Manchester route was not expected, but Railfuture is delighted that this busy route is to get the intercity-style services it deserves.

■ ■ Refurbishment at Shrewsbury

Network Rail has completed a £250,000 refurbishment of Severn Bridge Junction signal box, just south of Shrewsbury station. The Grade II listed structure is the largest working mechanical signal box in the world, retaining all 180 original levers of which 89 are still in use. However, after 117 years it was tired. New windows have been installed, identical to the original except they are



FIT FOR THE FUTURE: The 117-year-old signal box at Shrewsbury Severn Bridge

double-glazed. Other work included new timber cladding and some repairs to the external walkway gantry. The Shrewsbury sign on the signal box was also repainted.

Railfuture members were able to visit the box in 2018 following the Railfuture Wales AGM. This was the first of what was intended to be a series of visits for members to rail installations. It is hoped these will resume when the current pandemic is over.

■ ■ Goodbye to Pacers

The final Pacer trains ran in service in the UK in May. Two Welsh units operated for the last time on the Cardiff valleys lines. Most are being scrapped, but TfW has donated one to the Llanelli and Mynydd Mawr Railway in Carmarthenshire. Several more will be given to other heritage railways and community projects. Valleys lines services are currently being run by Class 150 trains augmented by Class 769 hybrids. Railfuture eagerly awaits the introduction of new trains and tram-trains in the next couple of years. These will be able to take power from the overhead wires as the lines north of Cardiff Central are progressively electrified. Battery power will be used on sections difficult to wire, leaving diesel operation for the Barry, Penarth and Vale of Glamorgan lines.

■ ■ Access challenge

Transport for Wales faces a big challenge in making its stations accessible. Of its 246 stations, only 19 are rated A for step-free access, while 41 have the lowest rating of B3, the Wales Trades Union Congress – which represents 400,000 people – was told in May. Ian Thompson of ASLEF's Treherbert branch warned: "Accessible toilets are required on platforms, stations and trains."

■ ■ Rail Excellence Centre approved

Planning approval has been given by Neath Port Talbot Council and Powys County Council for Wales' Global Centre for Rail Excellence at Onllwyn, which will be equipped to test electric, battery and hydrogen-powered trains.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
Twitter @RailfutureWales

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

arthur.thomson@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Access for All delays at Blackpool

There is concern in Blackpool after a recent meeting of South Fylde Line Community Rail Partnership about the time needed to acquire land for the creation of step-free access to Squires Gate station near Blackpool airport. A compulsory purchase order has been served on the person who allegedly owns the land, but the resultant dispute could take up to 12 months to be settled. Member Barrie Russell suggested later that a "fail safe" option should be checked to see if a ramp could be installed from Squires Gate Lane down to the platform in the shape of a zigzag. This design is used at many other stations. There is also concern that the Section 106 funding allocated through the development of the former Pontins holiday site by Persimmon Homes is yet to be spent, even though the planning decision was made five years ago.

■ ■ Personal welcome back on Bentham

The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership secured a grant to make a promotional video to encourage people to travel by train following the lifting of pandemic restrictions.

CrossCountryTrains made the grant from its community engagement fund. The video *We've Missed You Too...* is based on the theme of city, countryside and coast, and encapsulates the route from Leeds via Skipton to Lancaster and Morecambe. Narrated by Gerald Townson, the chairman of the partnership, the video includes new drone footage of Craven, the Lune Valley and Morecambe.

Mr Townson said: "We wished to encourage new audiences to enjoy journeys along our scenic route." The video can be viewed on the CRP website thebenthamline.co.uk and on YouTube.

■ ■ £250,000 accessibility fund awards

Northern's £250,000 accessibility awards will benefit Ulverston (Cumbria), Mouldsworth and Cuddington (Cheshire), Buxton (Derbyshire), plus some as yet un-named Lancashire stations.

The successful bids were chosen by the independent Northern Accessibility User Group and supported by Northern.

Mark Powles, commercial and customer director at Northern, said: "We are dedicated to making Northern's services accessible to everyone."

■ ■ Merseyrail test running of Stadler trains

Merseyrail's £500 million new Stadler train fleet started test running in July. Experts from the UK, Austria, Finland, Germany, Poland, Portugal and Spain are involved in the tests. The trains will provide level boarding with sliding steps, as well as more space for wheelchairs, bikes and buggies.

■ ■ Lakes railway history book

Accountant and railway historian Martin Bairstow has published a new edition of his *Railways in the Lake District* which includes the Cumbrian Coast and Furness Lines, the Windermere and Coniston branches and the late and much lamented Cocker mouth, Keswick and Penrith line, as well as the Lake steamers and Barrow Docks. He makes the case for electrification of the Windermere branch. Costing £17.95, it is available from Martin at 53 Kirklees Drive, Farsley, Pudsey LS28 5TD.

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

Dawn of a new age for disabled passengers?

Disabled passengers will have better access to public transport and a bigger say in how they travel, the Department for Transport announced in July, unveiling a range of initiatives to remove barriers and improve confidence for disabled people.

An audit of all UK train stations, originally pledged in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, is now under way and should help to identify where improvements are needed and highlighting existing areas of excellence.

The findings will form a new public database so people can plan their journeys.

Input from disabled passengers will also shape future investment in accessible rail travel.

The DfT will work with Network Rail on a new programme to install tactile paving on station platforms.

Work is under way to develop a passenger assist app to simplify communication with rail staff. Buses and taxis are also being targeted for action.

Accessibility minister Chris Heaton-Harris said: "Disabled passengers should be empowered to use all forms of transport with the same confidence as everyone else – whether by taxi, train, bus or ferry."

But rail union RMT warned that staff cuts threatened to make more stations problematic for disabled travellers.

"Ticket offices, station and on-train staffing are increasingly under threat as the government pursues a cost-cutting agenda," said general secretary Mick Lynch.

"Already, vast swathes of the rail network are unstaffed, with no guarantee for disabled passengers that there will be staff at the station and on the train to assist them.

"The department's own research tells us that the answer to this is more staff, not less. Cuts to staffing across our public transport networks will only serve to make rail and bus networks less accessible and less safe for disabled passengers."

Transport for London announced in August that Wimbledon Park is now the 86th Tube station to have become step-free, following the installation of a brand



Wheelchair user Katie Pennick wanted to travel to London but discovered that there are no staff on duty at the Chiltern station on a Sunday. She said: "It seems I can't travel by train on Sundays."

A Lonely Sunday discovery for Katie

The assistance desk was closed and there were no staff at the station at all (not a soul!) when Katie Pennick arrived at the Chiltern Railways station. She said: "There was no one to unlock the ramp and allow me to board the train."

Katie was able solve the problem: "Luckily my partner is strong and was somehow able to drag my wheelchair up the giant step on to the train. If I was on my own I would have been totally stranded."

But Katie went on to ask some pertinent questions: "How far in advance do we have to book assistance in order to be able to travel? And is this fair or reasonable? And does it have to be like this?"

She concluded: "Level boarding would solve everything."

Katie also knows the value of social media so she publicised her problems on Twitter.

Twitter user Ian Thomas commented: "In my naivety I assumed that when you requested assistance from

new lift. Whitechapel Tube station also became step-free after it was handed over from Crossrail to London Underground as part of the work ahead of the opening of the Elizabeth line.

Osterley, Harrow-on-the-Hill and Sudbury Hill are also all on their way to becoming step-free before the end of the year, as work continues to achieve this goal.

There are 13.9 million disabled people in the UK, all of whom need easier access to travel.

It is estimated that by 2050, one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 years or over, and as people age they become more susceptible to developing an array of conditions such as mobility impairments and memory, visual or hearing loss. Society is also starting to

recognise that many people have invisible disabilities – an impairment that is not visible – and that mental health conditions and cognitive impairments cause complex and similar challenges to physical conditions.

■ Northern has announced the winners of a fund to create a more accessible railway for all.

Schemes to install tactile wayfinding signs for people with visual impairments, immersive maps for people with autism and days out on the railway for students with special educational needs are among those that will benefit from the rail operator's £250,000 accessibility fund.

The fund is dedicated to empowering communities to make decisions which will improve the railway for all. Other

an unstaffed station, the assistance would simply arrive on the train."

Eddy Bayton added: "In reality it never works that way."

Another user pointed out that assistance has to be booked six hours in advance.

Other users stated that South West Railway and Northern trains carry an onboard ramp.

Another said: "It is against the law under the Equality Act 2010 to discriminate against disability. Pretty sure that the law does not just work Monday to Saturday. Train operators urgently need to review their approach."

When she did get on the train, Katie discovered that the wheelchair area was being used by bikes.

Of course, cyclists are always complaining that there are not enough cycle spaces on trains either!

■ Katie is a journalist, broadcaster and campaigns lead @TransportForAll

projects will focus on station improvements such as handrails, ramps and automatic doors.

The successful bids were chosen by the independent Northern Accessibility User Group.

■ South Western Railway has launched a turn-up-and-go scheme for disabled or elderly passengers who will not have to book assistance six hours in advance. SWR will be installing assisted boarding points at its 189 stations. Passengers need to scan a QR code with a smart phone and give only 10 minutes notice.

■ East Midlands Railway opened an assisted travel lounge at Nottingham. EMR also hosted a meeting with the disability inclusion group to devise follow-up moves towards making the railway more accessible.

Talk versus action

The government talks about a green agenda but its actions do not reflect its words. For example, why is the new Oxford-Cambridge rail line not being electrified? I recently received details of a statutory consultation on widening the A12 road between junctions 19 and 25. One of the stated aims is to reduce traffic congestion but studies show that any "improvements" result in extra traffic. Little seems to be done to encourage people to use public transport. For example, at Witham railway station, signs direct passengers to the taxi rank but no signs indicate that there are two bus stops outside the station. On Sundays, mind you, there are no buses!

Roger A Smith, Station Mews, Station Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2FP

Rail spending

The letter from Tim Mickleburgh (Railwatch 168) about perceived higher spending on rail in Scotland and Wales relative to England deserves a response.

The public spending figures Tim quotes for 2019/20 are correct but cover all forms of spending in the three countries, i.e. spending by the UK government as well as the devolved administrations. The principal reasons for the higher total per head spending figures in Scotland and Wales is as a result of greater spending in those places on what the UK government calls 'social protection'. This category comprises 41% of total expenditure. Most of the spend is on welfare payments which reflects the greater proportion of low income people in the two countries compared with England.

Looking at transport spending (all types), this is of course largely devolved, with rail infrastructure being one exception. Transport expenditure per head in Wales is lower than England. Scotland's figure was somewhat higher in 2019/20 but overall transport spend in the UK is about one eighth of that on social protection.

We would point out that the money the Scottish and Welsh governments receive from the UK government for devolved services (eg health, education and most transport) is based on a formula (Barnett formula) which ensures the devolved governments receive per head the same funding as that spent in England on these services. If the two governments choose to spend more on transport and less on, say, education, that is their prerogative, as is the decision on the split between types of transport expenditure, road versus rail for example. It is

understandable if some parts of England feel they are being unfairly treated with regard to rail investment spending but we suggest the source of these ills can be found in Westminster, and not Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Peter Kingsbury
Chair Railfuture Wales
Allison Cosgrove
Chair Railfuture Scotland

Mistaken views

Calls to reopen stations at Bow, Sampford Courtenay and North Tawton on the Okehampton line are mistaken. North Tawton station is about a mile from the village and there is no space for a decent-sized car park. Bow and Sampford Courtenay villages are both far away from their old station sites.

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Car parking

Comments about the proposed Tempsford/St Neots South station on the Bedford-Cambridge leg of East West Rail are dismissive of stations with adequate parking, preferring to promote active travel such as walking and cycling.

This approach is pious waffle. Active transport modes may work in dense urban areas, but for places like Tempsford you are not going to persuade people to ride for 45 minutes on a bike on dangerous country roads to get to a station. There is over 70% car ownership in the area. The risk is that people will go by car all the way. If there is good cheap parking, they may opt for the convenience of the train. Station parking needs to be cheap, plentiful, convenient and secure.

Peter Solomon
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Reservations

Mandatory reservations were always a bad idea. Although I am mainly in favour of a nationalised railway, the emerging danger is of a bureaucracy impervious to those who use its services.

This seemed to be the case with LNER who only wanted passengers who booked on specific trains. This was likely to result in a permanent increase in empty seats.

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Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups

Send material to: The Editor, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

Paul Salveson is well known in rail campaigning circles, as well as being the founding father of the community rail movement. He has always been generous in sharing his vast knowledge and experience of railway matters.

Paul's book *Railpolitik* remains an essential tool for campaigners.

Most recently, he has been involved in setting up Bolton Station Community Rail Partnership, which has now expanded to include a larger area of south Lancashire. Paul is a visiting professor in transport and logistics at the University of Bolton. There is not enough space to mention all the activities and achievements of such a busy polymath!

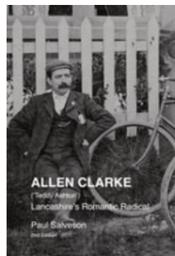
Although not strictly a railway book, Paul's new edition of his biography of fellow Boltonian Allen Clarke will appeal to *Railwatch* readers, as well as to anyone interested in working class history. This new edition has been updated by the author with a new chapter on Allen Clarke's railway writings and is published by Paul's own Lancashire Loominary imprint.

Clarke – like the readers of *Railwatch* – loved trains, and several of his novels have references to them. Of course, throughout most of Clarke's life, trains were the main and quickest form of transport. For working class people such as Clarke, railways democratised travel, enabling them to visit other parts of the country. Clarke often travelled from Bolton to Blackpool by train and lived in the seaside town from 1893 to 1899, returning six years later to stay there until his death in 1935.

Clarke remembered the "chep trip" to Blackpool as a boy. In those days, excursion trains left Bullfield Siding rather than the main Bolton station at Trinity Street. Clarke described these excursions: "The 'chep trip' of those days started very early in the morning, and the day fare was half-a-crown. The train accommodation was crude, primitive, hard cushionless carriages. Indeed, sometimes cattle trucks were cleaned and fitted up with a few seats for cheap excursions." Surely, Clarke would have been a critic of Pacers!

As the rail industry slowly recovers from Covid, it is worth remembering how crucial rail travel was in the development of seaside resorts and holiday travel. Allen Clarke and his

family and friends would have had the advantage of being able to travel to Blackpool and arrive at Central Station which, by the turn of the century, had 14 platforms! That station closed in 1964 and the site is now, among other things, a large car park. Clarke had a lively imagination, but I wonder if he could have predicted that happening?



Clarke was born in 1863, the son of textile workers. His parents encouraged Clarke's reading and he soon began writing his own poems. Clarke hated working in the mill and, after a short period working as a pupil teacher,

became a full-time writer. In his early twenties, Clarke started writing sketches under the name of Teddy Ashton, a sort of comic alter-ego. These pieces of writing often covered topical issues such as women's rights and life in the mills.

Clarke's writings appeared in a number of different publications, some of which he edited himself. He also wrote over 20 novels. He was a fierce opponent of child labour in the mills (which he had experienced first hand) and campaigned against it, working with the National Union of Teachers. The system was abolished by the end of the Great War. Paul chronicles the many different aspects of Clarke's life. Many readers will wonder why they have never heard of Allen Clarke as so many of his ideas and activities seem so relevant today. This attractive book is well illustrated and written in Paul Salveson's clear and engaging style.

Allen Clarke ('Teddy Ashton') – Lancashire's Romantic Radical by Paul Salveson
Lancashire Loominary 2021
ISBN 978-0-9559171-8-9
£18.99 plus £3 postage
Railfuture special offer: £15 plus postage for Railfuture members
www.lancashireloominary.co.uk

Railfuture Lottery winners

May: W Richardson, R White, B Buttigieg, R Goring, J O'Sullivan, J Ward

June: R Goring, R Nuttall, E Holland, J Ward, P Clark, B Buttigieg

July: G Hill, J Henderson, D Bailey, W Morton, T Sheppard, P Bisatt

August: G Smith, M Yallop, M Hanson, T Sheppard, B Berridge, P Fox

Queries: lottery@railfuture.org.uk

janeann.liston@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Rail campaigners were celebrating in September after plans for a fully accessible station at **East Linton** on the East Coast main line were approved by East Lothian Council. "Great news," said Railfuture's Allison Cosgrove who lives in East Linton. "After almost 25 years campaigning, the return of the railway will happen, after the station closed in 1964."

About 25 miles south, at **Reston** in Berwickshire, construction of the new station continues. It is hoped it will be open by the end of this year, five years later than originally announced!

Elsewhere Railfuture Scotland has been busy with consultations for next year's timetable. Although CrossCountry was reasonably uncontroversial, LNER's proposals for the East Coast main line would have severely reduced services to Dunbar. We are glad to report that LNER have deferred the changes.

Hot on their heels was the proposed **ScotRail timetable** to begin in May, two months after the Scottish network comes under the control of Transport Scotland. The idea is to run services more suited to the post-Covid era, with the emphasis being tilted from commuting to leisure travel. Apparently the busiest day of the week is now Saturday. However the cuts in service and other changes, in particular the lengthened travel time between Edinburgh and Perth, have provoked protest, with objectors pointing out that the journey time between these cities was shorter in Queen Victoria's reign. One reduction proposed is in the frequency of semi-fast trains between Edinburgh and Glasgow Central via Shotts. In the absence of a Glasgow Crossrail, this was the nearest there was to a convenient service for many who would otherwise have to change stations between Queen Street and Central. If implemented, nearly all trains on that route would make 18 or 19 stops between the two cities and the journey time would be significantly increased. **Glasgow Crossrail**, of course, was one of the campaigns doggedly

pursued by Railfuture Scotland's former research officer **Ken Sutherland**, who sadly died on 25 August. Along with the late **Roddy McDougall**, he showed how a mere 1.8 miles of track plus a station at Glasgow Cross could link the Queen Street and Central networks. Sadly, the powers-that-be have so far dismissed that simple option, preferring instead to look at drilling tunnels under the Clyde to achieve the same end. In view of the much higher cost involved, it is perhaps unsurprising that nothing has been heard of Glasgow Crossrail lately.

Other campaigns in Scotland have been ticking along over the summer, with the STAGs (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guide) for **Newburgh** and **St Andrews** nearer to fruition. At **Levenmouth**, the sites for the two new stations at Cameron Bridge and Leven have been selected and initial groundwork has been continuing.

The most exciting announcement was from the North East. This campaign, to restore rail to **Peterhead, Fraserburgh** and **Ellon**, announced: "Utilising the Boddam branch is the best way of reaching Peterhead, and it has never been studied. We can get all the way to the coast in one go using this route. A new feasibility study is coming, we have to make sure this option is finally examined." More information on Twitter: #connectPeterhead

The coalition agreement between the **Scottish National Party** and the **Scottish Greens** has been ratified. Greens will receive two ministries, though not positions in the Cabinet. After the Greens' innovative and extensive proposals for the railway in their Scottish Parliament election manifesto, hopes are high that finally we will see a significant shift in investment from road to rail resulting in an environmentally friendly and extended railway network.



CLEAR: Glasgow Queen Street compares well with many other digital information offerings on stations

Contacts:

- Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES): www.rages.org.uk/
- Beattock Station Action Group: www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/
- St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink): www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/ [facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign)
- Levenmouth Rail Campaign: www.levenmouth.co.uk/ [facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.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/](https://www.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>

Trivial! Yet full of essential information

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

Mark Chatterton's name will already be familiar to many *Railwatch* readers from his website, branchlinebritain.co.uk. The website's blog pages list the author's extensive rail journeys around Great Britain over the past six decades. Chatterton clearly is a thorough and knowledgeable chronicler.

I spotted this book in WH Smith as I manoeuvred my way past the fashion stationery. It is cheering to see a serious railway title on sale, next to the usual transport periodicals. Morton's Books – who have Gresley as an imprint- have clearly employed an effective distributor. This full colour, high quality 130 page paperback is an engrossing read. The first couple of chapters deal with the origins, definition and history of parkway stations. Chatterton's writing style is succinct, jargon-free and – to this

reviewer and rail campaigner – very readable. I admire the way that the author's command of his subject allows him to mix his opinions with the facts. This is a book that has been researched out on the ground, rather than just on a home

computer's search engine. Chapter 4, entitled *The Current Parkway Stations*, is the core of the book and lasts over 80 pages. Chatterton employs a user-friendly approach when describing each of the 22 stations, from Aylesbury Vale to Worcestershire. The reader is given the facts at the start of each entry in a clear and logical order – address, opening date, TOC details, destinations, service frequency and so on. Road numbers and bus links are an unexpected bonus as these are



often omitted in rail guides. Chatterton does himself something of a disservice with his last entry; he calls it *Trivia*, but actually it gives more fascinating, and often essential, information. This is followed – for each of the 22 stations – with a concise, detailed account of their individual story. Many reading this review will remember their own part in getting some of these stations built.

The colour photographs of each station – nearly all taken by the author himself – are of excellent quality. These do a lot more than break up the text. The photographs complement Chatterton's station descriptions and make the reader begin to question what sort of design the modern rail traveller wants and needs. The book concludes with

an acknowledgement of where parkway stations failed and this is followed by a longer and optimistic section on future projects. I was very impressed with this book. I cannot find any mention of Railfuture in the text, but our organisation's aims and philosophy permeate every page. Like Mark Chatterton, we all want an integrated public transport system, a reduction in road journeys and a cleaner environment. A book to be read in tandem with our own *Britain's Growing Railway*.

Parkway Railway Stations – A history of Britain's Park and Ride stations by Mark Chatterton (Gresley Books 2021) ISBN 978-1-911658-44-3 £12.99 www.mortonsbooks.co.uk

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

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■ ■ TPE introduces extra local trains

TransPennine Express surprised campaigners by announcing new Edinburgh-Newcastle local services from December. TPE will be calling at a remarkable selection of smaller stations: Dunbar, Reston (to be reopened), Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnmouth, Widdrington, Morpeth and Cramlington. Although a refreshing contrast to hear of extra trains, campaigners commented: "An excellent initiative but we still want an hourly service rather than a few odds and ends."

■ ■ Sunderland spruce-up?

Railfuture welcomes publication of firm plans to modernise Sunderland ("undoubtedly the worst city centre station in the country") as part of a £26 million six-year project. Currently it has no toilets, an escalator that usually does not work and unreliable train information displays, while the main access is via a back street. Big improvements should be apparent within two years, with £16 million from the government's transforming cities fund, while the city council, Nexus and Network Rail find the balance. Four platforms and tracks will be restored to separate Metro services from main line trains. Currently one island platform is shared by Grand Central, Northern, and the Metro.

■ ■ Stockton needs bicentenary recognition

User group Coastliners has asked Grand Central to add Stockton to its stops, to recognise the bicentenary year of the town's railway. The town centre is already being rebuilt with an emphasis on making it more attractive to visitors.

■ ■ Marketing initiative along Durham coast

Railfuture has congratulated Grand Central for its marketing initiative, the first time in over 50 years that there has been any publicity material aimed at increasing rail use over the Eaglescliffe-Stockton-Hartlepool-Sunderland Durham coast section of line.

www.youtube.com/c/GrandCentralRailway/videos

www.grandcentralrail.com/blog/your-ticket-great-summer

Grand Central is also poised to add a sixth daily train between Sunderland and London.

■ ■ Haltwhistle waiting

The Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership's enterprising plans for reinstating a waiting room at Haltwhistle station have been delayed by a few months. In response to the discontinuation of paper timetables, the CRP has funded, designed, printed and distributed departure-time posters and leaflets for stations along its route and has also produced printed timetables combining services on the Tyne Valley, Cumbrian Coast, Settle-Carlisle and adjacent lines.

■ ■ Northumberland line progress

Route-familiarisation trips along the Blyth and Tyne line have included stakeholders such as Railfuture, local dignitaries and Rail Campaigner of the Year Dennis Fancett, chairman of SENRUG, the South East Northumberland Rail User Group.

■ ■ Storm of protest halts LNER's timetable change

Angry protesters persuaded LNER to shelve its big proposed changes to the 2022 timetable along its 390-miles-plus London-Edinburgh route. Railfuture and others must now ensure that our views are taken into account for any changes the following year.

The proposed withdrawal of the York-Newcastle section of TransPennine's service is a mistake. The trains should however run from York direct to Stockton and along the Coast line to Sunderland and Newcastle.

A similar approach to CrossCountry's Reading-Doncaster-Newcastle services would free up space on the East Coast main line while boosting service quality on the Coast line. Railfuture North East supports Esk Valley Line users in protesting against splitting Northern train services at Newcastle and Middlesbrough.

Similar counter-arguments have been vigorously advanced by SENRUG against proposals to alter local stops on the Newcastle to Berwick-upon-Tweed section.

www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch
Twitter @RailfutureNEast

Warm welcome awaits directors

By Stewart Palmer

Railfuture Governance Director

Railfuture Ltd's Articles allow any member to stand for election as a director.

Please put yourself forward if you think you have the skills and personal qualities that can help Railfuture be even more successful than it is already. The board is anxious to recruit younger members in order to better reflect the spectrum of rail users.

For the next election, applicants must submit nomination papers by 1 February 2022. For more information, go to www.railfuture.org.uk/elections

The opportunity to hold a structured discussion will be provided in February, after the closing date for nominations, and will be available to potential new directors who have not

had the opportunity previously to attend a discussion on the role of a company director.

The discussion will be with two existing directors who are NOT standing for re-election.

Following the discussion, individuals can withdraw their applications, before ballot papers are printed in March.

There is no compulsion in attending such a discussion, but company directors have onerous and specific legal responsibilities.

Detailed instructions will be issued to candidates once nominations close. The discussions will be held via video link, to save money and be more convenient for candidates.

Railfuture's election returning officer may put a footnote on election statements if candidates do not avail themselves of this opportunity.

Devon and Cornwall



TRIUMPHAL HANDOVER: (from left) Network Rail's Christian Irwin, Devon County Councillor Andrea Davis, GWR's Matt Barnes and Phil Coupland of Aggregate Industries in July

Regular services from Exeter to Okehampton are expected to start later this year, following Network Rail's acquisition of 15.5 miles of the Dartmoor Railway in July.

Until then, the section from Coleford Junction to Meldon Quarry was owned by Aggregate Industries for more than 25 years, after it was sold during rail privatisation in the 1990s.

Network Rail has taken over the main platform of Okehampton station from Devon County Council. It is also upgrading six footpath level crossings with warning lights and is installing a mobile communication system.

Great Western Railway is planning to operate regular daily services to Okehampton, thanks to a grant from the government's Restore Your Railway fund in March.

Volunteers were planning to celebrate in Okehampton in early October, when the town will put up a triumphal arch of flags and flowers along with bands and

parades to celebrate the opening of the line 150 years ago – and the 2021 reopening.

The *Okehampton Times* calls the reopening the "biggest rail news for a generation in Devon". Railfuture is hoping the reopening is a step towards restoring the complete route through to Plymouth.

It would have been extremely useful for diversions when a Tesco lorry embedded itself under a rail bridge at Lipson on the existing Plymouth-Exeter line, on August bank holiday Monday, causing disruption. CrossCountry services were cancelled for five days.

Network Rail said the lorry caused huge damage to the line connecting Cornwall and south Devon, creating misery for thousands.

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Railway heritage recreated for village station



Hunmanby resident Edna Bates was born in 1920, when the North Eastern Railway still operated trains.

In August, Edna, a volunteer at the local St Catherine's Hospice Shop, unveiled a new tile map (paid for by an anonymous donor) at Hunmanby station, in the style of the maps which still grace many NER stations.

The map was handmade at the original works of Craven Dunnill Jackfield in Ironbridge, the world heritage site in Shropshire.

Hunmanby, between Scarborough and Bridlington, is one of the most attractive small stations in Yorkshire, but

faced closure or severe cutbacks. After prolonged campaigning by the Friends of Hunmanby Railway Station, services were won back.

Scarborough Borough Councillor Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff said: "The new tile map is a great addition to a much-loved station and will add to the wonderful welcome for users of the station."

Nick Harvey from the Friends said: "The railway line between Scarborough and Bridlington, via Filey, Hunmanby and Bampton, faced an uncertain future 30 years ago, with closure a distinct possibility, let alone cutting services."

Yorkshire

■ ■ MPs back Penistone line

Conservative MPs Miriam Cates (Penistone & Stocksbridge) and Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) are sponsoring a £47 million plan to improve the infrastructure of the Penistone line.

The Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association, which has been campaigning for years for improvements, met Mr Eastwood at Denby Dale station to hand over a dossier showing how additional track at key points would allow the train frequency to be improved from one an hour to every half hour. Mr Eastwood has worked with Kirklees Council to obtain support from the government's Levelling Up Fund. Mr Eastwood also hosted a visit to Denby Dale and Shepley stations by rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris.

Ms Cates is a member of the government's levelling-up task force.

"We applaud Mr Eastwood for taking a lead and driving forward the funding bid," said HPSRUA. "He has given passengers hope after too many barren years."

HPSRUA believes the isolation of the Penistone line could be dealt with by reopening the 4.5 mile

link from Penistone to Deepcar as this would allow a more direct route to Sheffield via the freight line south of Deepcar.

HPSRUA was delighted when Tracey Brabin, 48 hours after being elected mayor of West Yorkshire Combined Authority, met her South Yorkshire counterpart Dan Jarvis and announced that transport would be their priority.

Sheffield is the largest city in Europe without rail electrification. HPSRUA celebrated its 40th anniversary this year.

■ ■ Leeds-Glasgow hope

Reinstating a Leeds-Glasgow service via the Settle-Carlisle line, using five IC125 trains, by 2023 was being considered by the Department for Transport in June. Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line are delighted at the prospect.

■ ■ Huddersfield direct

LNER is proposing to introduce a once-a-day direct service from Huddersfield to London, as part of its changes to the East Coast main line timetable for May next year.

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

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Ian Brown visit

Railfuture West Midlands held its first physical meeting since Covid on Tuesday 17 September in Birmingham. Guest speaker was Railfuture policy director Ian Brown, who spoke about the future prospects for rail in the West Midlands.

■ ■ Campaigns strategy

The campaign to reopen the Lichfield-Burton line for passenger services, including a new station at Alrewas serving the National Arboretum Centre, now has active support from the West Midlands Rail Executive. More information from Lichfield Rail Promotion Group's website at www.lichfieldrailusers.org.uk

Railfuture is backing campaigns to get the Lichfield-Burton service extended on to Derby, improving capacity on the Birmingham - Worcester/Hereford lines and doubling the capacity of the North Cotswold line. Railfuture also supports campaigners wanting to reopen the Gobowen-Oswestry line and Baschurch station. Railfuture is also calling on Transport for Wales to improve services on the Marches line. In the long term, Railfuture wants to see

the lines through Snow Hill electrified and then for the electrification to be extended through to London Marylebone.

■ ■ Great British Railways

With planning for Great British Railways ongoing, Railfuture West Midlands wants to ensure that priorities for provision of local services are decided by agencies such as Midlands Connect and the West Midlands Rail Executive.

■ ■ Bike parking

Network Rail has opened new secure bike parking at Birmingham New Street after people reported being unhappy at leaving their bikes at the station because of security fears. Users need a free activated Swift card from <https://wmnetwork.co.uk/ways-to-travel>

■ ■ Help wanted

Michael Tombs' retirement has left a void in Railfuture West Midlands as not only was he an active committee member, but he also kept our web pages on Railfuture.org.uk up to date. If you can help with this or our Twitter account, please get in contact.

www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch

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Click on the green link "amend consents" and click on post or email. Remember to save your preferences by clicking on the "save" button.

COP-OUT 26 As Britain prepares to host the COP 26 summit in Glasgow, campaigners lost a legal challenge to the £27 billion road building programme. The High Court dismissed an application for a judicial review by the Transport Action Network in July. TAN argued that the government had failed to take into account the climate impact of another 4,000 miles of road. The judge said transport secretary Grant Shapps had taken it into account after receiving a "briefing, however laconic". Highways England, the government-owned company, which is being renamed National Highways, is planning for road traffic to rise by up to 60% by 2050.

Facts and aspirations on rail electrification Only two fifths of Britain's rail network is electrified, but the Department for Transport now admits: "There is much more to do. Our aspiration is to achieve a stable, on-going rail electrification programme. We are committed to delivering an ambitious, sustainable and cost-effective programme of electrification guided by Network Rail." The House of Lords science and technology committee called in July for the railway electrification programme to be accelerated.

Fares and timetables Railfuture campaigners have spent the summer producing briefings to challenge plans to cut rail services in timetable changes next year. It has also been working hard to prevent fare rises linked to the retail price index, threatened for January next year. Director Neil Middleton has produced a detailed briefing for the Lords built environment committee. LNER has shelved its timetable changes after Railfuture produced evidence against and issued a press release in August. Railfuture's LNER response, which runs to 16 pages of observations and suggestions for improvement is available at: <https://railfuture.org.uk/display2742>

Chiltern Railways' decision to axe timetable posters at stations has been met with dismay. Passengers are now advised to go online or scan a QR code.



Picture: BILL DAVIES

An electrified coal train over the Pennines at Crowden in 1980

Forty years have passed since Britain's futuristic electrified railway over the Pennines between Manchester and Sheffield was closed. Instead of valuing its showpiece railway, the government decided to close it down.

When first electrified, no steam or diesel locos were allowed through Woodhead tunnel because of the delicate nature of the concrete roof," recalls retired train driver Bill Davies. "That changed towards the end though."

One diesel loco was allowed through the tunnel every hour to avoid damage to the roof and to allow the fumes to disperse.

Many of the trains over the Pennines were from the Yorkshire coalfield to power stations, such as Fiddlers Ferry in Warrington. When the Woodhead line closed, Fiddlers Ferry relied on imported coal. The power station closed in 2020.

Electrification was considered by the Great Central Railway in the 1920s but the 1923 railway grouping and the Second World War delayed the project's completion (with a new double-track tunnel) until 1955. The benefits of the 1,500 volt electrification were

immediately apparent but the electrified passenger services lasted only 16 years.

Freight traffic ceased when most of the line closed in 1981, two years after Mrs Thatcher was elected prime minister. The miners' strike followed in 1985.

Meanwhile the government had been pumping money into the M62 transPennine motorway which opened in stages between 1971 and 1976.

Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell recalls years ago exploring the alternative Hope Valley route back to Manchester.

"When I presented myself at the ticket barrier at Sheffield Midland, the helpful ticket inspector genially explained that I was at the wrong station and that I needed to go to Sheffield Victoria if I was going to Manchester.

"He relented after I assured him that I deliberately wanted to go along the quaint Hope Valley route. And now all the trains go that way..."

The Department for Transport has ignored campaigns to reopen the Woodhead line for forty years. Is the time ripe for a new attitude?

Chair's column by Chris Page

The power of campaigning

The new normal is due to arrive at your local station. The railways no longer have the comfort blanket of guaranteed commuter traffic so the old rules no longer apply. Operating in unfamiliar territory, it is not surprising that some bad decisions will be made.

Railfuture has an important role here – through our campaigning and consultation responses we can get those decisions changed and point the way forward to get the best possible outcome in difficult circumstances.

Compulsory seat reservations were necessary during the pandemic to ensure social distancing, but LNER planned to keep them because a survey had shown that passengers do not want overcrowded trains. Railfuture and many others campaigned against this because many passengers need flexibility on travel time or are travelling short distances between intermediate stations. The railways in Germany have (before the pandemic) tried compulsory reservations, but quickly dropped the idea when fare revenues fell by 15%. Our campaign succeeded when LNER made some coaches non-reservable, and we now look to CrossCountry to change its policy too.

A new May 2022 timetable was proposed for the East Coast main line, reducing connectivity for intermediate stations and between the North East and North West. Railfuture, our affiliated user group SENRUG (South East Northumberland Rail User Group) and many others responded strongly to the consultation by calling for the introduction of the timetable to be deferred, to allow time for a revision taking into account the change in travel patterns in the new normal. Our response was listened to, the new timetable has been deferred, and a new service will be introduced by TransPennine Express between Newcastle and Edinburgh serving intermediate stations.

We recognise that the current high level of financial support from the government cannot continue, so hard choices have to be made, but it is not as simple as matching supply to demand; the bottom line impact must be considered. South Western Railway forecasts travel demand to recover to 76% of pre-Covid levels (made up of commuter 60%, business 62%, leisure

105%) so in its December 2022 timetable specification published for consultation it proposes to deliver 93% of pre-Covid capacity, but with much reduced service frequencies, by introducing new trains with seated capacity being less than half of the total capacity. But the expectation that more people will have to stand and the reduction in frequency will inevitably depress demand below their forecast, so that total revenue will be reduced, probably by more than

the cost saving of running fewer trains. There was strong pushback on frequency reduction at the SWR stakeholder meetings and in our consultation response. SWR's justification was that reducing frequencies would make the service more reliable, but to quote Chris Grayling, MP for Epsom (which SWR serves) and the previous transport secretary: "SWR promised when they took over the franchise that they were going to run this railway, with its congestion problems, more effectively than it was before." Also to quote Chris Grayling: "The state has taken much greater control over the railways, so the Department for Transport has significant influence over this."

All the other train operators will consult on their timetable plans, to which we will also respond strongly.

It is not only the rail companies and the government that have to adapt. The rail unions do too. The need for passengers to travel to work has enabled them to do well for their members, but when most travel is discretionary the strike threat becomes less potent. Railfuture campaigns for investment in rail to promote modal shift and so reduce carbon emissions, but the government may be reluctant to rely on an industry prone to disruption from disputes such as the demand that East Midlands Railway put a conductor in each four-car unit of a 12-car Corby service. Other decisions will be coming soon. The government could get away with retail price index plus 1% fare rises in the past because around half of rail travel was commuting, and people had to get to work – but in the new normal where many people can work from home, most rail travel will be discretionary. RPI was 3.8% in July, so Railfuture is driving home the message that a rise of 4.8% in 2022 would cause many passengers to make other choices.

See www.railfuture.org.uk for news on our campaigns.



Better value rail toolkit to help make the right decisions early on

A *Better Value Rail Toolkit* was launched in August, aimed at making infrastructure projects faster and cheaper to

deliver. The toolkit was produced by the Department for Transport, Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road.

Those sponsoring rail projects can use the site to "make the right decisions early on in rail projects". www.bettervaluerail.uk/

◆◆◆◆ Increase Railfuture's lobbying power: Recruit a new member

London & South East

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Influencing public opinion

Railfuture set out its stall at the Uckfield Festival "big day" in July. We put the case for reopening Uckfield-Lewes, extending the existing third-rail electrification 25 miles from Hurst Green to Uckfield, as well as expanding Thameslink services to more destinations in East Sussex and east London. More information on the Railfuture website (Thameslink-2).

Railfuture supports the idea of a new rail link to serve new homes built between Uckfield and Lewes. Railfuture website (Uckfield+Lewes).

■ ■ Influencing official opinion

Responding to consultations and calls for evidence remains a core part of Railfuture's action plan.

Railfuture's most recent responses have been to consultations by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, East West Rail, England's Economic Heartland, the House of Lords built environment



The Railfuture stall at Uckfield

committee, Croudace Homes at Ringmer, East Sussex, Transport for the South East, Lewes District Council and Greater North Kent Partnership, as well as timetable consultations for the East Coast main line and South Western

Railway. We also continue to keep an eye on developments for which consultations have closed but which remain ongoing.

Issues include accessibility at South Kensington station, proposals for a leisure resort on the Swanscombe peninsula in Kent, and Rother Valley Railway's planned link to the Kent & East Sussex Railway. Railfuture's input can be found on the Railfuture website.

■ ■ Access for All

Work has started to install the final lifts to make Finsbury Park station step-free from street to rail and Tube platforms.

■ ■ Railfuture updates

London and South East and 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

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Elections: Board elections held annually.

Nomination forms can be obtained from www.railfuture.org.uk/Elections

Who's Who: Many other useful contact details can be found on the Railfuture website: www.railfuture.org.uk

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Cheques payable to Railfuture
Email: membership@railfuture.org.uk

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Picture: DSELRAP

CHALLENGE: Campaigner Andy Shackleton stands in front of a long-derelict building in Colne. This is just one of many brownfield sites all across Pendle, a constituency represented by high-speed rail minister Andrew Stephenson MP. Andy believes reopening the Colne-Skipton line will regenerate the Red Wall towns of Pendle, Burnley, Accrington, Shipley and Keighley

Spirit level challenge to Whitehall

Campaigning group SELRAP has delivered spirit levels to MPs in constituencies along the route of the Skipton-Colne line.

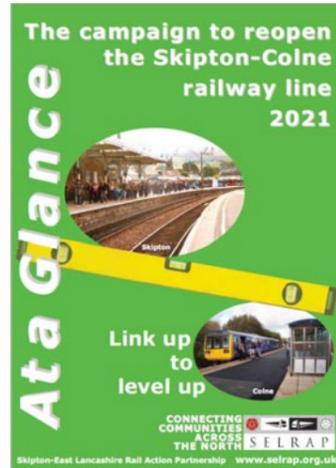
The spirit levels symbolise the “current gross inequality” in this government’s investment priorities.

SELRAP says over 90% of government spending on new infrastructure is still being pumped into already-well-connected communities in southern England.

Despite many promises, the government has repeatedly failed to deliver on investment in much-needed projects in the North of England, says SELRAP.

The long-overdue Skipton-Colne project, reopening just 12 miles of long-closed railway line, will regenerate many of the marginalised and economically deprived communities in this part of the UK. This includes the Red Wall towns of Pendle, Burnley, Accrington, Shipley and Keighley.

SELRAP chair Peter Bryson said the spirit levels are a timely



reminder to politicians and planners that work on this much-needed project needs to start soon.

SELRAP, the Skipton and East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, insists the trans-Pennine rail corridor will be transformational in levelling-up England’s northern economy. Its recent campaign video illustrates how this relatively small

infrastructure project will help passengers, and will create an important coast-to-coast freight rail corridor, while also benefiting the proposed freeports.

Connecting Hull to Liverpool would significantly reduce congestion on the M62 motorway, says SELRAP.

It would also open up other future projects, such as the building of a strategically placed freight terminal at Huncoat, near Accrington.

SELRAP chair Peter Bryson points out that the government has recently given the go-ahead to a new station at Cambridge South – at a cost of £183 million.

Reinstating the 12-mile Skipton-Colne line and building its two new stations has been costed at around the same price.

Peter says that Cambridge already has an excellent train services and a population half of the East Lancashire conurbation.

He said: “That figure, for just one new station in Cambridge, would pay for an entire new

railway line up here in The North.”

You can show your support by sharing SELRAP’s campaign video on Facebook at:

facebook.com/reopenskiptontocolne

More information on the SELRAP website at www.selrap.org.uk

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