

*rail*watch

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**Snow-white journey for trains to the Far North of Scotland
but what role is there for diesels in a decarbonised future?
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Alternative Far North future

PAGE ONE PICTURE

Our spectacular snowy front page picture by Sandy Colley of a diesel train at Muir of Ord, en route to Wick on Scotland's Far North route, can carry Season's Greetings to *Railwatch* readers.

The 10.41 Inverness to Wick is also a harbinger of change on its four-hour journey of more than 100 miles. By 2035, ScotRail will be expected to do without diesel power as Transport Scotland's decarbonisation plan takes powerful effect.

By that time the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland will probably have been recognised as Scotland's first natural world heritage site. The peat bogs are now recognised for their role in removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Transport Scotland has decided that standard electrification of the Far North line is too expensive so will introduce battery and/or hydrogen-powered trains.

A battery train is 12% less efficient in operation than an electric train and is limited in range by its capacity to store and release energy. The cost of a battery also adds one third or more to the capital cost of an electric train powered via a catenary system.

Friends of the Far North Line welcomed the decarbonisation plan but called for more frequent train services and reduced journey times. The train will be crucial in combatting climate change and in tackling immediate problems, supplying industry and commerce. Network Rail has been praised for running extra trains to make sure this year's Christmas merchandise gets through, amid reports that the United Kingdom now has a shortage of



Wensleydale Railway's Polar Express

Picture: WENSLEYDALE RAILWAY

100,000 lorry drivers. A weekly "wine train" is taking 4.5 million bottles of imports to supermarkets in the two-month run-up to Christmas. In the first stage of its UK rail journey, one train carrying more than 640,000 bottles pulled out of the port of Tilbury on the Thames in early November bound for Daventry in

Northamptonshire, en route to Tesco, Sainsbury's and other supermarkets. Britain's busiest container port, Felixstowe in Suffolk, which handles 36 per cent of the country's containerised freight, had to divert vessels away because docks were full of containers. Felixstowe also tackled the problem by increasing the number of freight trains from the port by three a day – equivalent to around 200 lorries. More container trains were also operating out of Tyne Coal Terminal and Immingham where some of the smaller ships docked after being diverted from Felixstowe. Trainloads of empty containers were diverted to Cardiff for shipping back to China, to avoid blocking incoming containers at ports such as Felixstowe and Southampton.

"We are moving more boxes than ever before because of the dedication of our people, as well as greater industry co-operation," said John Smith of GB Railfreight.

Heritage railways, such as Wensleydale, were reporting that some Christmas steam services were sold out as early as November.

Some National Rail passenger trains will also be affected over Christmas and New Year by engineering work, which the *Daily Mail* has described as 10 days of misery for passengers. Heathrow airport will be cut off from London Underground services for nine days.

Madcap axe threat to rail's green potential

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

It is difficult to know whether to laugh or cry. At the same time as we were getting news about another round of funding from the reversing Beeching fund, we hear that air passenger duty is to be reduced for domestic flights and the fuel tax rate for car drivers has been frozen for the 11th year running.

Meanwhile on the railways there was a constant stream of contradictory news stories, with announcements about investments being made almost simultaneously with warnings about cutbacks.

All this coincided with the biggest ever conference on climate change, on our very doorstep and which, on the face of it, should have been a vehicle for all sorts of green announcements.

Yet that opportunity seems to have been missed and instead we had

the mixed messages of a Budget that seemed to run entirely counter to what the politicians were promising in Glasgow.

Making sense of this is difficult. I will rephrase that, making sense of this is impossible. And that's because none of it does, indeed, make sense unless you view things through a very narrow political framework. On the demos I used to go on in the last century, there was always a series of chants: "What do we want? When do we want it?" And so on, you get the picture. So to understand what the government is up to, we have to ask – what does Prime Minister Johnson want? I suppose the most likely answer is a quiet life. He

famously dislikes confrontation, is very thin-skinned and hates being challenged. One could even cast doubt on whether he really is interested in getting re-elected.

Probably he is, but only because it would look bad in the history books if he lost. So his decisions are geared towards having to endure the minimum possible amount of short-term hassle. Viewed in this context, it is possible to understand the fundamental contradictions on transport policy. Therefore, in this strange world, it is

perfectly possible to restore some railway lines while imposing quite dramatic cuts on other parts of the railway. We have not yet had any

announcement about the latter, but all the evidence points to the fact that the 2019 timetable will not be fully restored and that there will be reductions in service levels in many parts of the country in response to the pandemic. Those complaining about these cuts will be pointed to the fantastic investment schemes in reopening lines and, indeed, building HS2.

For campaigners, this strange, almost Trumpian, world represents an opportunity. Make enough fuss about something, and quite possibly you might get heard. But there is a downside, too. If suddenly there is a change in policy which will not affect too many people and can be buried in some good news elsewhere, then beware. Your pet scheme may fall victim to a random axe attack. Understanding this context though is important. Do not expect common sense, rationality or coherence and pray that you are lucky. You may well win.



Railfuture president Christian Wolmar

Sad farewell to vice-president Paul

By Andrew Dyson

Paul Abell 1951–2021

It is with great sadness that we have to report the sudden death of Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell.

Paul was a fierce advocate for railways and particularly of light rail; he was a regular contributor to *Railwatch* since becoming a vice-president of Railfuture in 2015. He has championed the issue of Access for All through the pages of *Railwatch*. His enthusiasm and ideas were an inspiration.

Paul's interest in railways stemmed from childhood experiences, including a trip on the Liverpool Overhead Railway and observing A4 steam locomotives on the East Coast main line.

He acquired a passion for trams and light rail and, while a student, spent a summer as assistant stationmaster at Ramsey on the Isle of Man, followed by three summers working as a Blackpool & Fleetwood Tramway conductor.

He obtained a degree in mechanical engineering, which was followed by naval training at Dartmouth and a period at sea as an engineering officer with HMS Hampshire.

After 14 years as engineering manager at places as varied as British Steel Aldwarke and Watney's Brewery, Mortlake, Paul studied for a post-graduate certificate in education and then spent 22 years teaching mathematics.

Paul joined Platform 5 Publishing in 2009 as assistant editor of *Today's Railways UK* and was elevated to editor the same year, where he remained until retirement in 2015. He continued to contribute articles and photos, particularly on light rail and heritage matters.

He was heavily involved at the National Tramway Museum at Crich, both in the workshops and as a conductor, as well as serving on its health and safety committee.

He was also a volunteer at the Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre at Ruddington and was workshop volunteer and London area publicity officer for the Talylyn Railway from 1981 to 1989, as well as area officer for the Light Rail Transit Association Sheffield branch until 2018. Paul's funeral was held in Rotherham on 19 November. Our thoughts are with his widow, Shirley, his children, grandchildren and all their families.



COMMITTED TO THE RAILWAYS: Paul Abell where he always felt at home – on a railway station

Overcrowding returns to post-Covid rail

Leisure journeys on the railways were up to 90% of pre-pandemic levels, according to official figures released in October.

But journeys to work remained at less than half compared to pre-Covid. The number of commuters in mid October was 45% of the figure before Covid, up from 33% in August.

London is proving the slowest to recover with a figure of 41%, compared to 54% elsewhere.

In early November, Network Rail said overall rail services had recovered to about 85 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

Many people have continued to work from home but car use is higher than it was pre-Covid.

The rail industry's advertising campaign called "Let's get back on track" was criticised because it featured passengers who were not wearing masks.

Many people who returned to public transport were shocked by the large number of other passengers and some staff on trains and buses who were not wearing masks, even when Covid cases were rising. At the time the adverts were published in late October, 180 people were dying from Covid each day. Many passengers are still reluctant to return to rail because there is now no legal requirement to wear face masks,

even though most medical experts advise it.

Among over-70s, 92% thought wearing a mask was important to slow the spread of Covid, according to a survey by the Office for National Statistics.

All train operators are theoretically operating in line with government guidance that "expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas, such as public transport."

Train operators stress they are targeting resources on cleaning trains but in some cases fewer trains were being run, with passengers not having enough space around them to maintain social distancing.

Long-term service cuts are also being planned. South Western Railway said it intended to cut services by 50% from the end of 2022. There were even rumours of train maintenance cuts.

Some rail managers reported that cuts were being demanded by the Treasury, not the Department for Transport.

One manager said the pandemic has given the Treasury a taste for control. He said: "A lot of people there think that the railway system in this country was costing too much."

One commuter from Milford, Surrey told *The Times*: "There is

no other practical way to get to London and there are almost no bus services in the local area, leaving the train the only alternative to the car. But it seems that driving may soon be the only option."

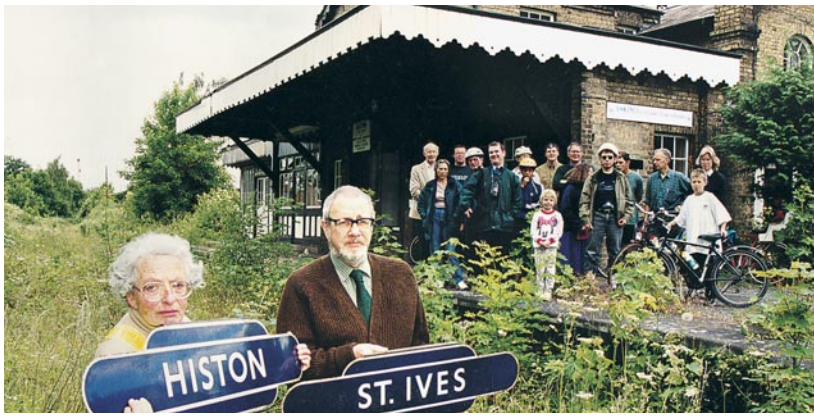
The RMT union, which represents most rail workers, called on the UK and Scottish governments to halt planned cuts as the latest statistics show a big increase in rail passengers.

General secretary Mick Lynch said: "The expansion of rail as a green alternative to road and air must be a priority as COP26 revealed the scale of the environmental crisis we face."

In some areas (miles away from the DfT and Treasury), passengers are flooding back to overcrowded trains.

In October, David Harby reported: "I am on the 1634 Nottingham to Grimsby train. Every seat is taken. The vestibules are full and people are standing along the aisles."

Another passenger on the 0729 Transport for Wales train from Aberystwyth on a Saturday in early November reported standing room only between Wolverhampton and Birmingham International, as well as standing passengers on Avanti's 1100 Birmingham International to London Euston.



HISTON STATION IN 1999: Railfuture's Clara Zilahi and Steve Wilkinson campaigned for years to get the Cambridge-St Ives line reopened. Both have since died and the line is a busway! But at least the building now has a new use, as a cafe. On the platform are rail campaigners, including Robert Stripe, Peter Harding, Ben Walsh, Roger and Kurt Blake, Trevor Garrod, Martin Thorne, Ray and Maggie King and their children Eleanor, then five, and Alex, nine

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■ ■ New life for station buildings

The magnificent station buildings at March are being revamped. March was once a major junction of five very busy lines in Cambridgeshire. The number of railways has shrunk to two links, to Ely and to Peterborough. With reduced status, the station buildings were treated with disrespect for years. A valiant group of volunteers worked hard to mitigate the decades of neglect and stabilised the situation. All is now changing as train operator Greater Anglia – with £9.5 million funding from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayor Nik Johnson's combined authority – is giving the main building a dramatic makeover. There is also a positive story at Histon where the refurbished former station buildings, now standing alongside the busway, were saved from demolition after a public outcry. They stood empty for 40 or more years but the recent repurposing – into a well-used cafe – was made possible by developing the adjacent station master's garden and other former railway land. Brandon station on the Norwich-Ely line is becoming a busy station again too, serving a growing town and surrounding area. Train operator Greater Anglia was stopped from demolishing the station building by local opposition and the station is now listed. The building has potential as a passenger and community hub. Railfuture is hoping to persuade Greater Anglia to partner with the local authority, Network Rail and others "to do a Histon". There are many stations where crumbling, but distinguished, buildings present an unwelcoming environment. The buildings are an important part of the history of their communities and are too important to be reduced to rubble. They can be successfully repurposed with some joined-up thinking and a determination to make the best of a rich railway heritage.

■ ■ Funding gap for reopening
Reopening Cambridge-Haverhill is

suitable for Restoring Your Railway funding in principle and a good case for future development, local MP Matt Hancock has been assured. But the scheme, backed by Railfuture, was turned down for funding when Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak announced the results of the third round of the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund in the autumn financial statement. Railfuture has been told other sources of funding are available and the Department for Transport has been asked to "keep the scheme under review for a future point". Railfuture will be working with local MPs and authorities to implement Cambridge-Haverhill reopening, which will give Haverhill residents access to jobs in Cambridge and support house building in Haverhill.

■ ■ Ely consultation

A public consultation was under way in November on Network Rail plans to unlock the bottleneck at Ely with its Ely area capacity enhancement scheme, which is crucial for passenger train improvements and also for container trains from Felixstowe.

■ ■ Another new station

Soham station opens this month, to be served by Greater Anglia's Ipswich-Peterborough trains.

■ ■ Holt banks on land for trains

Melton Constable Trust has purchased significant land at Holt with the aim of clearing the way for extending the North Norfolk Railway into the town and introducing a public transport service. More information at <https://norfolk-orbital-railway.co.uk/>

■ ■ Train for bird lovers

Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership teamed up with the RSPB and Greater Anglia to run a bird watching event on Sunday 28 November. Bird lovers travelled to Wrabness station and on to the nearby reserve to see the winter migrants, such as Brent geese.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia
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■ ■ Leisure travellers returning faster than commuters

Leisure passengers are fast returning to the railways. At Railfuture East Midlands' online September AGM, guest speaker David Jones of CrossCountry Trains told us leisure travel was back to 90% of pre-Covid levels. Commuting and long-distance business travel had not recovered so well, so overall passenger volumes varied between 52% and 68% on different CrossCountry routes. A recurring theme in the talk was collaborating with other organisations: with Network Rail over delay management and to reduce suicides, trespass incidents and antisocial behaviour; with other train operators to cover line blockades and over station operation; with 25 community rail partnerships on various local improvements, for which a new Customer and Communities Investment Fund has been set up; and with local authorities on integrated public transport, for example with buses arranged to meet trains at smaller stations. Of particular interest in our region is CrossCountry's improved train maintenance and cleaning facility at Leicester.

■ ■ Media gives Peaks and Dales project good publicity

MEMRAP, the campaign to reopen the Peaks and Dales line from Matlock to Buxton and Chinley, has been gaining good publicity with recent articles in *The Big Issue North* as well as local papers in Matlock and Buxton. Then in November MEMRAP also was given good national coverage in *The Guardian* in an article by Nazia Parveen. All the articles have described the importance of the line for connecting the East Midlands to the North-West, as well as improving local connectivity in Derbyshire and improving visitor access to the Peak District, and have emphasised that a new, improved Monsal Trail for walkers and cyclists would be provided when the existing trail is converted back to rail use. MEMRAP's Stephen Chaytow said: "We are heartened by the media coverage which makes up for losing out in round three of the Restoring Your Railway funding."

■ ■ Easy steps to make Nottingham station better

Railfuture East Midlands has responded to a consultation by East Midlands Railway on its masterplan for improvements to Nottingham station. Since many trains stop at the east end of the station, but the main entrance is at the west end, we have asked for a footbridge linking all platforms at the east end, together with better access from London Road. This masterplan is the first of a series that EMR are intending to produce for all their stations. Our joint Easy Stations survey with Lincolnshire Branch continues as a separate though related exercise.

■ ■ Transport body looks forward to improvements

Transport for the East Midlands has published a refreshed Rail Strategic Statement, which takes on board many of Railfuture's priorities for the region. In particular, it mentions the needs for higher speeds, better timetabling, improved inter-regional connectivity, electrification and new rail connections to towns such as Coalville, Ollerton, Staveley and Daventry.

■ ■ Welland Valley campaign goes on

Welland Valley Rail was saddened that its Restoring Your Railway bid for funds proved unsuccessful. It said: "There are no more bidding rounds of the Restoring Your Railway programme planned, so Welland Valley Rail will hope to work with local authority partners on alternative routes to progress the project which would improve east-west transport between Kettering, Corby, Stamford, Peterborough and towards Wisbech, particularly for the many people who do not have access to a car."



The East Midlands Connect London service at Kettering which uses the newly electrified line to Corby

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

Rail cuts prompt passenger revolt

By Bruce Williamson
Railfuture media

Campaign groups joined forces to fight plans to scrap direct trains from Bristol to Waterloo.

The West Wilts Rail User Group, Railfuture Severnside and others worked together to save the service, which was due to be axed on 12 December. They organised a public meeting in October at Trowbridge – one of the stations worst hit. The meeting was streamed via Zoom.

“This has all the hallmarks of a Whitehall decision made on poor and incorrect data, news sneaked out in a publication about something else, and not consulted on,” said Graham Ellis, who organised the meeting.

“Even Transport Focus – the Department for Transport’s own passenger watchdog – has suggested that the service should be retained until proper consultation and appropriate alternatives are provided.

“Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon, Oldfield Park and Keynsham will be badly affected, losing all of their direct trains to London, and there will be just one train a day – at 0750 – from Waterloo to Warminster.” Claire Mann, managing director of South West Railway, which runs the trains, said the plans were aimed at



Western Region

Great British Railways
DfT Action 2021

Withdrawal of through Railway Passenger Services

The Secretary of State for Transport has given his consent to his own department’s proposals to discontinue through passenger train services from London to the following stations:

TROWBRIDGE OLDFIELD PARK **BRADFORD-ON-AVON KEYNSHAM**

These services will be withdrawn from 12 December 2021

The terms of the Minister’s decisions and can be read at <http://www.passenger.chat/25503>

Want to help us challenge this? Public meeting: Trowbridge, 20th October 2021 at 19:00 Bethesda Baptist Church, BA14 0AA Missed the meeting? Still use the URL!



Campaign publicity

removing duplication of services which burdened the taxpayer.

She claimed the withdrawal of services would not materially impact key flows of commuter or school traffic and were in line with Department for Transport policy.

Mr Ellis said the proposed cuts ignored leisure travellers, people going to medical appointments, business meetings, court, to visit family or to go shopping. He said the cuts would result in most people having to change trains at Salisbury, with a

timetable where the remaining hourly train from London will arrive one minute after the hourly train to Warminster, Westbury, Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon and on to Bristol has left.

Mr Ellis said: “A 59-minute change is not a connection and no thought has been given to the effect on the business in towns that lose their London services.”

He said GWR had since been in contact to ask about the connections failing at Salisbury.

He said: “I wonder if we are to be given a couple of timing changes to make better connections a couple of times a day, and be told we have been listened to, but it is ‘too late to do anything more’.”

The issue was also raised in the House of Commons by Andrew Murrison, MP for South West Wiltshire, with Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, who passed the issue on to Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris.

Chris Irwin, Railfuture vice-president and chair of TravelWatch SouthWest, said local authorities vigorously opposed the lack of consultation about changes to the service. Nor was he happy with DfT’s attitude to public transport,



especially for disabled people making connections at places like Westbury and Salisbury.

“Finding economies does not necessarily require cutting connections,” he said.

He has been told that loss of connections was likely to cause a 40-50% decline in connectivity between regions.

He has been assured that existing off-peak fares would remain even after withdrawal of the through trains.

Chris has asked the DfT what could be done to save the service for the December 2021 timetable. It is now probably too late to avert and the best hope would be changes in December 2022.

An online petition attracted over 6,000 signatures. You can sign at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/598397>

Rail reopenings logjam as £0.65 million is divvied up

By Roger Blake

The Chancellor’s autumn financial statement allocated £650,000 at the end of October to 13 more railway restoration projects from the government’s Restoring Your Railway ideas fund.

The money will be used to develop outline business cases and Railfuture is hoping it will lead to several schemes being given real money for reopening.

In a blaze of publicity, one project which received an earlier £40 million grant from the Restoring Your Railway scheme was launched three weeks later.

A regular passenger service from Exeter to Okehampton along the Dartmoor line started on 20 November and was headlined on TV, radio and in the national newspapers.

One of the selected autumn statement schemes will also affect Dartmoor, the Tavistock-Plymouth via Bere Alston line.

Both Okehampton and Tavistock lines will/would allow people to visit the Dartmoor National Park without clogging the area up with cars. Railfuture believes the

favourites to succeed from the Chancellor’s little list are Ashton-Stockport via Denton and Reddish South; Sandbach-Northwich via Middlewich and Gadbrook Park; Corsham station; Oswestry-Gobowen; and Stoke-Leek.

Also sharing the £650,000 are Darlington-Weardale via Bishop Auckland; Bury-Rawtenstall; Stonehouse Bristol Road station; Gaerwen Junction-Amlwch, Anglesey; Beverley-York; Stocksbridge-Sheffield Victoria Don Valley line; and Doncaster-Knottingley.

Only 38 of the 199 bidders proved successful and the north-south ratio of winning bids was 2:1.

Rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris said some of the unsuccessful schemes have worthwhile benefits which might encourage reopening campaigners.

Access for All

The government’s autumn financial statement failed to provide cash for Network Rail to deliver another 15 step-free

stations. But some Access for All schemes are progressing, with new lifts at Liphook (Hampshire), Billingham (Tees Valley), and an access ramp at Dorchester West.

Consultations

Railfuture volunteers have provided input into a whole series of official consultations, including the draft transport vision of Peninsula Transport which covers Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Greater Manchester Combined Authority’s *Places for Everyone*, which includes Railfuture’s South Manchester avoiding route to relieve the Castlefield Corridor, West Sussex draft transport plan for 2022-36, spatial framework priorities for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the South Coast corridor improvement study and Surrey’s draft transport plan for 2022-32. Network Rail’s latest consultation on Ely Area Capacity Enhancements closed in late November amid concerns about its lack of ambition. Similar concerns surround East

West Rail being built to a budget which excludes electrification.

Gatwick Airport’s Future Plans consultation closed in early December.

Historical railways estate

Protests continue over National Highways’ destructive plans for some former railway land. After the issue was raised in the House of Lords by Lord Faulkner of Worcester, planned works were put on hold until a formalised framework and engagement process is put in place. Railfuture has so far not identified any structures affected by rail reopening proposals, but heritage railways and cycling or walking schemes could be affected.

Stay in touch with Railfuture’s national infrastructure & networks and freight groups via the Railfuture website.

All responses to consultations are on the Railfuture website.

Twitter: @RailfutureNetws @RailfutureFret

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

Trains are stars of COP26 show and

The first emission-free fully electric train crossed the historic Forth Bridge to commemorate COP26 taking place in Glasgow.

The eyes of the world were on Scotland as world leaders gathered to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

As part of COP26, Network Rail demonstrated its commitment to decarbonising Britain's railway and supporting the UK and Scottish governments' net-zero goals, with a showcase of two green technologies which are vital to rail's part in tackling climate change.

Two innovative new trains illustrated the range of green ways to power trains, including batteries, hydrogen and electricity.

Rail is already ultra green compared to road and air but Network Rail has a far-reaching traction decarbonisation strategy.

Of course more rail electrification is crucial. So far only 38% of Britain's network is electrified.

Vivarail has built battery and battery-hybrid trains, and its next design is capable of achieving a range of up to 100km and recharges in only 10 minutes.

Battery electric trains allow travel on parts of the network not yet electrified.

The Forth Bridge cannot have overhead electric lines installed because of the height restrictions, so trains need to have an independent source of power.

Some delegates to COP26 ensured they travelled by "climate train" to Glasgow, with many mainland Europeans coming by Eurostar to London and then on Avanti West Coast.

One passenger's carbon footprint from one flight between Amsterdam and London is the equivalent of seven Eurostar journeys. So trains are crucial to our meeting net zero targets.

Switching half of domestic leisure journeys to rail would save about 330kg of carbon



Picture: VIVARAIL

BRAVE FACE OF RAIL IN SCOTLAND: Vivarail's multi-modal train travelled to Scotland to be shown off to COP26 delegates. Here it is seen with the Forth bridge in the background

emissions per person per year, according to David Horne of LNER.

However, there are drawbacks. Trains are no longer equipped for two people travelling on holiday, let alone families who want to cycle, because they lack luggage space and only two cycles can be carried on some trains.

Big oil companies such as BP and Shell spent the two years prior to COP26 talking loudly about "transitioning" to net zero and investing in renewables. What will they actually do post COP26? The government also remains committed to its £27 billion road building plans and many people are already returning to flying.

"We can make progress tomorrow by getting people on buses and trains," said Norman Baker of the Campaign for Better Transport.

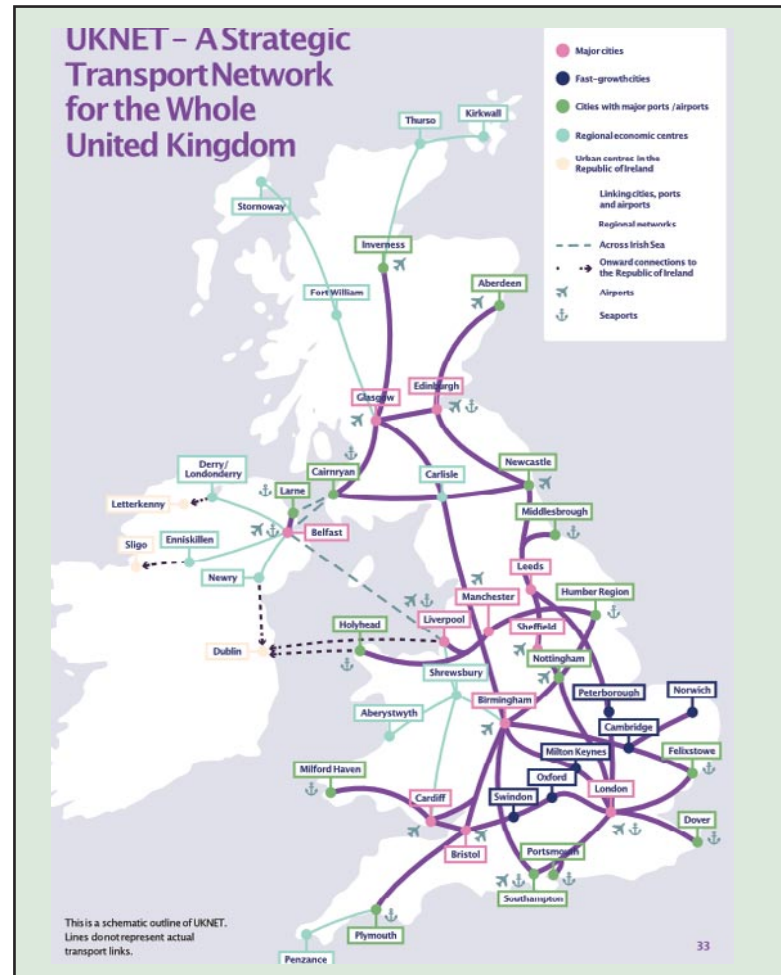
"The government should use some of the enormous sum allocated to the roadbuilding

programme to reopen railway lines. That would be very much more sensible." About 300 local authorities have declared a climate emergency in the UK. How many of these are actually

taking it seriously? Some local councillors have fought tooth-and-nail against low traffic neighbourhoods, even though the government provided money for them.

Miracle of the COP26 Glasgow Smartcard

Glasgow gave a travel smartcard to delegates at COP26 allowing free travel on buses, trains and the Glasgow subway. Whether the people who came to COP26 by private jet used the smartcard is unknown. But the giveaway to delegates highlighted the lack of an Oyster-style ticket for residents and tourists. Bus operators First, McGill's and Stagecoach do not make it easy to switch buses to get around, while ScotRail and the Subway each have separate smartcards which are not valid on the other. The technology to enable a smartcard ticket for use on bus, trains and subway has existed in Glasgow since 2019, but business self interest and political wrangling has stopped progress.



electric cars a dead-end diversion

Electric cars are no answer to pollution

The benefits of switching to electric vehicles to clean up our toxic air were given plenty of attention at COP26, said Sarah Woolnough, chief executive of Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation.

However, evidence shows that electric cars still emit PM2.5 particles, the most worrying form of pollution for humans.

The threat posed by air pollution cannot be overstated. The air we breathe can have a catastrophic effect on our health, right from the moment we are born.

More than a third of maternity units in England are in air pollution hotspots that fail the World Health Organisation's 2005 air quality guidelines.

Every two minutes a baby is born into areas surrounded by toxic levels of air pollution. Children are then likely to grow



This image was circulating widely on social media at the time of COP26, illustrating the frustration that lobbyists and dubious media coverage were preventing proper discussions

up, learn and play in these areas of lethal pollution.

If we are going to stop babies being born into toxic air, more electric cars will not cut it. We need fewer vehicles on our roads altogether, not just cleaner ones.

Ms Woolnough's case is supported by transport environmental groups because electric cars cannot reduce transport emissions enough. Reducing traffic and shifting towards public and community transport, walking, cycling and shared mobility are essential.

The Sustainable Transport Alliance said electric vehicles have major social and environmental drawbacks,

including allowing a potential 51% increase in road traffic.

More immediate benefits come from shifting more journeys to existing greener forms of transport.

This would in fact be in line with the UK government's stated commitments to make public transport and active travel the natural choice, and the Scottish and Welsh governments' targets to reduce private vehicle use.

With 55% of all UK transport emissions coming from cars, it recommends introducing progressively tightening targets to reduce road traffic, especially private car use.

Carbon reduction targets need to be set along with measures to ensure that public transport, shared, community and active travel are promoted as viable alternatives to private cars.

Jools Townsend, chair of the Sustainable Transport Alliance and chief executive of the Community Rail Network, said: "The inspiring campaigners and change-makers from around the world who have been addressing COP26 have been underlining how we must put people, communities and justice at the forefront in tackling the climate crisis, and this very much applies to transport.

"The evidence is clear that we cannot put all our faith in electric cars. We need a more fundamental shift in how we get around, and we have much to gain from this. By focussing on a shift towards public, shared and community transport, walking and cycling, we can create healthier, happier communities and more equal access to opportunity, without adding to emissions and environmental problems through the manufacture of millions more cars.

"Communities across the UK are working towards a greener, better, more inclusive transport future."

Electrify North Wales line says Union Connectivity Review

Improving connections between the existing rail network and High Speed 2 is essential to provide links between England, Scotland and Wales.

That was the conclusion of Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review, published on 26 November, which also abandoned the idea of a fixed link from Scotland to Northern Ireland.

A potential bridge or tunnel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland has been dismissed as "unjustifiable" on a cost and carbon basis, a study carried out as part of the review concluded.

Upgrades to the existing network and the creation of new routes are suggested as ways of maximising HS2's benefit for the whole of the UK. Upgrading the West Coast main line north of Crewe is the best way to reduce rail journey times and increase rail capacity between Scotland and London, the Midlands and North West England.

Sir Peter adds that improving journey times between Scotland and London to three hours once HS2 Phase 2b is open would dramatically reduce the number of people taking domestic flights. He said: "If it takes the same amount of time to travel by rail or by air, the evidence shows that people choose to travel by rail." He recommends exploring alternative connections to the WCML to the current proposed Golborne Link which was supported in the *Integrated*

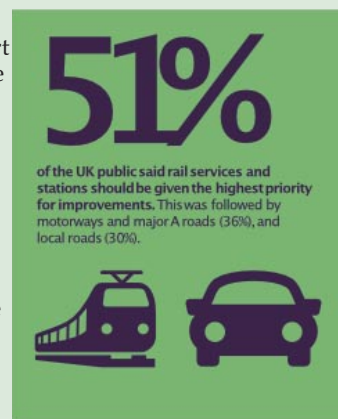
Rail Plan, published only a week earlier. Sir Peter's report said: "The emerging evidence suggests that an alternative connection to the WCML, for example at some point south of Preston, could offer more benefits and an opportunity to reduce journey times by two to three minutes more than the Golborne Link."

The review identified a range of possible infrastructure interventions, including replacing and enhancing track, signalling and power supply systems, and possibly new sections of line north of Preston, which would maximise line speeds for the non-tilting HS2 trains and create greater freight capacity.

For HS2 to serve North Wales, the North Wales main line needs to be electrified and have better connections with HS2 at Crewe.

The review wants the Welsh government to work collaboratively with the UK government on projects that will deliver vital improvements to local and national connections.

It also proposes the creation of UKNET, a strategic transport network spanning the entire United Kingdom using multimodal corridors, which should be reviewed regularly and appraised on a wider



economic basis, including meeting the levelling-up agenda and net zero ambitions. Research carried out for the report highlighted how important travel across the border between Wales and England is, with a large number of people travelling daily for work, services and leisure. Sir Peter also proposes upgrading and building new stations on the existing South Wales main line. He recommends the UK government

develops a package of railway improvements to increase connectivity and reduce journey times between Cardiff, Birmingham and beyond, which could include better rolling stock, timetable changes and enhanced infrastructure.

He concluded: "My recommendations provide comprehensive, achievable and clear plans forward to better connect the whole of the United Kingdom, leading to more growth, jobs, housing and social cohesion. I welcome the enthusiasm shown by the Prime Minister and the government to my final report."

Mr Johnson said: "Sir Peter Hendy's review is an inspiring vision for the future of transport."

Access for All

I cannot but feel that the new buzz phrase Access for All should be amended to read: "Access for All deferred indefinitely".

Until Network Rail climbs down from its cavalier attitude and involves the travelling public, nothing will change in the foreseeable future to make this happen.

At Cooksbridge in Sussex we have an unstaffed station, like many do. Access for All is clearly a dirty word in certain parts of the railway.

Southern and Network Rail are fighting tooth and nail against implementing anything that would help the travelling public.

Like many stations, we have a high step up to get on the train. It is not just the elderly, wheelchair users, mums with young children and mums with push chairs who are affected. So too are the general travelling public with wheeled suitcases who may be heading for Gatwick airport which is on our line.

As we have two nice straight platforms we had asked for "Harrington Humps" or similar to be installed on a part of each platform.

Reply: "It is not possible". I ask: "Why not?"

Two years ago we were lucky enough to have a three-car platform extension to our existing up platform. Very nice and most welcome. So why did not Southern or Network Rail engage us in dialogue as to what was to happen at Cooksbridge?

The hostile attitude immediately took over. Why speak to those who are going to use it? We get a standard unsuitable low platform to match the rest of the station. Access for All appears to have been deferred!

Network Rail could have installed the extension 200mm higher which would have meant less excavation work, less spoil to be taken away, less contractors' time on site and would have saved thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money, which in return would have resulted in at least one platform providing Access for All. Oh so simple!

Is there anyone within Network Rail who has any experience in "civils"? It appears not.

Ian Ginn

Cooksbridge station partnership

HS2 anger

On behalf of Railfuture and all the great supporters like myself who support HS2, I am very angry with the government for not wanting to go ahead with phase 2B of HS2



Picture: GYSEV

NO PLANET B: That is the message on this GySev freight loco at Sopron as it hauled the Connecting Europe Express on the line which links Austria and Hungary

After 36 days on the move, the Connecting Europe Express reached its final destination of Paris on 7 October.

The train made more than 200 stops, crossed 26 countries and 33 borders, travelling on three different gauges along the way. It even visited neighbours outside the European Union as a "flag bearer for European rail". It did not come to Britain.

The train was organised to highlight 2021 as the European Year of Rail and to show that train travel is the greenest way to go.

Setting out from Lisbon on 2 September, the express featured an Austrian sleeper coach, an Italian dining coach, a Swiss panoramic coach, a German seating coach, a French conference coach and a Hungarian exhibition coach.

Throughout its journey, the train hosted several conferences and a mobile exhibition, and welcomed school classes, policymakers, stakeholders and other citizens on board.

Additional conferences and welcome events were organised along the way, and the train stops coincided with key events such as the

from London to Leeds. What a terrible mistake for the government to have made. It is all very well for them to talk about upgrading other parts of the existing railway network – that's fine as far as it goes – but we still need HS2 to be built in full now, not later on over the years when both the East and West coast main lines are full up.

The government years ago gave the go-ahead for the full V-shape of HS2 as planned and supported by parliament. Now is the time for the government, along with parliament, to be held to account.

They all must surely be prevented from going back on their word.

James Knight, Church Road, Basildon, Essex SS14 2LD

Railway safety

I was appalled on seeing the location of the photograph in the centre spread of *Railwatch* 169 depicting the presentation to the *Railfuture Campaigner of the Year*. Although the caption states that the location is "on the station", it seems to me that it is trackside, adjacent to a level crossing.

In recent times we have seen much

stupidity regarding photography on railways.

There have been pop group photos, wedding photos and even this month the stupidity of lineside photographers attempting to photograph the Flying Scotsman.

Indeed, photography and the need for rail safety has been a feature of leading rail industry magazines in recent months and I am surprised that you seem unaware of this. Whatever the circumstances of your photograph, it suggests that such a location is acceptable, which it certainly is not. It gives the wrong message and I am saddened

Euro Express makes

informal meeting of transport and energy ministers in Brdo, Slovenia, as well as the first-ever Western Balkans Rail Summit in Belgrade.

In Halle, Germany, passengers witnessed the beginning of the era of digital automatic coupling for freight wagons as well as intermodal operations at the Bettembourg terminal in Luxembourg.

By the end of the journey, it was agreed that, for rail to unleash its potential, a true cross-border, modern, high-quality rail infrastructure is a basic requirement.

There is a need to complete the core Trans-European Transport Network by 2030, and the comprehensive network by 2050.

The European Commission will present changes to regulations later this year and the EU's recovery and resilience funding is expected to back improving interoperability, plus key infrastructure projects, such as the Lyon-Turin lines, the Brenner Base tunnel and



Picture: MAREK KNOPP

CLIMATE NEUTRAL: An Austrian loco hauled the Connecting Europe Express on the Brenner Pass line while also promoting the European Green Deal and cross-border rail

prefer to rely on public transport. When there is uncertainty about whether trains have a toilet, going by rail becomes an adventure too far for some of us.

J Evered, Goylands Close, Llandrindod Wells LD1 5RB

A good Railwatch

Just thought I would send a quick message to say what a really great edition of *Railwatch* the October issue was.

It was packed full of interest on so many diverse issues.

Here at Chinley we still await the final version of the enhanced GRIP study which Network Rail has carried out at Chinley (paid for by Section 106 monies in association with Derbyshire County Council).

It was due to be available for general readership a month ago... but you know how it is!

Do please pass on our congratulations though to all the *Railwatch* team.

Paul Tattam

Chinley/Buxworth Transport Group

Louth needs rail

As a resident of Grimsby from where trains used to go through Louth on their way to London, I was pleased to read Christian Wolmar's mention of the town's lack of a railway station.

It always surprised me that the line through this part of Lincolnshire did not survive the Marples/Beeching proposals, as Louth station survived for some time and did not actually close until October 1970.

In other words, the Labour government of 1964-70 could have stopped it from happening had the desire been there.

Tim Mickleburgh

Boulevard Ave, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Technology zone

I note the "Briefly" article in *Railwatch* 169 reports that Chiltern Railways no longer produces paper timetables and passengers are advised to go online or to scan a QR-code.

What about those – particularly us old folk – who do not like using computers, do not have computers, or do not have mobile phones?

I do feel, alongside age discrimination, sex discrimination, and disability discrimination, we ought to have a law on technology discrimination.

Martin James Egham, Surrey

thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com

2021 the Year of Rail

Rail Baltica. But existing infrastructure must be managed better in future while capacity must be expanded, especially the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) which can increase capacity, safety, and punctuality.

Expansion of the European Union's Shift2Rail programme is also likely, along with enhancements to the single European rail area.

Train drivers will be expected to accompany their trains across borders, to match the flexibility of pilots and lorry drivers.

Obstacles created by national rules will be targeted, with the aim of establishing an open and competitive European market for rail.

The European Commission is expected to produce an action plan in December aimed at boosting long-distance cross-border passenger rail services.

"The Connecting Europe Express has been a rolling laboratory, revealing in real-time the many achievements of our single European rail

area and our TEN-T network to allow for seamless travel across the European Union," said Transport Commissioner Adina Vălean.

"If the Green Deal is to be a success, it must become as easy to drive a train through Europe as it is to drive a lorry," said Andreas Matthä of Austrian Railways.

■ Austria launched a "climate ticket" in October that is valid on all buses, trams and trains for £930 a year – the equivalent of £3 a day. Demand was so strong on launch day that the booking website crashed.

■ Green champion: Rail transport is responsible for 0.4% of transport-caused carbon dioxide emissions. It accounts for 8% of passenger transport and 19% of freight transport across Europe.

■ The Discover EU programme has been a major success. It has provided young people with free rail tickets to travel throughout mainland Europe. It does not apply to Britain.

■ European Railways pledged in October to improve cross-border ticketing to persuade more air travellers to switch to rail.

that more thought has not been given to this by your editorial team.

*Ken Speake
k.speake11@gmail.com*

Dennis Fancett, chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, responds:

I think we must concede the point. It was not trespassing, but loitering on the crossing is still something we should not encourage. I cannot

think how this happened as I was thinking of the very point raised at the time I was presented with the award. I can only apologise, and consider my knuckles duly rapped.

I take full responsibility as Allison did not realise it was a live line. I certainly did. So I am sorry to have dragged Allison into it.

Please do not blame Allison as she took guidance from us as to where to stand. But Railfuture will not

help our cause by blurring the distinction between legitimate pedestrian use of a level crossing and trespassing on the railway.

Toilet travel

I want to speak up for the many potential bus and train passengers who have urinary problems. We need to use the toilet regularly and, sometimes, quickly. Many of us have lost interest in going by bus or train. For us, the news that there will be fewer toilets on trains is ghastly. Some elderly people are already being "forced" to keep using their cars when they would

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: RICHARD CRANE

The much-delayed reopening of the Isle of Wight railway between Ryde and Shanklin finally took place on 1 November. The picture shows Vivarail's "new" train approaching Ryde Pier Head. Much has not changed! The passing loop at Brading has not yet been brought into use but a loop remains at Sandown. It would appear that the whole eight-plus miles is still jointed track. The main negative aspect is the hourly service, which is the worst service for at least 55 years. South West Railway wrongly claims it is because of lack of demand.

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Timetable concerns

The principal focus for Railfuture Wessex this autumn has been on the severe reductions to rail services across our region and the deterioration in customer service. We are challenging CrossCountry Trains about the reduction in the frequency of the Bournemouth service from hourly to every two hours and the company's bizarre decision to cut out some station calls at Winchester and Brockenhurst. CrossCountry responded to complaints by reinstating some stops at Winchester. We would also like to see direct trains reinstated between Southampton and the North East as soon as practicable.

Cuts to South Western Railway services have resulted in longer journey times for many passengers. Some former semi-fasts now have to call at all stations, and some journeys previously possible by direct train now involve one or possibly two changes. SWR has no intention of restoring any of the lost services for at least a year. Even then the offering will be much reduced, judging by information we have been given about the proposed December 2022 timetable.

One combined consequence of the SWR and XC cuts is to reduce services between Winchester and Basingstoke, from four trains per hour to two trains per hour. It would seem to suggest, as with the SWR/GWR cuts on the Salisbury-Bristol line, that there has been little coordination of the combined impacts.

We are working with Railfuture Severnside to persuade SWR/DfT not to proceed later this year with removal of their direct services from London Waterloo to Bristol. This was one of the few upsides to privatisation, providing competition and new journey opportunities with direct London services from stations not previously served. These cuts,

combined with proposed reductions to GWR's Portsmouth-Cardiff service, will cause considerable inconvenience to passengers in the South and will not improve the rail offering on a key route for business and tourist exploitation.

We have been pursuing all these issues with MPs, local authorities and the companies themselves.

■ ■ Reopenings progress

The project to reinstate a passenger service on the Waterside Line between Totton and Hythe is gathering pace. A dedicated project team is forging ahead with detailed designs for upgrading the railway so that passenger services can operate once more to an area due for extensive residential development. The government announced a further £7 million of funding for the scheme in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

A project team on the Isle of Wight secured Restoring Your Railways funding to help develop a business case for extending the Island Line to Newport and Ventnor. Further progress on this awaits a funding decision from the Department for Transport, but in the meantime we are relieved to see trains running once more between Ryde and Shanklin after the extensive rebuild which lasted for most of 2021.

Planning permission has now been granted for the major housing development at Welborne to the north of Fareham. We had argued for a new station to be built nearby on the site of Knowle Halt and are delighted to note "safeguard and not develop Knowle rail Halt land" included in the section 106 schedule. We have also established top-level contacts with both the developer and Fareham Borough Council which will enable us to press the case for the new station as the Welborne development proceeds.

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

By Nigel Bray

■ ■ Bristol upgrade

The Bristol East Junction upgrade was completed as planned during September and, apart from a serious overrun which caused massive delays to trains on 9 August, seems to have achieved greater operational flexibility at Temple Meads station.

Work has started on Gloucester station forecourt improvements which will enable buses to serve the station entrance by next year. For decades it has been necessary to cross a busy dual carriageway to transfer from train to bus or vice-versa. The work will go a long way towards creating a genuine transport hub at the station.

In its December timetable GWR plans to introduce a later last train on Saturdays from Bristol Temple Meads to Bath, Chippenham and Swindon. It will depart from Temple Meads at 2330 and help create a safer journey home for people having a night out on this corridor. On learning that South Western Railway planned to axe its Bristol-Waterloo service from 12 December, Graham Ellis organised a public meeting at Trowbridge in October to campaign to retain the trains. Railfuture and five other organisations including Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways and West Wiltshire Rail Users Group were represented.

SWR's Bristol-London services do not duplicate those of GWR in any meaningful way but serve Andover, Basingstoke, Woking and Clapham Junction. Many passengers have found Waterloo a more convenient terminus than Paddington, both for visiting London and for onward travel within the South East. Graham pointed out that usage of the Melksham line had increased

from 18,000 journeys in 2003 to 200,000 in 2018.

"We just want to work out a solution," he said.

In reply, Andrew Ardley, regional development manager, SWR, said the Department for Transport wanted to look at areas of duplication between train operators to reduce the high subsidy paid to rail services. He said that driver availability on SWR diesel services was tight and there was no time to consult on changes planned for December.

See Page 5: Passenger revolt

■ ■ Very Light Rail

On 27 October the Railfuture Severnside meeting at Kemble was given a highly informative talk by the promoters of the Cirencester Community Railway project, whose aim is to reconnect the former branch from Cirencester with the national rail system using Very Light Rail technology. The line would mostly follow the original route but there would be slight deviations to serve a VLR vehicle depot and the university. Among the promoters' aims are reducing parking problems in Cirencester and making it easier to reach the town from other areas.

A VLR vehicle has been designed by Coventry University and its low height is intended to reduce the need for substantial platforms. CCR Chairman Richard Gunner said VLR had favourable pollution and fuel consumption figures. 2,350 new houses are planned along the route, which may help the case for the line. The promoters are aiming at a reopening by 2024.

Severnside branch contact:
wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk
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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

Fares Fair for the post-Covid railway

By Neil Middleton

There is official talk of fares reform but the detail, other than headline items such as “pay as you go” and “single leg” pricing, is often missing.

The Williams-Shapps report was published in May and is a classic example of this.

Railfuture accepted an offer to appear before the House of Lords built environment committee in July, which gave me and others a terrific opportunity to set out our thoughts on improvements needed to fares and ticketing.

We followed this up with further written submissions providing more detailed information.

In both my oral appearance and in the written submissions, Railfuture advocated both specific tactical improvements and some principles for fundamental reform.

Railfuture’s papers included six key observations:

1 There are considerable risks remaining with the status quo on fares – headline high prices, cliff-edge pricing and uncertainty all act as significant disincentives to travellers selecting the railway as their chosen transport option. Creating a low trust view, results in lost revenue.

2 A good first step to show intent would be to move away from the traditional “Retail Price Index plus” formula, which will continue to build in inflationary rises for 2022 and future years.

3 Fares and ticketing reform is not just about a better arrangement, it is key to encouraging the return to the railway and addressing the current gap between revenue and costs by focusing on revenue increase, not just cost reduction. A multi-stage reform is required, with short-term activity to improve the current fares structure, followed by a more fundamental restructure. It will also help the government with wider initiatives such as addressing climate change through carbon reduction across the total transport sector, to deliver growth and levelling-up.

4 So far, there has been considerable focus on ticketing improvements, and not enough on fares reform.

5 While the longer term fare concepts articulated to date are sensible, there is not yet enough detail and, while simplification is needed, too much will reduce choice (for example, the cheapest fares, flexibility on choice of train



WAITING FOR CHANGE: A polite pre-Covid queue for ticket machines at London’s Victoria station

Quick wins on fares

- **Split tickets: Reduce prices for Anytime and Off-Peak through tickets to less than the sum of the parts**
- **Explain the multitude of ticket restrictions better – what does “super off-peak” actually mean?**
- **Operator only fares: Eliminate these where there is just a small difference in price (for example 10p cheaper)**
- **The Flexi Season – improve them, most notably by extending validity – for example from 28 days to 31 or 35 days**
- **Start extending PAYG Smartcard by increasing the range of existing systems. For example, extend GTR’s to Southeastern**
- **Increase visibility of Contactless and National Rail fares**
- **Provide a single source of the truth for retail prices**
- **Railcards: Simplify conditions, for example the multiple definitions of when the morning peak ends**

routes) and benefits of matching supply and demand. Railfuture prepared an “approximately right” proposal for pricing tickets in the new single-leg pricing world.

6 Society would benefit from greater disclosure of ticketing sales. Railfuture argues that access to this data would allow our lobbying to be much better informed.

A new approach

Railfuture supplemented its observations with 19 areas for tactical improvement to the current fares structure and seven principles for a fundamentally new approach to fares.

Our seven principles for a fundamental restructure are:

1 It is essential to retain the “turn up and go” railway for all types of journeys and route

2 The start point for pricing single legs needs to be 50% of the applicable return fare (including Anytime, Day

Return, Off-Peak), not the existing single fare.

3 If there is any move away from the rule described in point 2, it should be monitored for adverse impacts, for example on day return prices.

4 Consideration is needed for tickets that start at a time of high price, but where most of the journey time is off-peak.

5 The traditional season ticket is still needed by many and they should not be disadvantaged by new arrangements.

6 The approach to rewarding regular travel – such as for travel to work – should be reviewed. Comments on the Flexi-Season show how this

design is sub-optimal. Options include loyalty bonuses, price caps, price cuts and free days.

7 Consideration needs to be given as to how to reward regular travel that does not qualify for travel to work rewards. How about someone who travels once a week to a long distance destination?

While my appearance before the committee was a solo effort, the submissions were a team effort and showed a key Railfuture strength – the breadth and diversity of our membership.

This allowed plenty of review and challenge and the inclusion of examples to bolster our case. If you are interested in this topic, please consider getting more involved with Railfuture’s passenger group.

The Railfuture submissions are on the website at: railfuture.org.uk/fares This includes a link to the transcript on parliament.uk.

So, what next? This work has given us a chance to refresh our fares priorities and give us a good foundation for lobbying. Our current campaigning priority is the likely inflationary fares increase for 2022. Railfuture is calling for this to be a freeze, to match the freezing of fuel duty for motorists and the domestic air passenger duty changes.

■ *Neil Middleton is a Railfuture board member.*

Appearing before a parliamentary committee

The House of Lords built environment committee staff were very helpful, so I could prepare properly. The questioning was pleasant and useful. The committee clearly wanted to be educated, not to embarrass me. On the few occasions necessary, members were happy with a “let me get back to you” response. If you are invited to appear before a committee, whether parliament, local government or other body, my advice is: Go for it. It is an ideal campaigning opportunity.

Clean and green - rail freight is o

Ian Brown, Railfuture Policy Director and former rail freight manager, looks at the prospects for freight on rail following COP26 with the creation of Great British Railways

The UK government published its *Environmental Benefits of Rail Freight* in June.

It was part of the government's *Rail Environment Policy Statement*, setting the scene to give Great British Railways a statutory duty to promote rail freight.

Environmental sustainability will be a key component of an imminent 30-year plan for the railway.

The *Williams-Schapps Plan for Rail*, published in May, advocated a long-term plan to transform the railways.

A comprehensive environmental plan, expected next year, will establish rail as the backbone of a cleaner future transport system.

Setting the "direction of travel" policy for the whole railway, including freight, is crucial.

The listed priorities are:

- Remove all diesel-only trains from the network by 2040

- Commitment to a sustainable, deliverable (but not quantified) programme of electrification that delivers a higher performing net zero railway

- Air quality targets: Net zero greenhouse gases from trains by 2050

- Air quality improvement plans for all stations identified as having poor air quality

- Zero waste to landfill by 2025, with increasingly challenging recycling targets to be set across all parts of the railway

- Targets for renewable energy generation and use at stations

Modal transfer from road to rail (passengers and freight) is exceptionally effective in achieving overall net zero objectives for transport.

We need a total transport policy in which achieving these objectives for rail is a subset of the overall initiative. This is particularly important for rail freight.

A freight train hauled by a two-stroke diesel locomotive is far better than a convoy of road vehicles in achieving emission reductions, but it is not net zero.

A freight train hauled by an electric locomotive is net zero, if the source of power generation is net zero. Carrying no freight at all on a diesel railway quickly achieves the narrow rail objective of net zero, but does not contribute to an overall



Picture: DB CARGO

EVERYONE KNOWS IT: Freight belongs on rail. DB Cargo reinforces the message on a locomotive

transport objective. This is not the answer.

Electrification will take time, particularly if there are no targets, nor the establishment of a rolling programme of electrification deploying competent teams, learning with experience.

The policy statement recognised that decarbonising rail freight is a challenge. The risk though is that nothing much will happen.

However, short infill electrification schemes are recognised as delivering quick benefits, to enable rail freight operators to switch to electric traction.

A national freight coordination scheme will be set up with, in due course, a freight growth target.

We therefore need a policy that encourages modal shift to rail, followed by a rolling programme of investment in electrification to achieve net zero for the rail freight operation.

The government followed up the policy statement by issuing in October its *Net Zero Strategy for the UK*, which is not specifically rail related but which focuses on unlocking investment in clean and green industries.

What needs to happen to encourage the transfer of freight on to railways?

The economics of freight on rail depend on its value to the environment being recognised. Pricing must enable a shift to rail and be stable so hauliers can invest with confidence in freight facilities.

The recent sudden electricity price rise, up to a 100% increase, has forced Freightliner to move

from electric to diesel haulage as it has to be competitive to survive. Coinciding with COP26, this was not a good look.

Open access has been an outstanding success for rail freight. The rail freight operators have risen to the challenge, investing in equipment and flexible working.

The Williams-Schapps plan maintains a fully open access railway with no state subsidised operator, unlike many other railways in continental Europe.

The rail freight industry must be able to plan for the long term, and be able to rely on stable, realistic access charges which reflect the value to the country of using rail.

Rail freight can no longer be treated as some form of marginal activity where the passenger operators grudgingly accept freight on the network.

Capacity for freight

Rail freight has increasingly become a long-distance operation, a far cry from local trips from pits to power stations. This applies to intermodal freight and also to bulk freight such as aggregates from the Peak District to just about everywhere on the rail network.

It is essential therefore that the network has the latent capacity to allow new freight flows to be introduced.

A major benefit of HS2 is to unleash capacity for more freight trains on the West Coast main line, the UK's most important freight corridor. This is good, but not enough in itself to facilitate a major shift to rail.

There are other areas where capacity needs to be provided and safeguarded for rail freight,

both on the rail network and at terminals.

East-West links essential

It is East to West links where we need upgraded rail capacity for freight, across the Pennines (Liverpool Port to Yorkshire) and also from Felixstowe to the West Coast main line by eliminating the bottleneck around Ely.

The same applies to the South to North Spine, a concept floated by government and abandoned almost in the same breath.

The Oxford-Cambridge reopening was originally envisaged by the then transport secretary Chris Grayling as a non-electrified local railway operated by diesel multiple units, and without provision for diverted passenger trains or freight. It is difficult to understand why such a strategic asset could be viewed so narrowly.

The other area, not all within the gift of GBR, is the need for capacity at freight terminals, including rail access to terminals and ports such as Trafford Park and Felixstowe.

The ports of Southampton, Felixstowe and Liverpool, also the new London Gateway near Tilbury, have invested heavily in rail transfer facilities and are likely to continue to do so to accommodate growth, and also to affect modal shift to rail as a way of facilitating this. Rail must not miss out on growth from smaller East Coast ports either.

Bulk freight

Bulk rail freight has also seen a revival, with demand for commodities such as aggregates and cement products increasing with demand for housing and major construction projects such as HS2. The sources of these products are predictable, such as quarries around Buxton, but the destinations vary with demand, although heavily concentrated on the South East.

The only current rail freight access from Buxton to the Midlands and the South East is via the already oversubscribed Hope Valley line or northwards via the Manchester suburbs! Road vehicles have the option of travelling directly through the Peak Park.

Capacity is the constraint on rail freight growth and the industry must plan to expand capacity, especially at known pinch points identified as long ago as 2009 in Network Rail's route utilisation strategies. One positive development is the imminent start of a new aggregate service between Lanark and London, the

On track to battle climate change



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

SUPER MARKET SERVER: A train with Tesco containers hauled by an electric loco

length of the West Coast main line.

Distribution

The prospects for intermodal freight from ports and domestic bulk construction freight are good. The biggest market, largely untapped however, is distribution, where rail freight needs to enter the supply chain. Major retail suppliers, such as Tesco and the Co-op, are acknowledging the increasing importance of resilience in the supply chain by investment in rail for the trunk haul, such as from major warehouses in the Daventry area to Scotland.



Map: marfimasurente.com

FRESH: Murcia to Barking

This type of operation can, with investment, become mainstream. Our railways are well aligned for this development as many bulk flows are from and to the warehousing and distribution complexes in the Daventry area, to the north and to Scotland and hopefully Wales.

We need to ensure that main line capacity, particularly north of Crewe, post HS2, is available for these developments.

International freight

The Channel Tunnel financing plan was based on the provision of 35 train paths per day between France and London. High costs and reliability are two of the factors which have handicapped rail freight services via the Tunnel. The two main markets identified were white

goods, such as fridges, from Italy to the UK and fresh food from southern Spain for supermarkets.

White goods can tolerate unreliability to some extent but competitive cost is important. Fresh produce cannot risk delay.

Way back in the planning stages for the Channel Tunnel, there was enough traffic being carried on lorries via ferries to the UK and Ireland to justify operating 24 trains a day if the traffic switched to rail.

Rail also has the advantage of taking a day less than a lorry to deliver the goods from Valencia to London. It could have been a dream ticket but too few bought into the idea.

The advent of open access for freight in the European Union (Directive 440/EEC in 1991) had the potential to make the difference on crew efficiency and avoiding strikes.

The recent introduction of a fast freight train from Murcia and Valencia to Barking on HS1, with no booked stops in France except for crew changes, is a game changer.

So too was the earlier Transfesa Ford component train, the longest non-stop train in Europe, from Valencia to Dagenham.

Tesco, with its experience of UK rail freight operation, is a major customer of the Murcia refrigerated container train, and the resilience of supply of fresh products to Tesco brought major benefits during the recent shortage of lorry drivers. Only 23 more trains to go!

Another big structural change is under way, with freight from China to mainland Europe switching from container ship to intermodal freight trains operating along what is called the New Silk Road.

In 2020 alone, 12,400 trains ran from China to Europe via Kaliningrad, Russia's Baltic Sea

enclave. One even made it to London. Rail is increasingly competitive on speed (two weeks from China is faster than a ship), reliability and price.

New applications to fast "passenger rated" traffic

The UK train operators have not developed the market for what used to be called parcels traffic, which was big business before the privatisation of British Rail. The franchise system has not encouraged this, preferring to cram as many passengers into train space as possible.

However carriage of mail by rail has continued, in what is now a very slick all-electric service based on the Royal Mail hub at Willesden, using dedicated mail electric multiple units operating nightly at 100 mph to Warrington, Newcastle and Glasgow.

There is potential traffic from other parcel operators such as DPD, UPS and FedEx for domestic flows.

Good connections to airports, particularly Heathrow, are essential for international traffic.

New operators such as Orion High Speed Logistics are setting up to address the large but untapped market for high speed parcel traffic. They need encouragement, given the high set-up costs. GBR must facilitate such developments.

Orion is planning to use surplus 100 mph electric multiple units fitted out to carry high value consignments, similar to the Royal Mail operation but operating from passenger stations.

Electrification

At one level, diesels can do the job in effecting modal shift if track and terminal capacity is provided together with competitive access charges. This is not so easy with routes across the Pennines, where capacity is already fully taken up. Electrification for freight is

needed if the rail freight operation is to become net zero. We need a strategy of modal shift to get more freight on rail, together with a longer term strategy of electrifying the network to enhance the efficiency of the operation and achieve net zero targets.

Freight operators will invest in leasing diesel locomotives, but additional incentives are required to make investment in electric locomotives more attractive.

Last-mile dual-mode capability is essential for efficient operation as all rail freight has to use terminals or ports, most of which are not electrified.

More infill electrification is also required, based on the needs of the freight operators to tip the operational efficiency balance more in favour of electric operation and facilitate better use of existing electrified routes.

We need electric freight operation with its high payload potential on routes to the Midlands and the North from Southampton, and cross-country from Felixstowe as well as a replacement electrified link across the Pennines.

The future

The creation of GBR, the need for a resilient supply chain for freight, addressing congestion issues and the urgent need to address climate change, represent a major opportunity to create a freight system based on a rail backbone in Britain with international connections.

We must not miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity. It will not happen naturally unless we equip our railways with the capacity required based on a sustainable high capacity electrified network, designed to serve existing markets by modal shift to rail and with innovation, expand into new markets domestically and internationally.

Let's go for it!



Picture: ORION

CITY CENTRE: Orion parcels train on show at Euston station

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■ ■ Berkshire developments

Except for the Didcot, Newbury & Southampton and Lambourn Valley lines, Berkshire did not suffer from rail cuts, and so there was no call for reopening campaigns, or for new stations.

Editions of the *A-Z of Rail Reopenings* published by Railfuture some 30 years ago included Woodley in the list of proposed new stations, but although desirable there seemed no scope for a new station on the Great Western main line. Railfuture did at one time propose a new station at Southcote, but this has been superseded by Reading Green Park. Railfuture strongly believes that the planning of major new developments must include public transport, and so we welcome the building of Reading Green Park station. Also to be welcomed is the promised upgrading of Reading West station, with ticket office and toilets. There was a time when cross-country trains used to call at Reading West, bypassing Reading General. We do not expect to see inter-city trains calling at Reading West, but we do believe that these developments will stimulate a growth in local rail traffic and relieve road traffic congestion in the town.

■ ■ Battle for Aylesbury

The exclusion of Aylesbury from initial East West Rail plans has prompted Buckinghamshire County Council to remind officials that the council contributed £6 million to support EWR. It believes it is being short-changed if Aylesbury is not included. Milton Keynes Council also paid grants on the expectation that Aylesbury was included in the scheme.

The new head of the transport body England's Economic Heartland, Councillor Richard Wenham, was reported as seeking a meeting with government ministers over the issue.

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



Work on the new East West Rail station at Bletchley was making good progress in November. This view from Brunel roundabout on the east side of the line shows that the station will have a new, bold "face" towards the town centre. Work has involved demolishing sections of the 1960s flyover to make a secure bridge over the West Coast main line and to create space for the new station entrance

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



Picture: WIKIPEDIA

A rich tapestry of railway and Scottish life

The Great Tapestry of Scotland is now on show in a purpose-built visitor centre at Galashiels, two minutes walk from the station on the reopened Borders Railway. One section features rail, including the Forth bridge.

The Great Tapestry went on public display in August after being taken on a Scotland-wide tour.

It was hand stitched by 1,000 people across Scotland and represents the history of Scotland, including the crucial part played by railways. It has 160 linen panels, created over an 18 month period in 2012-13.

Calum Paxton's picture, right, shows a queue of train passengers making their way to see the tapestry at the new Galashiels centre.



Picture: CALUM PAXTON

Be more active in the campaign for a better railway

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

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

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

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

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

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

Twitter: @railfuture

Picture: RAY SCHOFIELD



Set a target to switch freight from road to rail

The government should set a legally binding target to shift freight from road to rail, following the example of the Scottish government.

Doncaster-based DB Cargo UK made the call when it opened its new £7 million rail freight terminal in Cricklewood, London, in October.

“Freight belongs on rail,” said DB Cargo UK’s Andrea Rossi. “The more goods and materials we can take off the road and on to rail will reduce congestion, significantly cut carbon emissions and improve air quality, which are part of the UK government’s key objectives in its drive to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

“There has never been a better time for government to promote rail freight as the way forward.”

Mr Rossi added: “Setting down in legislation a legally binding target for UK modal shift, as has already been done in Scotland, will provide the confidence and certainty needed to unlock sustained investment in rail freight going forward.

“It will also drive greater ownership and accountability, as well as encouraging greater collaboration and innovation, behaviours we have already seen from rail freight operators and their customers following the UK government’s publication of its target for decarbonisation. Some of Britain’s best-known construction companies, supermarkets, steel manufacturers and car makers are already enjoying the economic and environmental benefits of using rail freight, and we will be working closely with them in the months to come to carry the message to other businesses who would benefit from changing their existing transport strategies.

“It will, however, take a collaborative effort by all stakeholders – government, regulators, the rail companies, industry bodies and customers – to deliver the policies and reforms necessary to unlock rail freight’s true potential.”

The “Freight Belongs on Rail!” campaign is designed to bring home the message to the heart of government.

Mr Rossi added: “The company is asking its existing customers, including some of Britain’s biggest businesses, to lobby Prime Minister Johnson urging him to act.”



Pictures: CEMEX

SHEFFIELD: Workers installing pre-fabricated new track at the CEMEX Attercliffe Road depot. Improvement work was also undertaken in the past few months at other CEMEX depots – Small Heath (Birmingham) and Bletchley

CEMEX boosts its rail operation

Building suppliers company CEMEX has officially opened its new rail depot in Birmingham, which will allow the business to increase its use of trains to transport its products and reduce lorry movements.

This aligns with the company’s efforts to improve the sustainability of its operation as part of its net zero carbon dioxide strategy.

Following significant investment and major infrastructure works at Small Heath, the first aggregates train arrived from Dove Holes quarry in Derbyshire.

The Small Heath depot supplies builders and projects throughout the Birmingham area. It is expected to receive four trains per week.

“The depot will enable us to maximise the use of rail as a more efficient means of transport for our products,” said supply chain director Dave Hart. “This depot

could mean 17,000 fewer lorries on the road each year.”

CEMEX has partnered with GB Railfreight and leading aggregates distributor GRS to ensure a smooth operation and service at its Small Heath depot.

Liam Day, commercial director of GB Railfreight, said: “The new depot demonstrates the key role rail freight is playing in reducing the impact of carbon emissions. It will also remove congestion from some of Birmingham’s busiest roads.”

CEMEX said its use of trains to move building materials is growing year on year, with considerable efforts being made to switch from road freight to rail and sea.

It said that in 2020, the increased use of rail transport saved 150,000 lorry movements.

Welcome for plan to upgrade transPennine route for deep-sea containers

The government’s decision not to build a completely new high speed line as part of its Northern Powerhouse Rail agenda provoked wide-ranging outrage in November.

But positive aspects of the government’s *Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands* were embraced.

The Rail Freight Group welcomed news that the North TransPennine route is to be upgraded to allow containers to be moved by rail. The plan states

that gauge clearance, allowing shipping containers to move on rail wagons, will be undertaken as part of the first phase of the Northern Powerhouse Rail project.

Government plans will also allow for additional capacity for freight trains, which could be completed in the first phase if a third track between Huddersfield and Marsden is delivered, says RFG.

It says the major freeports on the East Coast and West Coast of

England, including Humber, Tees and Liverpool, are not able to move containers by rail to cities across the north of England.

So this crucial scheme should allow new services to start, removing thousands of lorries from the region’s road network and significantly reducing carbon emissions.

RFG also welcomed news that the TransPennine route and Midland main line are to be electrified, allowing electrically

hailed freight services to be introduced. However, RFG has concerns over other aspects of the plan, which could reduce capacity for freight or create bottlenecks where new NPR and HS2 trains have to share existing infrastructure.

“The upgrade of the TransPennine route has been one of RFG’s main campaign priorities in the last five years, and an absolute priority for our members in the region,” said Mike Hogg, RFG’s northern representative.

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■ ■ Tunnel proposed for west Wales line

Railfuture members heard about updated plans for the proposed lines linking Carmarthen with Aberystwyth and Bangor with Afon Wen (*Railwatch* 169) at an online meeting.

Adrian Kendon, chair of Traws Link Cymru, highlighted the economic and environmental benefits of reopening the line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, which would improve access in a remote part of west Wales. The scheme would cost about £26 million per mile, less than 10% of the estimated cost per mile of HS2.

TLC has refined plans by suggesting a 3.2km twin-bore tunnel near the Carmarthen end of the route. This would bypass a highly curved stretch of the old line, significantly shortening it and allowing timings to be reduced by up to 10 minutes. It would also help reduce conflict with the Gwili Heritage Railway, which uses part of the section avoided.

Railfuture's Bob Saxby looked at Caernarfon, where parts of the northern section of the line now have other uses. The original station site is occupied by an Asda car park, and he proposed a more central location for a new station. Fortunately, a road that uses a tunnel where the railway previously ran is not heavily used, and the tunnel could be returned to its former use.

The development of north-south rail links are to be explored as part of the Plaid Cymru and Labour cooperation agreement, the Welsh government announced in November. In September, the Welsh government released a map of North Wales Metro proposals (see below) which hinted that a north-south railway might be in the offing, but nothing has been confirmed.



■ ■ New freight from Ebbw Vale

Freight could once again use the Ebbw Vale line under proposals from GB Railfreight, which wants to establish a new quarry and freight terminal near Cwm, three miles south of Ebbw Vale. It is consulting with Blaenau Gwent council and landowners. Quarried aggregates would be conveyed to various sites in England and to Newport docks for export. The line was mothballed after the Corus steelworks closed in 2002, before being reopened for passenger use in 2008.

■ ■ Keep up the good work

Railfuture was invited to keep putting the arguments to Westminster for the electrification of Cardiff-Swansea (cancelled in 2017) and for the North Wales main line at a meeting with senior Welsh government officials.

James Hooker, rail programme director, and James Arden, rail project manager, want to see both lines electrified, as well as the short



Picture: TRANSPORT FOR WALES

INTEGRATED: Buses and trains are ideal partners but sometimes the operators make it virtually impossible to combine their use. Transport for Wales is keen to encourage public transport use and has made a small step in the right direction by allowing people travelling by bus between Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws y Coed and Llandudno to use their T19 bus ticket for the return journey by rail. People using the new 1Bws rover ticket are excluded

stretch between Patchway and Bristol Temple Meads, which they believe is important to south Wales. They are worried that skills painfully acquired during recent electrification projects may be lost to Wales if there are not new schemes after the wiring of the Cardiff valleys lines is completed in 2024.

In a wide-ranging discussion, Railfuture called for a minimum two-hourly service frequency across Wales, but the civil servants did not think this was achievable in the near future. However, additional rolling stock expected soon in Wales, including the new trains formed of mark 4 coaches, should allow some additional services to run, such as in west Wales and on the Heart of Wales line.

Railfuture also sought reassurance about work to integrate public transport, the development of metro schemes in south-west and north-east Wales, and provision for cycles on the new trains and tram trains currently being purchased.

More details of the discussion can be found in Rail Wales at

<https://www.railfuturewales.org.uk/newsletters/Rail-Wales-Issue-71-Autumn-2021.pdf>

■ ■ Wales Rail board idea endorsed

Westminster agrees with a recommendation by the House of Commons Welsh affairs committee that a Welsh Rail board should be set up. This would be responsible for "identifying and developing a prioritised set of proposals for rail infrastructure improvement and investment in Wales". It would be comprised of the UK and Welsh governments, Network Rail, Transport for Wales and other operators providing services in Wales.

Railfuture contributed to the committee's call for evidence and it adopted most of our suggestions. However, it is disappointing that the UK government is only lukewarm about many of the committee's other recommendations. It merely "notes" the calls to reinstate the cancelled electrification between Cardiff and Swansea and provide other important infrastructure improvements in south and west Wales.

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■ ■ Rochdale fights to keep bus link

Rochdale Borough Council has proposed redeveloping the area in front of the town's railway station, which also has a Metrolink tram stop and a bus stop within 100 yards. Earlier this year the council consulted on ambitious plans to transform the area, which include pedestrianising a section of Maclure Road to create a new public square in front of the station.

Rail group STORM (Support The Oldham and Rochdale Manchester rail line) has pointed out that if the plans are passed, the 471 bus service which currently serves the front of the station, would have to be diverted to the station's rear entrance on Miall Street to continue to serve the station, but the only obvious route for this involves low bridges, which the double decker buses that travel the route cannot use.

As this could leave the Rochdale-Bolton bus service running via Drake Street instead, STORM members say this would lose a valuable connection at Rochdale station while going against the Greater Manchester Bee Line aims of making public transport a seamless operation and would reduce accessibility with the greater walking distances involved. They have asked to keep the 471 bus route where it belongs, at the front of the station.

STORM chair Richard Greenwood said: "I am sure that any other town or city would be delighted if they had a railway station, tram station, bus stops, a taxi rank and disabled parking all within 100 yards radius."

Mark Robinson, assistant director of economy at Rochdale Borough Council, said: "Our proposals for the area around Rochdale station are in their very early stages and the detail around how any future scheme could be implemented has yet to be determined." The council said, "In the longer term, as part of these proposals, we are keen to see more bus services calling at Rochdale railway station to make it even easier for more people to make sustainable transport choices and easily transfer between train, bus and other greener forms of transport."

■ ■ Rail's nine-year wait for ticket reform

Transport for Greater Manchester has announced plans for Oyster-style contactless ticketing across the region. The aim is seamless travel on buses, trams, cycling and walking by 2024, with rail incorporated by 2030, to transform how people travel in Greater Manchester. The plans are being set out for consultation and the travelling public's opinion is being sought with a view to developing a system based on local needs.

Key parts will include a daily fare cap and single multi-modal ticket, with the whole network accessible and affordable, using the symbol of the Bee Network.

In October, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham appealed to the government for £1 billion of funding to allow Manchester to have a London-style transport service with Oyster-style ticketing.

Martyn Cox, the Conservative leader of Bolton Council, said: "Everybody recognises that our public transport system is not where we want it to be and I think the vision set out by Andy is certainly supported by Conservatives in Greater Manchester."

Plans for contactless travel can be seen at <https://tfgm.com/destination-bee-network>

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

Access for All funding needs ramping up

More than 50 years after astronaut Neil Armstrong took one small step for man to walk on the moon, many British rail stations remain a step too far for many passengers.

Hundreds of rail stations lack step-free access, and the Department for Transport's current policy of allocating funds over five-year periods means that progress towards full accessibility remains pitifully slow. Will another 50 years fix the problem? Probably not.

After billions of pounds were made available by Chancellor Rishi Sunak in October for sustainable transport projects in city regions, it is time for Access for All funding to be reappraised.

Disabled people benefit from step-free access. So too do families with buggies, people with luggage and those people with mobility problems.

In September, train operator Greater Anglia launched a survey to find out what accessibility improvements disabled customers want.

Accessibility manager Rebecca Richardson said the pandemic had created new challenges such as one-way systems and social distancing.



Picture: ON THE ENGENER

Pam Duncan-Glancy, pictured above, became the first permanent wheelchair user to be elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 2021. She represents Glasgow.

Duncan-Glancy, who has a BSc in psychology and an MSc in health psychology, was forced to wait for 45 minutes outside the Emirates Arena election count because the venue was not accessible. She said: "What happened happens to disabled people across Scotland and the country, and indeed the world, on a daily basis. It shouldn't.

"That's one of the reasons why I have always been involved in politics. It's why I'm an activist. I will speak up for disabled people's human rights."

We waited years for this to happen

A new £350,000 access ramp was officially unveiled at Dorchester West station in October to give passengers step-free access to platform one – and also provide a way to Dorset county hospital.

Previous access to platform one was via a stepped footbridge meaning some people had to travel on to Weymouth, change to a northbound train and use platform two.

The project was carried out by Network Rail and Dorset Council. Sustainability and biodiversity have been at the heart of the project as the ramp is made from recycled concrete and other materials sourced from a local construction site. Six trees were removed to allow for the ramp to be built but will be replaced with six new ones.

The trees will be primarily native and will replace the lost breeding bird habitat.

Hedgehogs will be catered for with a new hedgehog house within a new landscaped area. Dorset county councillor Ray Bryan said: "This project has been years in the making."



MP Chris Loder, left, meets Wally on the new ramp



Pictures: STEWART PALMER

Wheelchair user Wally Gundry of the station Friends was the first to use the new ramp at Dorchester West station

Rail campaigner Wally Gundry told a radio reporter at the opening: "Ten to twelve years ago I started the Friends of Dorchester West Station to look after the station and keep it nice and tidy.

"It has taken more than 10 years of pushing to get this ramp. It does not just benefit wheelchairs. Those with pushchairs, prams and bikes also benefit.

"Before, if I wanted to go to Trowbridge or somewhere like that I had to catch the train to Weymouth and wait for it to return and go north. It added an extra hour on the journey. "We have been treated like second-class citizens. We are

always an afterthought. Now we have this marvellous ramp."

Chris Loder, the MP for West Dorset, said: "I have campaigned for this since I got elected. Too much bureaucracy was involved and the project got bogged down."

Lizzie Milner, a local resident who has only recently become a wheelchair user, said: "I see things from a completely different angle once I am in a wheelchair.

"OK, one more station has been made accessible. But it is not a little thing.

"It is very, very important. It is a massive thing for us. Try getting up stairs in a wheelchair."

Tight spot for new £1 billion Tube stations Petition plea

Facilities are not always brilliant on new stations. Disability campaigner Alan Benson, right, took his wheelchair in September to try out the new Northern line stations at Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms which cost more than £1 billion. He said: "Brand new station, and the lifts are way too small. I can't turn round, I have to reverse in or out. These feel like a squeezed-in afterthought. It's going to be worse when they're busy. So incredibly disappointing." He added: "Signs on the new station are confusing. Deeply frustrating at a new station." Only 40% of London Underground stations are step-free.



Picture: @AlansTweets

A new petition has been launched to appeal to the government to make all stations and trains step-free.

Railfuture member Clifford James said: "People with mobility issues find steps impossible, so travelling on the railway network is impossible at a lot of stations in the UK.

The petition is at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/591434>



COP26 SHOWPIECE: Rolling stock company Porterbrook took its HydroFLEX train to Glasgow to show it off. The train took delegates on a trip from Glasgow Central round the Cathcart Circle of suburban lines in the south of the city in an event hosted by International Association of Public Transport secretary general Mohamed Mezghani and International Union of Railways director general François Davenne. Next day, Network Rail, Porterbrook and publisher Macmillan took a party of

children on a similar journey to show how “technology is powering rail’s green revolution in Britain”. The train was powered by electricity for both trips (not hydrogen) so passengers could inspect the hydrogen tanks and other equipment while on board. Porterbrook said HydroFLEX is the world’s first hydrogen train that can also run using overhead electric wires or batteries. The HydroFLEX is converted from a former Thameslink dual-voltage class 319

Hydrogen is not the answer to decarbonisation

Hydrogen is being touted as the solution to many transport problems and sometimes as an alternative to rail electrification. Julian Langston explains why we should be careful of accepting the current madding crowd’s love affair with it.

Network Rail unveiled its Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy in September last year.

It outlined how it would stop using diesel to power trains by 2050 (*Railwatch* 166).

Electrification of at least 13,000 single track kilometres (stkm) was proposed for the 15,400 km of Britain’s network which remains unelectrified.

A “judicious” mix of hydrogen and battery power was suggested for the remaining 2,400 stkm. However, using hydrogen power is inherently inefficient. To contribute to decarbonisation, electricity must be used to electrolyse (split) water into hydrogen and oxygen. This process is about 70% efficient.

Producing hydrogen by reforming hydrocarbons both uses fossil fuel and produces carbon dioxide, so this does not achieve decarbonisation. Then the hydrogen must be pressurised to at least 350 times



Picture: ALSTOM

ALSTOM CHALLENGER: This is the Coradia iLint train, in regular service near Vienna in Austria last year. The iLint is built by Alstom in Germany and can be diesel-powered. It also uses on-board fuel cells to convert hydrogen and oxygen into electricity, reducing operating emissions to zero.

Rolling stock company Eversholt has joined forces with Alstom to build a fleet of 10 three-car hydrogen multiple units, based on its London Crossrail Avenra trains. It was announced in November that the hydrogen trains will be made in Britain.

atmospheric pressure (94% efficient), and it may then need to be transported to a depot where trains are fuelled. On the train, it is converted back to electricity in a fuel cell (60% efficient). Finally, the power converter and motor are about 89% efficient between them.

Overall, from taking power from the grid to wheel on rail, the process is at best only 35% efficient. By contrast, traction using an overhead electric system can be over 80% efficient.

It is sometimes argued that spare wind power will be used overnight to extract hydrogen, so efficiency is not particularly important. But as more and more people will be charging their electric cars overnight, there is unlikely to be any electricity left over to produce hydrogen.

Moreover, hydrogen is a low-density fuel (about one eighth that of diesel), so it takes up a lot of space. One demonstrator train built by a partnership of Alstom and

Eversholt is the Breeze, designated the class 600 HMU. This is a converted three-car class 321 electric train. Britain’s limited loading gauge is restrictive, and one third of each end car is taken up with hydrogen fuel tanks. Over 20% of space that could be carrying passengers is used for the fuel – a further loss of efficiency.

Batteries are better. In theory the sort being developed to power trains can be well over 90% efficient.

However, fast charging and the high currents used to power trains mean the batteries get hot, and heat is wasted energy. In practice, 65% to 70% efficiency is achievable.

The range of battery-powered trains when self-powered is limited. Vivarail suggests that up to 100km for the class 230 between charges is possible, but rapid progress in battery technology suggests a much greater range may soon be feasible. Despite the limited range, battery power does have

its uses. In the short term, when used as a hybrid with diesel, it can be used to store braking energy, and this can give a boost when accelerating or going uphill.

This means the diesel engine can be smaller and use less fuel. In future, batteries can be used for infill sections where full electrification is very expensive (for example under low bridges), thus helping to bring down the cost of wiring schemes. This is already happening on the Cardiff valleys lines.

So, what about lines too long for battery power but too lightly used to justify full electrification?

One idea is to install modular electrification in judicious places, so battery trains can be used to bridge the gaps.

Hitachi Rail and ABB Power Grids have proposed a way of wiring short lengths of such lines to allow the battery to be topped up. If easy locations to wire are chosen, especially at stations where the train is going to stop for a minute or two anyway, the costs need not be high.

In this way, longer lines than those proposed could be suitable for battery traction and there would be no need for hydrogen.

By the time you read this, COP26 will have happened and the government should have learnt about the shortcomings of hydrogen as a traction fuel.

What is needed is a decision to electrify the vast majority of the rail network.

Railfuture Lottery winners

September P Rowland, M Lloyd, M Edgell, T Sheppard, R White, J Barfield

October K Porter, M Edgell, G Smith, W Morrison, E Holland, D Fleming

Queries: lottery@railfuture.org.uk



There is even a hydrogen powered trike now. The Kholos e-cargo tricycle, developed by Cycleurope, Valeo and STORH, was one of the eye catchers at the Made-in-France exhibition in July at the Élysée Palace in Paris

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■ ■ Rail map for the future

Railfuture Scotland is revising the late Roddy McDougall's seven-year-old map of the top 50 candidate stations on existing railway lines which should be reopened. Some stations, such as Leven, Cameron Bridge, Reston, East Linton and Dalcross (Inverness Airport) are already under construction, while in other places amended development plans have changed the priorities.

The new map will appear at future Railfuture Scotland events.

The £14 million Dalcross (Inverness Airport) station will be served by a bus every half an hour to the airport (three miles away), and have improved cycle and pedestrian access when it opens in December next year. The car park will have charging points for electric cars.

■ ■ Model members of Railfuture

Committee members attended the Aberdeen Model Rail Exhibition, the first for nearly two years. It is hoped to be able to return to other exhibitions in 2022.

■ ■ Levenmouth

With the old track having been lifted and donated to the Kingdom of Fife Heritage Railway, new track is now being laid on the alignment between Thornton Junction and Leven, in a very tangible demonstration of progress. It is hoped that trains will start serving this line in 2024.

■ ■ St Andrews

A draft executive summary of the St Andrews Sustainable Transport study Preliminary Options Appraisal under the STAG protocol includes heavy rail, as well as two light rail proposals. Once complete it will be going to Transport Scotland for its approval.

■ ■ RAGES

From 12 December TransPennine Express will be increasing its Edinburgh-Newcastle service from two to five daily trains (four on Sundays), which will call at Dunbar, Reston (when it opens), Berwick, Alnmouth, Morpeth and Cramlington. While construction of the station is well under way, it has been delayed by bad weather so might not open until January 2022.

■ ■ Threat to former branch line

Planners have apparently recommended approval of an application to build houses over the former Bridge of Weir railway station, which would make reopening the former Kilmaccolm branch line much more difficult.

A previous attempt to develop the site by Sustrans around 20 years ago was blocked by the then Scottish Executive's statutory planning guidance to protect potential public or active transport routes from adverse development. However, soon after 2007 the new Scottish government got rid of this protection, which seems somewhat short-sighted.

■ ■ More electrification

Transport Scotland has given the go-ahead to another electrification programme, south west of Glasgow. The £63 million project to electrify the route to Barrhead will begin in April and will provide electric train services for passengers using Nitshill, Priesthill & Darnley, Kennishead, Pollokshaws West and Crossmyloof stations.

An added bonus of the scheme is that the route can be used as a diversionary route for Anglo-Scottish passenger and freight trains. Transport



Picture: CAMPAIGN FOR BORDERS RAIL

WHY DO IT?: Ironic speaker Gareth Dennis at the Campaign for Borders Rail AGM

Scotland says it is also working on ways to extend electrification on the partly single-track route to East Kilbride. It claims identifying savings here could speed up electrification of the Borders railway to Galashiels and Tweedbank.

Meanwhile, Barrhead saw the Vivarail class 230 in action to showcase battery train technology during COP26.

■ ■ Borders Railway campaign in Carlisle

Holding its AGM in Carlisle for the first time in its 22-year history, the Campaign for Borders Rail heard a loud call for extension of the Borders Railway northwards from Carlisle through Hawick, to complete the reinstatement of the main line formerly known as the Waverley route.

Rail engineer Gareth Dennis gave an entertaining examination of how the Borders Railway might be completed. He drew some keen attention with his presentation title: *Why The Borders Railway Should Not Be Completed*. He was being ironic.

In her address to the AGM, newly elected chair Marion Short said: "I live in the heart of what might be called the extension area, and have the interests of all the communities at heart. I want to dispel negative comment."

She acknowledged the respect paid by other campaign groups around the UK, who look to the success of the Campaign for Borders Rail as a model for their own success.

"The introductions of our sub-groups have generated much detailed research and information, that has significantly raised the profile of the campaign and brought closer the realisation of completion of the Borders Railway," she said.

"Everyone has a task, whether on the committee or a member of the campaign, and plays a vital role in making this project a reality, to the benefit of everyone – be they in the community, in the region or at large."

In the public session, members warmly received presentations from John Stevenson, the MP for Carlisle, Gareth Dennis and campaign patron

and TV presenter Rob Bell. MP Stevenson was questioned vigorously over funding and starting the feasibility study – which he defended as a necessary part of the process, which would give a solid case upon which to build the case for extension and completion of the Borders Railway.

Rob Bell rounded off the afternoon with a rousing call to action for all campaigners. "Engineers have always overcome challenges to build something not just spectacular, but spectacularly useful," he said.

Recognising the passion of the community, Rob exhorted the audience to tell the world about the campaign. The impact of the completed Borders Railway will be felt far beyond the Borderlands.

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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>

Church bells ring out to welcome rail's No 1 comeback

Devon and Cornwall

By Gerard Duddridge

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Public service trains returned to the Exeter-Okehampton route on Saturday 20 November 2021, a gap of 49½ years since the 1972 closure, and 150 years since the original opening of the railway.

It is the first line to reopen under the government's Restoring Your Railway programme. The new service runs approximately every two hours, and during the day the 118 bus service provides a link to Okehampton town centre, and on to Lydford and Tavistock.

Both Lydford and Tavistock were each served by two rail lines, but lost their services in the 1960s. Next year the Okehampton-Exeter trains will become hourly and a bit faster after the track is improved between Coleford Junction, Yeoford and CREDITON.

On opening day an enhanced timetable was run to cope with the large number of passengers. The Dartmoor Railway Association opened its museum on platform 2 and served refreshments. A free

shuttle bus ran to the town centre every half hour. Twenty miles away at CREDITON, the significance of the rail reopening was recognised when the bells rang out for 20 minutes at the CREDITON Parish Church of the Holy Cross.

The Okehampton reopening resulted from cooperation between the Department for Transport, Network Rail, GWR, Devon County Council, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and local campaigners and MPs. The DfT said the reopening had been accelerated, delivering passenger services in only nine months from the original funding being approved. It said more lines and stations will be reopened in future.

See also:

Rail reopenings logjam: Page 5

Return to the trains

Passengers are returning to the trains in Devon and Cornwall faster than in some other areas of Britain. Passenger numbers on the Exeter-Barnstaple line were at 116% in October, compared to pre-virus levels.



REOPENING DAY: Mid-afternoon train at Okehampton

North East

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Waiting for extra trains

Railfuture campaigners were hoping that a promised sixth train would feature in Grand Central's Sunderland line December timetable. This was one good feature of the ill-fated LNER timetable draft for May 2022.

Boost for Ferryhill vision

Public opinion is swinging behind Durham county council's plan for a new station at Ferryhill, where the Stillington line branches off the East Coast main line towards Stockton.

Now there is the additional prospect of through direct train services along the Stillington route linking Tyneside and Teesside. With the overall blessing of the North-East Joint Transport Committee, officially promoted by Durham county council and supported by Tees Valley Combined Authority, it is one of 15 schemes being considered by the Department for Transport, and it has the support of MP Paul Howell. The project also includes the later possibility of a reopened station at Sedgefield, about halfway along the line, mainly for park-and-ride traffic from the A689 and A19.

Good takeoff for Lumo trains

The one-class-only no-frills London-Edinburgh Lumo trains which began running in October have attracted more passengers than initially expected. Calling only at Newcastle and Morpeth, they provide a cheap but comfortable alternative to air and car travel. Railfuture wishes them well, especially in attempts to win traffic from air travellers. Some of the Lumo services take the avoiding line at York rather than going through the station itself.

Through trains for Saltburn

Saltburn will benefit from through TransPennine trains to Manchester Airport, but not until May 2022. Redcar gained a similar through service two years ago. Railfuture welcomes more through trains to Teesside. Connections

can sometimes introduce too much risk into a rail journey.

Access cash for Teesside

Government funding announced in the Chancellor's autumn financial statement will allow the completion of the third platform project at Middlesbrough station and the enhancement of platforms at Hartlepool. Money was also made available for gauge clearance, particularly on the Eaglescliffe-Yarm-Northallerton section, to allow larger and longer freight trains. Railfuture welcomes improvements but would also like to see the electrification of the whole Eaglescliffe-Middlesbrough-Teesside line, and on to Saltburn, as an integral part of a national plan for rail electrification.

Billingham station will finally go step-free, with two lifts and a new footbridge. Unfortunately Stockton remains merely a candidate for improvements. If plans for passenger services along the Stillington line materialise, improvements must be made at Stockton.

Bidding to be rail HQ

Stockton South MP Matt Vickers is campaigning for the town ("birthplace of railways") to be chosen as the headquarters of Great British Railways. Many other places will be bidding, including York and Darlington. York has its Railway Museum, Darlington has its North Road "Head of Steam", and Shildon, where there are preliminary plans to develop a range of driverless trains by 2025, also has a very good museum.

Much has been heard of "levelling-up" recently. We can only hope that the government looks favourably on the various claims from the North East to be home to Great British Railways. Choosing one would be a genuine act of levelling up.

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



LEEDS: Publicity initiative by Tyne Valley community rail

Tyne Valley CRP activities, and rail publicity in general

Members of the Tyne Valley community rail partnership joined in with a number of exhibitions at stations such as Edinburgh and Leeds during October, publicising the attractions for rail users on the Tyne Valley line. One of the most popular items among the "freebies" handed out was the Tyne Valley Railway timetable booklet, which reminds those of us who live in Northern Rail's area that we have had no paper timetables since the middle of 2020.

After protests, we hear that Northern Rail is to provide paper timetable displays at all of its stations from mid-December this year. This is better than nothing, but not sufficient. Northern Rail produced a welcome map to illustrate engineering works. Unfortunately it had a couple of errors, including showing Redcar British Steel station, which closed two years ago.

■ ■ £20m new station

Plans for a new £20 million station at Elland in West Yorkshire have been revealed by the combined authority. "This project would transform Elland town centre," said Councillor Jane Scullion. Walking and cycling links to the town centre are crucial in the outline planning application to Calderdale Council.



■ ■ Access bid for Halifax

Passengers campaigning for Access for All improvements are being encouraged to take part in a feedback survey of £30 million plans to upgrade Halifax station. The plans include installing solar panels, a 'green' roof and low-carbon heating.

You can find the survey here: <https://www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/embeds/projects/11903/survey-tools/11779>

■ ■ November £10 rover

Penistone line rail campaigners welcomed the return of the popular Northern Day Rover promotion which, for November only, allowed travel throughout the extensive Northern Rail network for £10 (£17.50 for Saturday and Sunday).

The offer required people to collect three tokens from their local newspaper before using the Rover to hop on and off trains all day. Depending on your nearest station,

you could visit Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Southport, Sheffield, York and Scunthorpe. A map of the Northern network can be seen by earthing online for "northern network map".

■ ■ Canal maps for rail users

Northern has teamed up with the Canal & River Trust, to highlight Yorkshire's waterside walks which are easily accessed by train. The maps are available to pick up in five train stations along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal: Saltaire, Shipley, Bingley, Skipton and Keighley. The trust's research shows that the 2,000-mile canal network provides around £1 billion of savings to the NHS each year through health and wellbeing benefits offered to everyone. Spending time by water can make people happier and healthier, it says.

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

'Feel good' rail trip for mums and babies



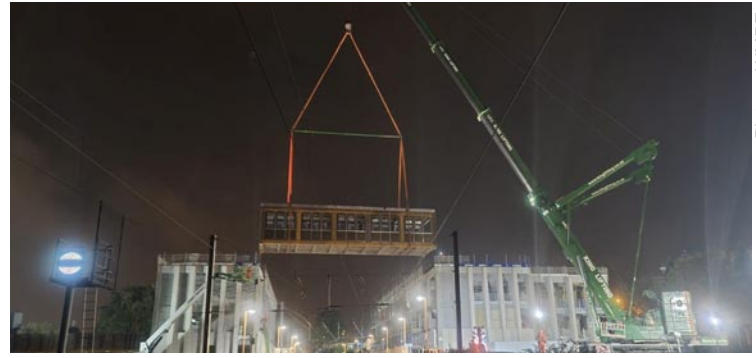
PENNINE WAY: Babies take the train to Edale

Babies may not be welcome in the House of Commons, but mothers and babies in South Yorkshire enjoyed a day out on Northern services as part of a scheme to encourage young families to feel comfortable on the railway.

Northern teamed up with High Peak and Hope Valley community rail partnership and South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive in October to run the Sling Express from Darnall station in Sheffield to Edale. A total of 11

mums and their children were fitted with slings borrowed from the Sheffield Sling Library and Surgery – which offers a collection of hundreds of slings and carriers to try out, allowing parents to borrow a carrier to take home. Once kitted out, the group took the train to Edale, where they enjoyed drinks and cakes before being given a tour of the Edale visitor centre and local area by Anna Jennings, a Peak park ranger.

◆◆◆◆ Recruit a new member for Railfuture



Picture: WMIRE

BIG LIFT: A footbridge from University station over the canal to Birmingham University campus was craned in early in October. Later in the month, this fully glazed passenger bridge (above) between University station's platforms was winched into place

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■ ■ Big lift at University station

Work continues at pace to have University station finished in time for next year's Commonwealth Games as part of a £56 million upgrade. The footbridge over the canal to Birmingham University campus will be used by thousands of passengers when it opens next year. The station serves the campus and also Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It is one of the busiest stations in the region. The new station buildings have been described as "flat packed". They are built off-site and assembled on-site.

■ ■ Rail freight for city centre

Railfuture West Midlands has suggested changes in the way freight trains make their way through and around Birmingham. Our suggestions were part of the branch submission to the West Midlands Rail Executive review of its rail investment strategy. Our other improvements include giving the Lawley/ Lander St Freightliner terminal a new lease of life as a "last mile" feeder for goods into the city centre. Currently, lorries with deep sea containers from the rail depot form 10% of the road traffic on that section of the Middle Ring Road A38 in central Birmingham. Changing the depot's use would fit in with Birmingham City Council environmental policies. The depot currently generates approximately 240 lorry movements a day.

■ ■ Branch open meeting

Having been the first Railfuture branch ever to hold a hybrid (face-to-face and online) AGM in September, we will continue to offer this to our committee and members.

■ ■ Community partnerships

Community rail partnerships are going from strength to strength, with the Shakespeare line being used as a model for others by the industry. The Worcestershire CRP reached its second birthday in November with an anniversary event in the Guildhall Worcester, where the Friends of Droitwich Spa Station presented their

experiences of forming a station adoption group and their achievements to date. In conjunction with Wychavon district council, Wheels2Rail events have taken place at Evesham and Pershore where families had their bikes checked for road worthiness by Doctor Bike, then Bikeability, who tested their safe riding and took them riding on the safest route from and to the station. This was so successful that another date has been found to accommodate those unable to book on the first date.

■ ■ Cross-City Seven

Railfuture West Midlands helped set up Cross-City Seven, a user group for the seven stations between Five Ways and Longbridge on this part of the Birmingham Cross-City line. We have plans to help create the same for the new stations on the Camphill line when they are opened.

■ ■ West Midlands Railway

West Midlands rail passengers are enduring high levels of cancellations by West Midlands Railway, especially on the Snow Hill lines, with very little advance notice bar a sign at Worcester Foregate Street and Kidderminster, and nothing on WMR's website. There have been gaps with no-service for up to five hours on some Hereford services. This has started to make passengers revert to using cars to get to work, and there have been regular calls on social media for demonstrations at Stourbridge Junction and other stations.

■ ■ Very light rail

A new form of "affordable" very light rail track was unveiled at Coventry in September. The city council and Warwick University have been involved in the design, which involves the tracks being installed only 30cm beneath the road surface. It is hoped expensive work in moving utilities such as water, gas and electricity can therefore be minimised.

www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch

No way to treat the Heart of Wales line

Andrew Tweed lives in Llandrindod on the Heart of Wales line, which runs from Swansea to Shrewsbury. He wants people throughout the country to be aware of the way this vital service has been treated during the Covid pandemic.

This line through Central Wales is one of the most scenic in the country, and consequently is often used for rail tours. The timetabled services are, however, very sparse. Before the pandemic there were four through trains each way Monday-Friday, plus an early morning Llandovery-Swansea, and Llandrindod-Shrewsbury. Four trains each way ran on Saturdays, and two on Sundays.

SINCE THE PANDEMIC

When lockdown started, the line had only a single daily train each way, and then this was later expanded to two. We were then given a new timetable which still remains in use.

Only two of the southbound trains now run to Swansea. One stops short at Llanelli in order to return as a northbound service to Shrewsbury. A rail-replacement bus connects with this train each day to transfer rail passengers the 15 miles to Swansea. The last train runs to Carmarthen, without any way of getting to Swansea.

Only two of the northbound services run from Swansea. The first train starts at Carmarthen, and it is not possible for rail travellers from Swansea to connect with this train. The second northbound train starts from Llanelli. For rail passengers travelling from Swansea, there is a 25-minute wait at Llanelli.

It may be that the timetable has been planned to suit the operating convenience of the trains or railway staff, but it is certainly not friendly for rail passengers.

TRAIN CANCELLATIONS

This summer has seen frequent cancellation of train services, or services terminating short of the original destination. This is generally blamed on "resource availability", which I think is the phrase now used to mean staff being unavailable. I appreciate that during the pandemic there may be those who are unable to work due to a positive result from a test for Covid, but



LLANGAMMARCH: A Swansea-bound train leaving the station in 2018

when the Heart of Wales line has such a minimal service it might make more sense to cancel services on routes with an hourly (or more frequent) service, where passengers are at least able to use a later train. We do not have this luxury on the Heart of Wales.

ROLLING STOCK

Services are provided by class 153 or 150 Sprinters. Not only are they now over 30 years old, but they are not really suitable for the line. The seats are badly spaced, the window views are restricted, and the noise when travelling (especially when the windows are open – which is essential in hot weather as they do not have air-conditioning) is deafening. We were promised that refurbished class 170 units (now working on some routes in South Wales) would come to the line, but it has since been said that none will be coming to

us. Transport for Wales Rail does have some new stock coming into use on other routes, but lags far behind other parts of England and Scotland where smart new train sets are already in use.

THE FUTURE

There is a promise of an extra train each way in the future. But confidence was damaged by closures last year in the south (at Llangennech) and in the north (between Llangynllo and Knighton). Currently there are no weekend services north of Llandrindod due to work on the track.

The truth is that when people want to travel, but the service is not provided, they choose to travel some other way. Some train operating companies have released tickets at bargain prices to encourage train travel again. Yet little is being done to promote train travel here. On one day in late November, only a single train ran each way.

London & South East

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■ ■ Hoo peninsula campaign

Railfuture's Roger Blake and Chris Fribbins gave a presentation to Gravesend Railway Enthusiasts Society about our Hoo Peninsula Railway campaign. We advocate the construction of a Higham chord to allow passenger trains, and a new station at Hoo St Werburgh to provide a rail service (using the existing freight line) to the 12,000 new homes planned for the Hoo peninsula. Railfuture suggests it should be included in Transport for the South East's 30-year strategic investment plan. The presentation can be downloaded from the Railfuture website. Search for Gravesend.

■ ■ Assembly discussion

Railfuture directors Neil Middleton and Roger Blake joined a London Assembly transport committee discussion on rail in relation to changing work and commuter patterns, ticketing and fares, accessibility and Crossrail. We submitted a follow-up memorandum specifically on fares.

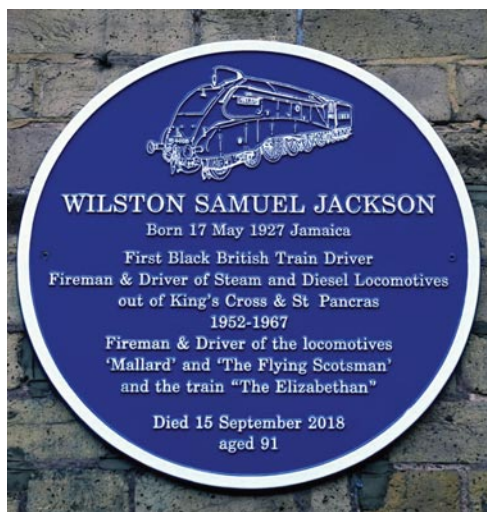
■ ■ Cuxton chord for better connections

Railfuture's Chris Fribbins and Roger Blake took part in Network Rail's workshop on North and East Kent Connectivity. We suggested a new Cuxton Chord to link the Medway Valley and Chatham main lines. It would provide the

infrastructure for new direct rail links between the Medway Towns, Maidstone and Gatwick Airport via Tonbridge and Redhill.

■ ■ Black History Month celebration

Britain's first black train driver, Wilston Samuel Jackson, was honoured in October (Black history



month) with a blue plaque at London King's Cross, where he worked as a driver. Mr Jackson died in 2018. Despite Jamaican-born Mr Jackson

being appointed nearly 60 years ago, only 10% of Britain's drivers are currently from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, according to recent figures from union Aslef.

■ ■ Consultation work continues

The London and South East branch of Railfuture responded to consultations on the Lewes local plan, improving transport links between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet, meeting the UK's housing demand, South Western Railway's December 2022 timetable, fare reform proposed in the Williams-Shapps plan for rail, changes to LNER ticket office hours, draft West Sussex and Surrey transport plans, Oxford-Cambridge Arc spatial framework priorities, South Coast corridor improvement (Brighton-Pevensy) and delivering new homes and community facilities in Ringmer.

All Railfuture's regional and national consultation responses can be found on the Railfuture website.

■ ■ Railfuture updates

London and South East and all Railfuture members can subscribe free to the branch's monthly newsletter *inter-raise*. The newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from

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

Government flunks exam

Railfuture set the questions and marked the papers for the autumn statement and COP26 exams. The government scored an epic fail. Railfuture was frustrated but not surprised.

Rail is the most sustainable form of transport, so modal shift to rail is the best way to decarbonise transport, particularly for freight. But there was no mention of rail in the government's stakeholder communications toolkit for the COP26 transport day. The focus was entirely on electric cars which, though part of the answer, need vast amounts of energy both to build and to run. They also depend on the availability of rare minerals for the batteries and they still create air pollution. The autumn statement reduced air passenger duty for domestic flights and froze road fuel duty for the eleventh year, hardly conducive to decarbonisation.

There was no equivalent promise of a zero rail fare rise. If the retail price index +1% formula is followed, rail fares will go up by 4.8%. The Department for Transport published its decarbonisation plan in July, promising a rolling programme of rail electrification. Yet no funding for the programme has been committed. Nor have there been fleet orders for battery or hydrogen trains for use on lines where electrification would not be viable. To meet the government's target of net zero by 2050, Network Rail would need to electrify 448 track km per year, but last year achieved only 179 – and the present lack of approved and funded schemes means that even less will be achieved in the next few years. When the rail network enhancements pipeline was published in 2017, annual updates were promised, but the last was two years ago. The government's Integrated Rail Plan adopts Railfuture's smart plan for HS2E to Nottingham and Sheffield, and offers faster electric Leeds-Manchester travel, but fails Bradford, leaves a Leeds-Sheffield gap still to be decided, and funding is not committed. With no commitment to funding, engineering teams cannot be kept together, causing a loss of skills and knowledge in the



Chris Page and the viaduct at Balcombe, Sussex

supply chain and so higher costs when the government finally accepts that investment is essential. The autumn statement did announce £6.9 billion for rail, light rail and buses in the city regions, but only £1.5 billion of this is new money; the rest is a reheat of a 2019 announcement. A few crumbs were thrown, in the form of 13 Restoring Your Railway ideas fund awards, and funding for the next stage of reopening

Totton-Fawley and Wellington and Cullompton stations, but at the same time development consent for

Portishead was delayed by six months. No other new rail investment was announced; a raft of essential rail projects are waiting. A survey by

Network Rail showed that most people know that rail is green, but we in Railfuture know rail must also be convenient,

affordable and comfortable to attract people out of their cars. In the wake of the pandemic, £5.7 billion was announced to support the rail industry recovery but this comes with severe Treasury cost control which prevents train operators from marketing a service people want to use. The Treasury should see rail as a revenue opportunity rather than a cost problem.

Effectively, the government has put rail into palliative care. Why? Is it because it believes the rail industry is unable to deliver value? Is it pinning its hopes on commuters returning to revive city centres, but hedging its bets? Has it taken a strategic decision that transport should

not depend on the cooperation of unions which it sees as militant? Or does it believe the impression that it gives the public, that decarbonisation will come without a cost, so it does not need to invest? Please let your MP know your views. Simple economics tells us that decarbonisation, not just of transport, will not be cheap. If it were going to save money, it would have happened already. But if we do

not invest now we can expect a much larger impact in future as we cope with global warming effects.

Railfuture will keep pressing the government to invest in modal shift to rail before it is too late.

This is the most effective way to decarbonise transport and combat climate change. For news of our campaigns and our response to the Integrated Rail Plan, see www.railfuture.org.uk

railwatch

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Railfuture's annual conference will be held next year in Leeds on 15 September with the theme: A turning point for the railways

Integrated Rail Plan Crumbs of comfort

By Bruce Williamson
Railfuture media

There is a lot to welcome in the government's much-criticised Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands which was launched in November.

Electrification of the Midland main line and TransPennine routes will bring faster, more reliable and greener trains.

Contactless integrated ticketing has worked well in London for years, so it is good that this will be rolled out in the Midlands and the North of England.

Passengers in Nottingham and Sheffield will get faster times from London and Birmingham, with Manchester just 33 minutes from Leeds. The proposed mass transit system for the West Yorkshire area is badly needed.

Railfuture has long advocated the smart way of connecting HS2E to East Midlands Parkway rather than bypassing Nottingham and Sheffield.

However, the proposed line (dubbed Northern Powerhouse Rail) has been drastically scaled back and Bradford misses out badly. There seems to be no hope of improving the city's poor service to London.

There is no indication of journey time between Manchester and Bradford, no indication of capacity enhancement between Northallerton and Newcastle, and nothing new for Manchester to Sheffield.

Some train journeys will still be slower than they were a century ago. And there have been no funding commitments yet, except £200 million for the Leeds metro, although some of that money seems to be for electrifying Leeds-Bradford.

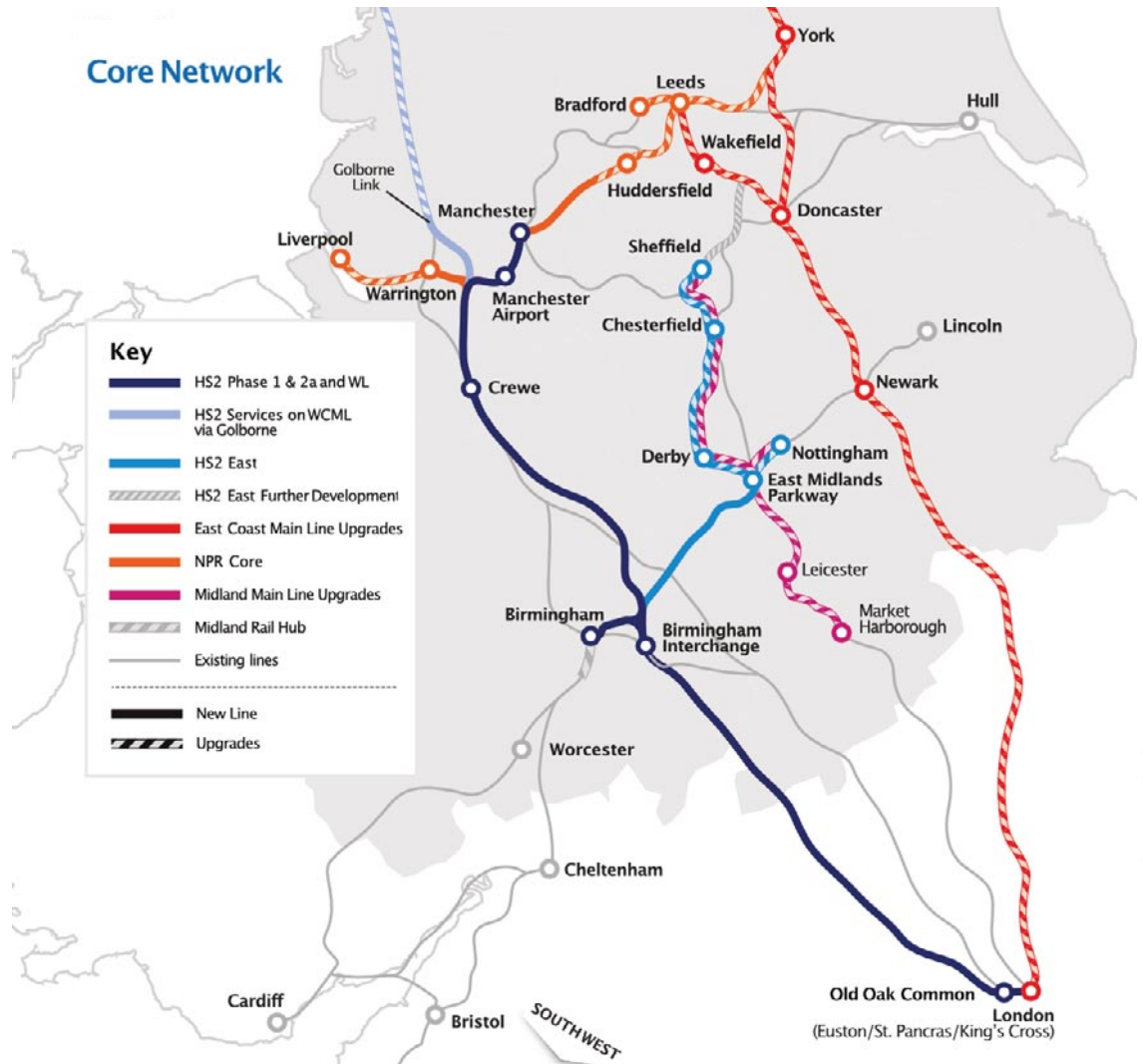
There remains a rather critical question mark over how to connect Leeds.

What is going ahead?

- The HS2 line from London to Manchester with new stations at Manchester Airport and an HS2 station adjacent to Piccadilly.

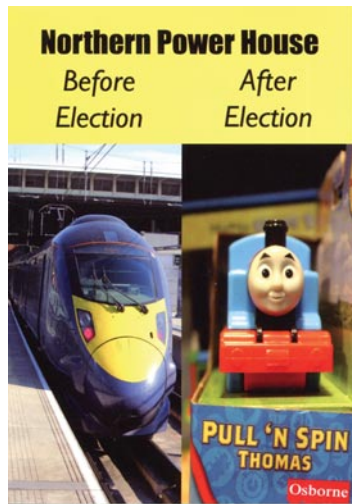
- A high speed line from Birmingham to East Midlands Parkway, with trains continuing to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield on an upgraded, electrified Midland main line. In the previous plan many high speed services were to miss Sheffield.

- Completing electrification of the Midland main line to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield, for which Railfuture



COLOUR-CODED FUTURE: Hatched lines are upgrades of existing lines, rather than new build
The full 162 page report can be read and downloaded from <https://tinyurl.com/53r5tvke>

Map: DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT



MIND THE GAP: Cartoonist George Blair's cynical view

has campaigned for years. Work was halted on MML electrification four years ago.

- A high speed line from Warrington to Marsden (seven miles short of Huddersfield). Liverpool loses out.

- Electrification and upgrading of the TransPennine main line between Manchester, Leeds and York. The upgrading is said to include gauge clearance work for shipping containers. Bradford loses out but should get faster trains to Leeds.

Cartoon: www.gbme.co

- Speeding up the East Coast main line with selective upgrades.
- A study into getting high speed trains to Leeds.

Northern Powerhouse Rail was announced by chancellor George Osborne seven years ago as HS3, the logical next step after HS2.

Critics have said the IRP's upgrading of existing lines, rather than building new ones, will cause engineering delays for years. Rather than this miserable "make do and mend" approach, it would be better to cancel road schemes in the south.

Some said the IRP was woefully inadequate, robbery, shameless and laughable.

The government countered that it would provide 180 miles of new electrification, 110 miles of new high speed railway and the savings would free up money to improve local services.

Upgrades are essential but will not deliver the improvements in reliability, capacity, and journey times of a new line. Before the plan was announced, the Prime Minister was reported to be locked in negotiations with Chancellor Rishi Sunak over demands for 50% cuts in funding. The Chancellor's autumn financial statement at

the end of October was labelled a missed opportunity to unleash the potential of rail.

It shocked environmentalists in the run-up to COP26 by reducing domestic air passenger duty, reaffirming road-building plans and continuing the fuel duty freeze which encourages car use.

"It makes little sense to cut air passenger duty on routes where a journey in Britain can already be made by train in under five hours," said Andy Bagnall of the Rail Delivery Group.

Pass it on

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