

*rail*watch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture by IAN BROWN

‘WEDGE OF LIGHT’ STATION
One of three new rail stations in New York
The World Trade Center site – the Oculus
Full story: Pages 2 and 3

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From Ground Zero to stunning new station

The "wedge of light" Oculus station in New York is an impressive monument to rail.

Designed by architect Santiago Calatrava, it was opened in 2016.

Ian Brown's page one picture shows the impressive interior, which is lined with white marble.

The Hufton + Crow picture shows the dramatic exterior.

The £3 billion station, on the site of the former Hudson Terminal which dated back to 1909, is now in the middle of skyscrapers.

The station replaced one destroyed in the 2001 New York's World Trade Center terrorist attack.

Now at what was once Ground Zero, more than 300,000 people go through the station doors every day.

It is designed to illuminate the shopping centre and



EXTERIOR: New York's Oculus station

Picture: Hufton + Crow

underground transportation hub, which is served by 12 subway and suburban rail lines. The station has five tracks and four platforms which are four floors below ground level and is

in the middle of a turning loop. A network of underground pedestrian connections allows passengers to change trains. Oculus is composed of

smoothly curved steel ribs, painted white and combined with glass, arranged in a large elliptical shape that rises from the ground to form a dome over the lobby, free of internal columns.

Delays dog the birth of Great British Railways

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

There was a period soon after the arrival of Rishi Sunak in Number 10 when it seemed that Great British Railways was dead. With its grandiose name, it was an unwelcome reminder of boosterist Boris. The idea, the centrepiece of the Williams-Shapps report which arose out of the May 2018 timetable debacle, did not find favour with Sunak's new team.

For months, it appeared that the plan for an all-singing all-dancing organisation at the heart of Britain's railways would be quietly dropped, despite tens of millions having been spent on the concept, mostly on 235 people working for it. Yes, you read that right, and pretty eye popping when one considers that most are seconded from major consultancy firms who typically require a daily rate of a couple of thousand quid or so.

When Mark Harper arrived as the third transport secretary in three months and cast his accountant's eye over the idea, his instinct was to ditch the whole plan and create a more modest restructuring of the

railway. GBR was deemed to be too powerful and would stifle private sector initiative. Rail minister Huw Merriman was particularly sceptical of allowing Great British Railways to wield both control and power. Instead, they wanted GBR to be a "guiding mind" making strategic decisions but allowing the private sector more free rein. Was it necessary, they wondered, to create a large organisation, which would encompass Network Rail and be the dominant force in rail? There was soul-searching and debate, with rumour abounding that GBR would be stillborn. However, with the George Bradshaw lecture in February, the first major outing by Harper, it became clear that GBR was still breathing, but would be weakened. The new emphasis, set out in the speech, was for a revived private sector with a key role in the railways. GBR would have around 200-300 staff in its Derby office, but would be

involved only in overall strategy rather than day-to-day management. Among the many questions about how precisely this will work in practice, the overarching one is whether there will be legislation in the King's Speech, expected in June. Without it, the contracting out process – franchising has been abolished – will remain under the control of the Department for Transport. That is because the legislation, which effectively remains the Railways Act 1993, though it was subsumed into the 2005 Act, determines that it is the Department for Transport that has the power to award

contracts. According to rail industry insiders, the chances of getting legislation are rated at only around 25% as there will be a lot of other, more electorally significant, acts that the government will want to see passed in its final session. There

are numerous other questions which remain to be answered such as who will make decisions on rolling stock, fares, investment and so on.

As for the greater emphasis on private sector involvement, it is difficult to see how this can be delivered without a return to franchising and the passing of revenue risk to private firms. But there have been no answers to any of these major questions.

The lack of legislation will mean that the industry remains in a state of limbo. This will be helpful to the Labour party if it wins the election, as it will start without being encumbered by recently passed Conservative legislation, but the uncertainty remains a major problem for railway managers already having to cope with poor performance, industrial disputes and the changing patterns resulting from the pandemic.

Uncertainty is the last thing they need, but it remains the dominant feature of the industry.

You can listen to Christian on his regular podcast, *Calling all Stations*, produced by Cogitamus



Christian Wolmar

Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

By Ian Brown

The current situation with our railways is dire, mainly because the world of transport has changed following the Covid pandemic.

Our railways failed to refocus on the growing leisure and wellbeing market.

The RMT needs to concentrate on addressing the flexibility needed to provide a seven-day service.

The working week does not have to be longer but there has to be flexibility, especially in providing a proper service on Sundays, increasingly a peak day.

Continued confrontation could end up with job cuts.

The railway historians among us point out that implementing productivity exercises has always been difficult.

The biggest failing is the lack of industry leadership.

Unless the railway adjusts, we may be back to an era of decline.

There are signs of this already with service withdrawals (Lancashire Dalesrail) and frequency reductions, for instance West Yorkshire electric Metro services.

These cutbacks are blamed on the operator's inability to staff the services.

The market for rail travel is strong so it is important to address this issue.

The attitude of union leaders has not changed a great deal, but what about both government and industry leadership?

The government started well as Covid receded, aided by better-informed rail ministers.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper, in his George Bradshaw address, recognised that the current system was broken.

His solution was to go ahead with Great British Railways (not my choice of title) which could be a one-off opportunity to put leadership and direction back into the industry which it has lacked since privatisation.

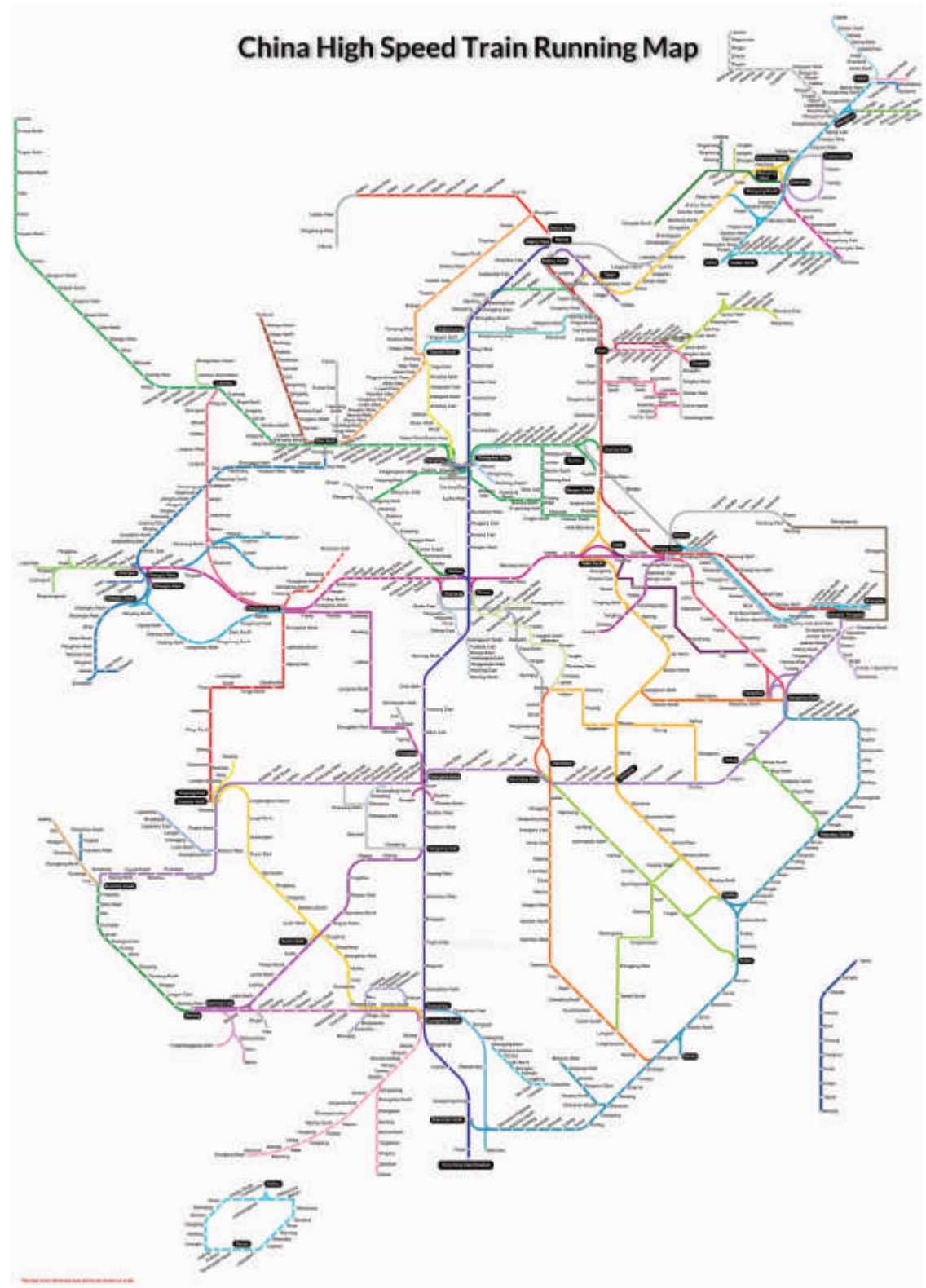
The industry could then focus on passengers and freight customers rather than playing the money-go-round game.

The Bradshaw lecture could be a turning point, unless existing train operating and open access companies hijack the process to maintain their financial status quo.

Companies making money from the existing system are unlikely to give up easily.

However, the risks continue to grow, and there is doubt whether the government can justify continuing to bail out contracts.

The doubling of the number of



THINK BIG: China has created a 40,000 kilometre high speed rail network since 2008 Map: Chinese Railways

passengers over the past 10 years is partly a result of train operator marketing expertise, as well as a growing economy and travel market.

The fundamental issue, however, is the constraint on growth caused by the failure to invest in modern track and signalling.

There is just not enough infrastructure, so its use must be carefully planned, with operators contracted to provide an optimal service, including allowing for

freight. That is the real reason behind GBR, which must behave as an informed client with the private sector bidding for involvement. It will not be nationalisation.

Sadly, the government appears to have lost interest in the whole GBR exercise as well as investment in railways generally.

This shows up most in the north of England, and the government's stewardship of HS2 is laughable.

HS2 was about long-term

investment in the economy. Short termism is back with a vengeance, to the extent that deferring Euston opening to 2040 will actually increase overall costs. More cost and no benefit!

There is now no general pipeline of rail investment schemes, particularly in the north where the Northern Powerhouse high speed route is confined to the upgrade of an existing trans-Pennine route. We

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Can Britain learn its lesson on rail?

> FROM PAGE 3

will get electrification only to Stalybridge, plus a capacity upgrade in the Huddersfield-Dewsbury area. Significant, yes, but not Powerhouse.

Down south, creating the new rail route from Oxford to Cambridge seems to be proceeding, although even here the government fails to grasp its significance as a trunk route, particularly for freight.

With all this gloom, the diagnosis could be that there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

An optimist such as me can, however, see plenty of light.

Just as in the smoky tunnels in our steam yesteryears, the way ahead can sometimes be difficult to see.

Railfuture is not a political body but, as observers of politics, can we perhaps foresee that the attitudes of politicians are likely to change?

They ought to be able to recognise that railways have a significant role to play on issues of economic, environmental and social inclusion (now called levelling up) and devolution.

Limited devolution to the mayors of Manchester and the West Midlands was envisaged grudgingly with the GBR plan.

What happened to Transport for the North?

The present government seems bent on preventing people outside London from enjoying Overground-style improvements.

The voting public could change all



CAMBODIA PAST

that. The UK's approach to HS2 is blatantly pathetic and does not bear comparison with overseas developments.

We in Britain sat back and watched high speed train services appear in Japan in the 1960s and French TGV construction in the 1980s.

It is now happening all over again. China has constructed 40,000 kilometres of high speed railways since 2008. That is 100 times more than HS2 even before it was reduced in scope.

The same applies all over the Middle East, India and Far East. I visited the lovely Phnom Penh station in Cambodia pre-Covid. There were no trains at all.

Now Cambodia is embarking on a high speed line to Thailand. I mention China and Cambodia together because China is the richest country in the region, Cambodia the poorest in GDP terms.

Both ends of the spectrum see



CAMBODIA FUTURE

Pictures: IAN BROWN

investment in rail as key to their future economic growth.

This also applies to India and Saudi Arabia. Even the USA now has a high(ish) speed railway – Brightline, privately financed, between Orlando and Miami in Florida.

The USA is also investing heavily in its conventional passenger railway and transit systems. For example, New York has three spanning new spectacular passenger terminals, and the national passenger operator Amtrak is obtaining new trains for the whole network. Canada is similar, with new passenger railway equipment and new transit investment in key cities such as Toronto and Montreal. They are all doing this for economic reasons, not sentiment.

It is not obvious what rail world will exist in Britain when the smoke of reorganisation finally clears.

It is obvious though that there must be effective leadership and stewardship of the rail industry focussed on customers.

This must replace internal power struggles, endless strikes and conflicting objectives.

The government must put the framework in place and set clear objectives for the industry.

The industry itself must deliver for its passengers, freight customers and indeed our national economic, environmental and social objectives.

Railfuture's chair Chris Page has written to Transport minister Huw Merriman on what he should do, including, for goodness sake, the need to get on with GBR implementation.

Well worth a read. You can see the Railfuture letter at:

www.railfuture.org.uk/display3256

Railfuture intends to hold government and the rail industry to account, including on delivery of an effective GBR organisation and investment in our railways.

■ **Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture's policy director**

East Midlands



IMAGE OF THE PLAN: Leicester City Council
anthony.kay@railfuture.org.uk

Leicester station upgrade

Railfuture East Midlands responded to a public consultation on proposals to remodel Leicester station at street level, supporting the proposed improvements as long as they do not prevent possible future developments at platform level.

There will be a new entrance facing the city centre, providing greatly improved pedestrian access, a more spacious ticket hall, a new secure cycle hub, and better use will be made of the porte cochere, converting it from a taxi rank to a space for retail, cafes and bars. The proposals are backed by £17.6 million from the government's levelling up fund. A new free electric bus service was introduced in April for an 18-month trial period, providing a circuit of the city centre (Monday-Saturday) and also connecting the rail station and Haymarket bus station.

Midland main line electrification

Railfuture is concerned about reports that electrification of the Midland main line north of Wigston may be cancelled, having already been cancelled a few years ago and then revived in the government's 2021 integrated rail plan. Railfuture East Midlands vice-chair Terry Holt has written to Rushcliffe MP Ruth Edwards, pointing out the efficiency benefits of a rolling programme of electrification, the low per capita transport funding for our region, and that cancellation would leave the new Great British Railways HQ at Derby 30 miles from the nearest electrified line. The MP has asked rail minister Huw Merriman to respond.

East Midlands Counties Combined Authority
Railfuture East Midlands continues to debate

the implications of the proposed combined mayoral authority for Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. To aid us in this, several members of the branch had an online meeting with Railfuture Yorkshire colleagues to explore their experiences of working with combined authorities.

We noted the significant differences between the two regions, not least the lack of predecessor passenger transport executives in the East Midlands.

Railfuture has a role in seeking to influence transport policy so, as the East Midlands Counties Combined Authority develops, we intend to establish a constructive working relationship. We are grateful that Railfuture Yorkshire colleagues shared their valuable experience.

Matlock-Nottingham service

East Midlands Railway has restored the full hourly Matlock-Nottingham through service in the May timetable. The service had been curtailed to a Matlock-Derby service during the Covid pandemic, and Railfuture had joined local people calling for the through service to be restored. EMR also reintroduced 14 pre-Covid services on its Leicester-Lincoln route.

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

The borderlands disaster area

By David Woodward
(Self-confessed Grumpy Old Man)

Just before I wrote this article, my wife and I were coming home from Wrexham to Penyffordd by car. Trains? What trains?

We were passing Caergwrlle station when we were stopped behind a rail replacement bus.

As we scraped past it, another rail replacement bus appeared, heading in the opposite direction! Such is the situation on the Wrexham-Bidston line, marketed as the Borderlands line.

Ever since the Welsh Government took over the railways in Wales, as far as North Wales is concerned it has been an almost complete disaster.

As an example, the “service” along my local line, the unfortunate, “destined-for-smaller-things” Wrexham-Bidston line, has been downgraded to virtually zero.

I can rarely travel by train since I was seriously injured in a 2020 accident, but I used to be able to watch the trains from my house before housing development obscured my view. Now there are none to speak of anyway.

Nationally, Transport for Wales is nearer the bottom than the top of the lists for their record on both punctuality and cancellations.

The situation in North Wales has been caused solely by TFW’s decision to pull out our already ancient class 150 Sprinter trains because South Wales needed them.

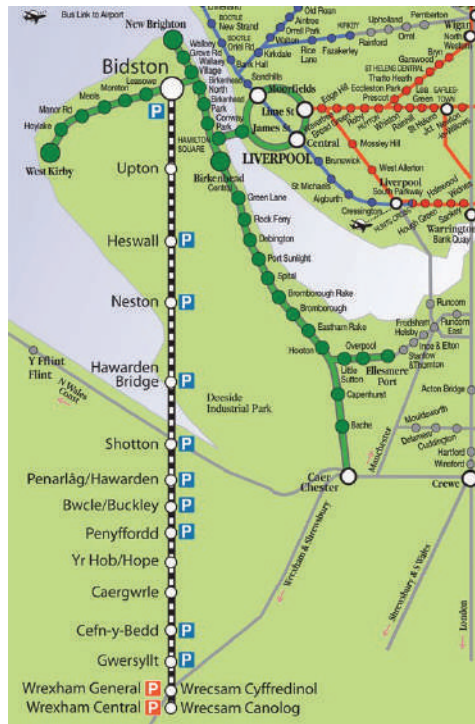
At the same time, local councillors in Wrexham and the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users’ Association were promised two trains an hour for most of the day. So near, but so far. At the moment, we cannot even rely on one train.

A few insiders know that, from early April, a bimodal battery electric diesel class 230 train started working up and down the line – empty – but supposedly involved in driver training.

Virtually no one else knows it is there!

TFW states that it needs the Sprinters because the class 175 trains, once so comfortable and reliable, are now breaking down and requiring long repairs. Sometimes, we are told, they catch fire.

In any case, they are soon to be dispatched to other companies as arranged by the Office of Rail and Road, possibly before the necessary



Map: Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users’ Association

supplies of new trains arrive. For our line, we need five class 230s or class 197s. What have we got? None actually providing any rail services.

What are our members of the Senedd doing about it? Nothing! Only the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users’ Association is fighting for this line, and we should be grateful that our committee – our chairman in particular – is doing the fighting for us.

Elsewhere in North Wales, the picture is a little brighter. New CAF-built 197s (assembled in Newport) are now grinding round the sharp curves of the Blaenau Ffestiniog line, making their future there look a bit doubtful.

I should think the wear and tear on the severe curves could result in their removal.

The class 197s are also appearing on the Chester-Liverpool via Runcorn line and Holyhead-Manchester services. I have taken

only one trip on a 197 (to Manchester) and I was impressed by the design, especially the quietness and acceleration from stops.

My sole criticism is of the non-stop barrage of announcements in Welsh and English talking about the station we had just left (why?), the next station and all subsequent stations.

We were arriving at some stops almost before the announcements were finished. It cannot be very pleasant listening to that all the way between Holyhead and Manchester.

At the moment, there is no way I would plan another journey by train anywhere in Wales. I simply do not trust TFW to produce a train, let alone a new one.

In South Wales there are ambitious plans for tram-trains and new trains already around.

I get the feeling that, if it is for the south, TFW can find (and waste) the resources somehow.

Witness the proposed introduction of the test circuit for new trains (Wales’ own Velim circuit), the purchase of Cardiff Airport for about £52 million in 2013 (now worth about £15 million), the Swansea Bay tidal power scheme, and the MotoGP race track in Ebbw Vale which was going to cost £7.3 million in 2017.

Back on our line, the crossover in Penyffordd station was removed years ago, following the loss of Tunnel Cement traffic to road haulage. It had been the only crossover on the whole line between Wrexham and Shotton.

Now the Hanson Cement sidings need relaying and the crossover reinstated so that trains do not have to run all the way to Shotton in order to return to Wrexham and beyond, which means more fuel, more pollution and more expense.

There are electrification projects down south but nothing is being considered in our area, not even electrification of the North Wales main line which has been crying out for modernisation for years.

Electrification of the North Wales main line would put us back on the map and would contribute far more to a reduction in global warming than all the Welsh Valley lines put together.

It is long past time there was a change of attitude in Welsh Government, which is as southern-centric as the government in London.

“Levelling-up” just does not happen in Wales, certainly as far as the railways are concerned.

Railfuture supports user group in its battle to improve services

By Julian Langston

Railfuture is very concerned about the continuing problems on the Wrexham-Bidston line.

The causes are twofold. First, introduction of the five class 230 trains, sold to TFW by Vivarail for use on the line, has been severely delayed. Although the first unit arrived in July 2020, only one unit entered passenger service on 3 April 2023, operating a two-hourly service alongside a rail-replacement bus.

The trains failed to keep booked time and suffered more failures than expected after so much testing.

Second, class 175 trains were withdrawn from the Marches line (Newport-Shrewsbury) following

on-board fires which prompted the Office of Rail and Road to serve an improvement notice on TFW. Class 150s were taken off Wrexham-Bidston to replace the missing 175s.

Wrexham-Bidston has been left with buses which take twice as long as trains, and passengers have been deserting the railway.

This is not the first time there have been no trains. The service was suspended for several weeks in 2018 “because more trains than usual needed maintenance”.

Although a service has now resumed, Railfuture affiliate, the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users’ Association, has lost patience. It has no confidence in TFW senior management and has issued a

statement concluding: “The WBRUA believes that the Welsh Government should instigate an independent review of TFW to determine where the root cause of the problems lies and what needs to be done to rectify the situation.

“In the meantime, as a minimum, the Welsh Government should be demanding reassurances from TFW that it is exploring all options for returning regular passenger services to the Wrexham-Bidston line as soon as humanly possible.” There have been suggestions that the service should be transferred to Merseyrail, a more reliable operator, aligned to the Mersey-Dee region rather than South Wales. Railfuture’s North West and Cymru/Wales branches have been liaising and have agreed to

endorse WBRUA’s position. A change of operator could be in passengers’ best interests.

In the medium term, a through service to Liverpool is sought, which is supported by the Welsh Government, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the cross-border political and business alliance group Growth Track 360. This could be achieved by using the battery-electric class 777s recently introduced on the Merseyrail network, although more units and charging infrastructure would be needed.

WBRUA’s full statement can be seen at

www.wbrua.org/wbrua-statement-270323

Pass it on

There are many ways to promote Railfuture and encourage people to join our campaign for a bigger and better railway.

With a few exceptions, every member receives a copy of *Railwatch* which can be read – and then passed on to friends and relatives who may be potential members.

Some members volunteer to receive bulk supplies of *Railwatch* which they distribute in schools, colleges, doctors' and dentists' surgeries and local libraries. With Covid restrictions in mind, please ensure you get permission.

If you would like to join this simple campaign to get Railfuture's name known more widely, please contact Ray King at

editor@railwatch.org.uk and say how many extra copies of *Railwatch* you would like to be posted to you.

Eco-friendly

Railwatch has in the past been delivered in a see-through wrapper, made of starch film which was 100% compostable and biodegradable. Our despatchers now advise that it is cheaper to use a paper envelope which, of course, is easily recycled.

Waiting for Great British Railways

Early in May, outlining what routine funds the railway can expect over the next five years, Network Rail published its £44 billion plan for England and Wales "to make our green railway even greener".

It is more than doubling the budget, to £1.6 billion, for control period 7 (2024-2029) to make the railway more resilient to climate change.

Still awaited is firm news about legislation to set up Great British Railways, and road building continues to receive massive funding. Campaigners claimed the Department for Transport has required policy makers to ignore the negative climate impact of road building and traffic. The Transport Action Network called for the "disastrous" road building policy to be changed to encourage travel by public transport, walking and cycling.



Pete Myers



Owen O'Neill

New faces on the Railfuture board

Two new people have joined the Railfuture board – Pete Myers and Owen O'Neill.

Pete lives in Beverley, Yorkshire, and is well known to Railfuture Lincolnshire members, having been guest speaker at the branch's 2023 AGM in March. Pete recently retired from his position as stakeholder manager east at Northern Railway.

He said: "I have an up-to-date knowledge of how the modern (post COVID-19) railway works, including the somewhat fragile funding environment that it finds itself in. I can bring this knowledge to our organisation and, while it does not make me a railway expert, I do believe that I can use this knowledge to advise on policy and help represent us with the rail industry.

"My bailiwick has always been the North of England, and I understand the issues and challenges that are peculiar to the region, not least the needs of a part of the country with the economies focused in distinct urban areas, but with a potentially lucrative (and often untapped) leisure market. In addition, I understand the 'political' geography of the North, with powerful Metro Mayors, but equally large shire counties, all with differing needs.

"The next few years are going to be difficult for the rail industry. Costs are high and income has stalled since the pandemic. It is clear that the old franchising system, for all its merits, has probably run its course.

"Equally, perhaps the idea of a fully funded Great British Railways may now be too costly, so there will be change. I believe that the nation needs a body that can represent the users (and potential users) of the great asset which is our rail system. Railfuture needs to fill this void, and I am confident that I am in a position to help make this happen."

Owen is based in Birmingham and is a director of the Welland Valley Railway Development community interest company (CIC), Sustainable Transport Lutterworth Line CIC, and Sustainable Transport Midlands CIC. He is also a member of the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line.

He said: "My interest in public transport developed four years ago via a local campaign group. This switched me on to the fact that transport is our biggest carbon dioxide emitter. This led me to rail since it is one of the most efficient ways to move

people and goods. The mission of Railfuture matched my goals and, with the help of people I have met via Railfuture, led me to create and promote a *Restoring Your Railway* project in the East Midlands (Welland Valley Rail). My criterion was to create a project that connected the largest population with the smallest amount of infrastructure.

"Although not successful in securing funding, it has attracted considerable support among local MPs and local authorities, and good engagement with the sub-national transport body, which we hope to progress.

"I have a professional engineering background, and now have a reasonable grasp of engineering design of infrastructure and operations.

"Some people get excited by rolling stock and the colour of paint on the outside of it. It interests me to the extent that it is a key part of the system and customer experience. My questions tend towards Does it have level boarding? Is it reliable? Is it electric? Does the vehicle improve the customer experience, accessibility being a key part, and through improved experience promote modal shift?

"Key areas for me are achieving modal shift. Trams are an important part of the mix, as is integration with other modes providing the 'final mile', including active travel.

"The other area of interest for me is freight, since there are many benefits to be had from moving freight off road on to rail."

There were three board vacancies for a full three-year term. Two vacancies arose from the end of term for directors Jerry Alderson and Stewart Palmer. Stewart Palmer has decided not to stand again.

Jerry Alderson, who has been on the Railfuture board since 2005 and is director of finance and IT, has agreed to continue on the board. Pete Myers was co-opted on to the board in December following the death of Mike Rose.

With three candidates for three places, Jerry, Pete and Owen, there will be no need for an election in 2023.

In the interests of openness and providing members with information about the directors, their election statements can be found on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display3241

Eden Project potential for Morecambe's railway

By David Alexander

Northern Station Adopters
at Bare Lane

With the Government's £50 million levelling up award to the Eden North Project in Morecambe, upon which much of the future of the town is seemingly dependent, there is an urgent need to assess the possible effects on rail services to and from the local stations at Bare Lane, Morecambe and Heysham Harbour.

At an Eden Project summit in Morecambe in March, transport was an important issue.

The Lancaster & Skipton Rail User Group, in its March Newsletter, identified the need for some serious thinking about this, since the project is due to open by 2026.

The Northern Station Adopters at Bare Lane are also asking questions about the impact on our station.

1 Can we expect longer trains, which could see the currently out-of-use platform ends brought back into use?

2 Should there be a redoubling of the line between Bare Lane and Morecambe South Junction?

3 May we see some faster, limited stop services that run to and from Morecambe only?



The Eden Project Morecambe will follow the example of the Eden Project in Cornwall. It will include biomes shaped like mussels and will focus on the marine environment. Planning permission was granted last year and £50 million levelling up funding was granted in January. It is expected the year after next and to benefit the North West economy by £200 million per year.

Picture: Eden Project Morecambe

4 Could more through services be on the cards, including from Manchester, Liverpool, Preston and the North?

5 Can further improvements be made to services from West Yorkshire, as well as improving services to Heysham Harbour for connections to and from the Isle of Man?

6 Will the present Morecambe station require additional facilities to cope with visitor numbers?

It has even been suggested that serious consideration should be given to reopening the earlier heritage station on the promenade, which was built to

cope with the much larger seaside crowds of old and which is better placed for the Eden Project.

The old station's current and longer term future as a visitor and entertainment centre has recently been put into some doubt by the local authority.

There is also a wider option of encouraging visitors to alight at Bare Lane, visit Bare village and enjoy a gentle stroll along the promenade before arriving at the Eden Project site.

This option could also be encouraged in reverse and would help spread the economic impact of regeneration more widely across the town and its facilities. There are

of course other options being considered, including focussing on a road-based solution, using the park-and-ride facility just off the M6 at Junction 34 in Lancaster and running shuttle buses to and from the Eden Project site.

Station car parking in Lancaster and at Bare Lane is limited, with only Morecambe and Heysham Harbour offering sufficient space for at least some parking.

Perhaps now is the opportune time for Railfuture to make its views known on integrating rail with large visitor attractions and regeneration projects such as this, and nudge the relevant authorities not to forget about the importance of rail links and to put in place the work needed as soon as possible?

However, local rail passengers want to see an end to the current industrial unrest and regular cancellations on the railway. There were 18 cancellations on the Morecambe branch in the week ending 20 May. There is an urgent need for the restoration of a regular and reliable Northern rail service that both local people and visitors can depend upon to go about their lives in a more sustainable way. The clock is already ticking down . . .

By Richard Lysons

Railfuture's honorary president Christian Wolmar is a prolific writer, having produced many books about railways, past and present, home and abroad.

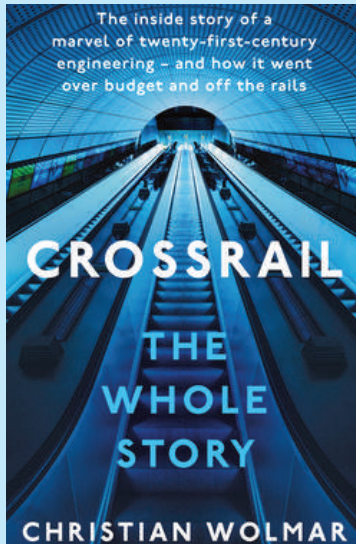
His fortnightly column is one of the highlights of RAIL magazine and, probably, like many of you reading this, I rely on him to keep me up to date with all things rail.

He is a frequent guest on TV news and a regular correspondent to the letters pages of our broadsheets. I can also recommend his pithy and always interesting podcast *Calling All Stations*.

His *Crossrail The Whole Story* was published last year. It is difficult to realise that it is just over a year since the late Queen Elizabeth II officially opened the Elizabeth line during her Platinum Jubilee year. I am no monarchist, but was touched that, aged 96, she was able to officially open the Crossrail project named in her honour.

Obviously there are two parallel strands to Wolmar's account of Crossrail. First, there is the extraordinary civil engineering project of building a main line railway under London, and then there is the tale of the delays and massive cost. Crossrail was the biggest British urban rail project that the country has ever had and was due to open in December 2018. Of course, this did not happen and it took over three

Now it's over to you, Charles III



Crossrail: The Whole Story
by Christian Wolmar (2022)
Head of Zeus £9.99
ISBN 978-1803281247

more years and an extra £3.5 billion before its eventual opening last year. For many of us in Railfuture and the rail campaigning world, the delays of the Crossrail project are almost as fascinating as the entire engineering achievement. In particular, the cost of the project must have affected the attitude of central government to current and future rail projects.

The sheer numbers, quantities and

costs of Crossrail are hard to digest at times, but we have to remember that the Elizabeth line (which is what we have to call Crossrail now) was, and is, a unique leap forward in helping improve a capital city's rail problems. Wolmar's skill as a writer and journalist is making these huge numbers and statistics comprehensible.

Although I am an historian and campaigner rather than an engineer or rail expert, I am always impressed when statistics are boiled down to compare with familiar objects. The tunnel boring machines measure 10 red double-decker London buses in length and 143 buses in weight! In this case, the boring is luckily only a physical act, totally unlike the experience of death by PowerPoint we often experience at conferences. I also appreciated, for example, Wolmar's detailed description of the quality of the earth of the London basin. The first few chapters of "the story so far" are fascinating. I had no idea that a route across London had been discussed for decades. Only by understanding its history can we comprehend Crossrail.

The costs were enormous and Wolmar is at his best when relating such complex matters. Public works DO cost money and,

inevitably, while I was reading about Crossrail, I could not help thinking about HS2 and the latter's own cost situation. The two schemes are totally different, but there are pertinent comparisons that can be made.

This updated edition of Wolmar's impressive book does not contain the fact that Crossrail/ Elizabeth line has already been a huge success. There were 125 million journeys in its first 10 months and on Tuesday 21 March this year no fewer than 650,000 people used it. Currently, the Elizabeth line accounts for one in six of all rail journeys in the United Kingdom. Encouraged by Wolmar's fascinating book, I hope to travel the line later this year.

I am genuinely looking forward to the opening of perhaps a Charles and/or Camilla line in the next decade, whether it is between Skipton and Colne, on the Scottish Borders or elsewhere.

His Majesty King Charles III was decades ahead of most people with his concern for the environment, so I am assuming he will welcome any new rail project. I just hope that the visitors' book pen at Skipton or Melrose does not leak! I also look forward to books by Christian Wolmar about future successful rail projects.

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

Woodhead silence

On being formed in 1981 and then affiliating to the Railway Development Society, we never envisaged for one moment that its successor Railfuture would emerge as part of the establishment. This conclusion has been reached given the deafening silence from the Railfuture Board on Woodhead.

Silence from the Railfuture board is not golden. What will it take to elicit a response? Is a Freedom of Information request required? Given all the calls for further electrification, what compelling reason is there for the prolonged silence on Woodhead? Is it down to acute embarrassment?

Railwatch 175 refers to the sixtieth anniversary of Beeching, who actually proposed the development of this modern electrified route, yet less than seven years later, in January 1970, the passenger service was withdrawn, which must mark one of the most wilful acts of corporate vandalism in railway history.

Has the Railfuture board imposed an embargo on even discussing Woodhead, and if so why? What does this say about the credibility of the Railfuture board? If a pro-rail group will not campaign for Woodhead, then who will? Has the Railfuture board been nobbled to ignore this priceless piece of modern transport infrastructure?

Is it beyond the talents of the board to grasp how a reinstated electrified Woodhead route could contribute to the government's levelling-up policy? It would also represent a major step in narrowing the north-south divide.

The fact that the western third of the line is still open should help the campaign for reopening the full route. Humble Railfuture members wonder whether the Railfuture board has been sworn to secrecy on Woodhead.

Ironically, leadership is called for in *Railwatch* 75. This is precisely what is long overdue from Railfuture on Woodhead. Will the board finally show some leadership and respect to members by explaining why it seems to have abandoned this priceless piece of transport infrastructure?

Andrew Oldfield, secretary, Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association, Long Lane, Worrall, Sheffield S35 0AF

Editor's note: The Railfuture board expects most campaigning to be initiated by Railfuture branches. The board is sometimes involved directly when branches ask for more financial resources for their campaigns or perhaps disagree about campaigning priorities. The Woodhead route directly

Winter kept an icy grip



The winter was reluctant to give way to spring this year, adding to the disruption already widespread on the railway.

Snow affected Scotland, Wales and northern England in March, so Network Rail had to keep its snow ploughs and other specialised equipment at the ready for most of the month.

As usual, the Settle-Carlisle line was affected by the adverse weather but snowdrops and other flowers cheered passengers up at Settle.

The UK recorded its coldest March temperature for 13 years, with temperatures in the Scottish Highlands as low as minus 15C, while England and Wales had their wettest March for 42 years.

Composite image by Mark R Harvey

affects two Railfuture branches, Yorkshire and North West.

Both branches are currently preoccupied with HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and the appalling reliability and punctuality of current rail services.

Railfuture Yorkshire has long advocated Woodhead reopening, to provide a half-hour Sheffield-Manchester journey time. It would also provide an extra transPennine freight route.

A good first step would be for the two Railfuture branches to set out a joint approach on Woodhead.

Railfuture would also like to see Transport for the North, South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester provide some positive action on the Woodhead front.

Bottlenecks

There are problems with electrifying some of our older established lines, with low bridges being one example. Suggested solutions have been to use: Diesel-

electric bimode trains, electric-battery bimode trains or hydrogen power.

A simpler answer, as used by Eurostar in the early days, could be to use both third rail DC and overhead AC wires (different voltages).

John Cutcliffe.
johncutcliffe2@yahoo.co.uk

Political engagement

I thought it useful to respond to the letter "Negative reaction" in *Railwatch* 175 on our organising a fringe event at the Conservative Party conference – and the approach I took while on the panel.

We really would like to organise fringe events at the conferences of every major party and welcome offers of involvement, contacts, etc to help us achieve that.

We want to engage with parties across the entire political spectrum, not just one wing of it. When I

accepted the West Midlands branch's invitation to be a panellist, I had to reflect on what I thought would be most useful. I decided I should focus on the Conservative party members in the audience and seek to persuade and influence them to champion practical steps to improve implementation of their current policies between then and the next general election, rather than attempt to persuade them to adopt a new approach to private sector involvement.

Thus not mentioning the Labour party, nor renationalisation, was probably inevitable.

Irrespective of any government's ownership approach, we want to apply our influence to see measures and rewards that focus on great service for customers and a busier railway. We have no right to impose them. While cost management will always be important, cost savings that focus on less output (for example, fewer or shorter trains or staff) will rarely be wanted, but cost changes (for example, to redeploy ticket office staff to a wider customer help role) can often be sensible.

Neil Middleton, Railfuture director, Harpenden, Herts
neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

Non-political status

The letter from Peter Geall in *Railwatch* 175 saddens me as the panel at this fringe meeting was independent of Railfuture, comprising Andy Bagnall (chief executive of Rail Partners and former director general of Rail Delivery Group), Malcolm Holmes (chief executive West Midlands Rail Executive and director of rail for Transport for West Midlands) and Denise Wetton (central route director, Network Rail), and they were speaking to an audience of Railfuture members and delegates to the Conservative conference held that day in Birmingham.

The views the panel expressed were their own and not Railfuture's; indeed as a non-political organisation we do not take sides.

Mr Geall may be interested to learn that five out of the nine members of the West Midlands branch committee, myself included, like most of the public, have no declared political allegiance. However, the other four have declared membership of the Greens, Lib-Dems, Conservative and Labour parties. I can assure him that when deciding the priorities for Branch campaigns for

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

Top quality signs pointing to a better rail future



READY REOPENING: Richard Searight of TavyRail, Mike Moore of Connect Bude and Alan Clark of Tarka Rail Association on behalf of ACE Rail. Councillor Julie Yelland, who until May represented Okehampton South on West Devon Borough Council, holds the Christow (Teign Valley) sign *Picture: Dave Ellis*

As a show of support from the Teign Valley, station signs were made for local campaign groups and handed over at Okehampton station in April.

They could have been made less expensively, but it was thought that they carried more weight being the "real thing", made by a long-standing railway supplier, Rydon Signs in Exeter.

The firm had the British Rail contract and still supplies much of the national network.

The signs use the original double-arrow and rail red colouring. The lettering is in **Rail Alphabet** font which dates back to 1965. Subtle changes were made in 2009 when **New Rail Alphabet** font was launched. In 2020, **Rail Alphabet 2** font was adopted by Network Rail for new signage and can be seen on the recently reopened station at Marsh Barton, Exeter.

The British Rail double arrow is one of the most enduring and recognisable corporate symbols, although it has been modified for the digital age. It was first sketched by its designer, Gerry Barney, on the back of an envelope while he was going into work on a tube train.

As Tavistock is a two-direction campaign, another sign has been ordered for OkeRail, to be kept at

Okehampton, and there will also be an Ilfracombe sign for Coombe Rail. All four stations closed after British Rail's corporate identity was established in 1965. Now that the signage is done, all they need to do is rebuild the railways.

Colin Burges, Christow Station
teignrail@gmail.com
www.teignrail.co.uk

Editor's note:

Tavy Rail aims to reinstate Tavistock to Plymouth rail services by reopening the line from Tavistock to Bere Alston. An hourly service would complement existing Tamar Valley services from Plymouth to Gunnislake

OkeRail wants reinstatement of the Southern main line from Okehampton to Plymouth via Tavistock

Connect Bude aims to restore the railway from Okehampton to Holsworthy and Bude

Tarka Rail wants to reconnect Bideford to Barnstaple

Combe Rail exists to preserve the heritage of the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe railway, with the prospect of reinstated light and heavy rail services

More Devon and Cornwall news on page 19

rail services in the West Midlands, there are robust and wide ranging discussions. Once decided, these are presented to the organisations represented on our panel as well as the five train operating companies and other rail industry organisations in the West Midlands.

Colin Major, Secretary Railfuture West Midlands
colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

Union response

Having read the the chair's column in *Railwatch* 175, I would like to

clarify a few things he seems to think are the fault of the trades unions. He writes: "Seven-day rosters with a flexible working day must be planned by the operators not the unions." It has been Aslef policy for years to have Sundays in the working week. Some train operators have this already. The others choose to rely on overtime to run service, keeping their driver establishments low. They think: Fewer employees = lower wage bill = higher shareholder dividends. As for "with a flexible working day", he needs to clarify what he means by flexible.

Managers think flexible is having people on-call or working split shifts so they have to make numerous journeys into work at their own expense.

I cannot get a bus to my workplace 24/7, so how does he expect me to get to work to offer the flexible seven-day day service he wants? The whole transport system outside London needs to be addressed for us to get to the reliable seven day a week network he says he wants.

Lee Davies
lippydavies@blueyonder.co.uk

Quick wins

Railfuture chair Chris Page has prepared a list of quick wins. He has sent it to the government which he says should take the following initiatives.

They could be implemented within six months, without significant cost, to demonstrate progress with Great British Railways and improve customer experience.

- ◆ Prepare a programme of national and local fares promotions to be implemented when the current industrial disputes and frequent cancellations are resolved
- ◆ Focus a 'First of a Kind' innovation competition for 2023 on customer service development projects
- ◆ Reintroduce Freight Facilities Grants in England to enable decarbonisation through modal shift from road to rail by creating new rail freight terminals, increasing capacity and reducing barriers to market entry
- ◆ Identify routes and services which are subject to overcrowding or have the potential to grow leisure travel, then strengthen train formations or increase frequencies
- ◆ Focus passenger-facing staff on reducing anti-social behaviour, which will both improve the journey experience for passengers and help combat fare evasion
- ◆ Capitalise on the GWR fast charge trial and show commitment to decarbonisation by making funding available to roll out this capability on similar routes nationally
- ◆ Stop giving seat reservations with *advance purchase on the day* tickets, so passengers with more expensive walk-on tickets do not lose their seat part-way through their journey
- ◆ Abolish first class on all commuter and metro services
- ◆ All operators, including open access, to accept tickets on the next available service if a train is cancelled, irrespective of operator
- ◆ Improve contingency plans to deal with emergencies and planned engineering works so that both cooperative working with other transport providers and diversionary train routes take precedence over substitution, and replace unwarranted "do not travel" warnings with helpful advice and assistance regarding alternative travel arrangements.

Chair's column: Page 23

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

Land slip and viaduct failure cause misery

At the start of the year, trains between London and the south were severely affected by a landslip at Hook, on the main line between Woking and Basingstoke. Not long after, services to and from our region were again plunged into chaos by the partial collapse of Nuneham Viaduct spanning the Thames between Didcot and Oxford. Structural failures like this on key routes disrupt the economic activity of an entire region for several weeks so it is vital that lessons are learnt, both in respect of improving the resilience of structures and in contingency planning so that as many services as possible can be kept running.

The train service to Exeter was decimated for nearly a week in April due to a problem with the trains' biofuel mixture, and it seems barely a day passes without an emergency somewhere on the network causing disruption. Planned engineering works are a necessary fact of life, but recently some very large chunks of the network have been closed leading to long bus journeys and the complete withdrawal of service from intermediate stations. Railfuture remains concerned about the lack of consistent advice being given to passengers about delays, potential alternative routes and the compensation available. Route-specific live announcements from control would be a real benefit in such circumstances.

Railfuture on alert for timetable problems

CrossCountry assured us that, from the May timetable change, its core service between Bournemouth and Manchester would return to hourly. However, the doubling in frequency had to be delayed several weeks until the Nuneham viaduct was reopened. It remains to be seen if the company has sufficient rolling stock to operate its enhanced timetable, especially after it retires its last remaining InterCity 125 trains. Railfuture members are urged to write to their MPs making the case for strengthening the CrossCountry train fleet, perhaps using diesel units displaced from other operators as a stop-gap measure.

Meanwhile Govia Thameslink Railway, which operates West Coastway services into Portsmouth and Southampton, is looking to make efficiency savings that could affect the outer fringes of its network. We have already seen Coastway services to Bournemouth cut back to terminate at Southampton and would not want to see any further retrenchment. While looking to make alterations, GTR needs to work with other train operators to ensure service frequencies between key centres of population are not adversely affected.

Extra ticket checks cause chaos

Railfuture has been in discussion with Transport Focus about constant hold-ups at the Waterloo ticket gateline while additional manual checks of tickets are carried out. It is disconcerting for people to discover valid tickets fail to operate the barriers, and the smooth flow of passengers quickly dissolves into chaos and confusion. Appropriate signs and staffing should be deployed strategically whenever it is deemed necessary to conduct additional checks. Perhaps it would be better to leave detailed ticket examination to onboard guards.

£18m station would bring in 250,000 passengers

Consultants continue to work on the business case for a new station between Fareham and Botley to serve the major housing and commercial development at Welborne. The official word is that there is an assumption of a quarter of a million passengers a year, and the cost of the single-platform station would be around £18 million. There is reason to believe that the estimated patronage is on the low side, but at least the cost seems to have tumbled to an affordable figure from the original "fantasy" estimate of £80 million.

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



CAMPAIGN SUPPORT: Railway pioneer Isambard Kingdom Brunel (in the shape of a wise old owl with a top hat) paid a visit to the Railfuture stand at Bristol model railway exhibition in Thornbury. In May, Railfuture volunteers David Smith from Stonehouse and Tim Weekes (right) from Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways joined the owl at the exhibition which was also attended by Roger Witt from Bristol, Graham Ellis from Melksham and Railfuture media expert Bruce Williamson. Great Western Railway sponsored Bath artist Rita Lazaro five years ago to create the Isambard Kingdom BrunOWL. It has been exhibited around the region, including at London Paddington, Swindon, Bristol Temple Meads and Bath Spa stations. Rita has had exhibitions of her work in Beijing and Shanghai
 Picture: Graham Ellis

Severnside

bruce.williamson@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture campaigners are welcoming two key events this year which should unlock the enormous potential of the network around Bristol. Work started in February on a new station at Ashley Down, between Temple Meads and Filton Abbey Wood.

The new station is part of the MetroWest phase 2 project, which will also see new stations at North Filton (next to the planned Bristol Arena) and at Henbury. Major work on Ashley Down is programmed to take place in June during a 16-day blockade of the line, saving an estimated £2 million.

Also expected to open this summer is the long-awaited Portway park and ride station on the Severn Beach line.

It will be the first new station in the Metro West rail enhancement programme and is also claimed to be the first new station in Bristol since Parson Street in 1927.

However, Filton Abbey Wood opened in 1996. There were former stations nearby – Filton (1863-1903) and Filton Junction (1903-1996). The crucial aspect of MetroWest is increased train frequencies.

Severnside branch contact:
severnside@railfuture.org.uk
Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide

RAILFUTURE AGM 2023 IN LONDON

Railfuture's annual general meeting will take place in central London at 11.00 on Saturday 15 July.

The venue is Senate House at the University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

It is 15 to 20 minutes walk from the mainline stations at Euston, St Pancras and King's Cross.

Registration starts at 1000 with the business meeting from 1100.

As well as formal business, such as receiving the annual report and financial statements, there will be an update from our honorary president, Christian Wolmar, and a chair's review looking at the year just gone and the year ahead.

It will be followed by the Member of the Year award before lunch. After lunch, there will be the Rail User Group Awards and presentations.

We are planning to live stream the meeting, but please note that for the AGM portion remote watchers will not

be counted as attendees, nor will they be able to vote.

The 2023 AGM will consider a motion to allow future AGMs to be fully hybrid. The board recognises that wherever the AGM is held, some attendees will have to travel a long distance and a hybrid option provides choice.

A special mailing was carried out in May, after it was discovered some members did not receive the wording of the motion with the despatch of Railwatch 175.

The Railfuture AGM is open to all current members or their proxy. There is no fee to attend. There is, however, a fee if you want lunch at the venue.

You can book your AGM lunch on the Railfuture website. The wording of the motion and any late details, including information about proxy voting can be found on the Railfuture website at: https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/#2023_london

Family-friendly trains score highly

By Abby Taylor

The Campaign for
Family Friendly Trains

This campaign is a volunteer group of parents campaigning for the needs of children and their families to be built into the design of the UK rail network, having had poor experiences travelling with our own children.

Rail travel is, in theory, a fantastic option for families – feeding, changing, toileting and entertaining are much easier on a train than in a car.

Unfortunately, the UK's rail network is not child friendly. With inadequate space for pushchairs, lack of level boarding and poorly designed baby changing and toilet facilities, many parents are put off train travel.

Some train operators dictate that parents fold prams before boarding, meaning they are expected to juggle baby and nappy bag before lifting everything up a steep step, often without access to passenger assistance from staff – a clear safety issue.

Furthermore, safe sleeping guidance tells us that preventing babies from lying horizontally to sleep for more than 30 minutes is a hazard.

There are also clear financial, environmental and gender-equality-driven arguments to be made in favour of getting families on to the railways.

The campaign's top priority is for dedicated space on trains for unfolded prams and pushchairs with seating for parents and carers nearby, which is clearly signed both inside and outside of the train.

Ideally, this could be booked in advance in the way that you can a wheelchair or a bike space.

We would also like to see the following:

Toilets

Clean and reliable, with thought-through baby changing facilities, spacious enough for a pushchair or somewhere to put a child safely while parents use the toilet. Baby changing facilities to be accessible from the pram/pushchair space in a standard width pram.

Getting on/off train

Passenger assistance needs to be extended to people travelling with buggies, level boarding, wide doors and gangways, and priority boarding at terminus stations.

Navigating stations

Pram-friendly ticket barriers with double gates that open outwards when you have a pushchair between yourself and the QR code reader, step-free access, and on-station baby changing facilities



PROTEUS CONCEPT DESIGN FROM PRIESTMANGOODE: Campaigners say it shows that family-friendly rail travel in the UK is entirely possible. Train operators need to adapt to changing customer needs and put families and other leisure travellers at the centre of their plans
Picture: PriestmanGoode

accessible to all parents. Family-friendly waiting areas such as the one recently unveiled by LNER at King's Cross station.

As a campaign team, we have met with many train operators, rolling stock operating companies and manufacturers, as well as Network Rail. The Department for Transport has also been very receptive to and supportive of our arguments.

Following discussions with the campaign team, the addition of family-friendly clauses into the Rail Delivery Group's key train requirements document is looking highly likely.

Last summer we published a scorecard comparing family-friendly provision across the train operators. This gained huge traction across national and local media. The results were unsurprisingly dismal, but since then we have had operators coming to our meetings with their scorecard results to hand, asking how they could do better.

In the coming months, we plan to publish updated scorecards that will show how much progress train operators have made in the intervening year. So, watch this space.

On some new trains there is nowhere to put a pushchair apart from blocking the doors, and often there is nowhere where parents can sit next to their pram.

Even though it is sometimes practically impossible, some train operators demand that children under five must be carried through ticket gates. In Germany, trains have family compartments and in Norway there are play areas. The

campaign is pleased that new Merseyrail trains have one bay with fold-up seats for prams, as well as level boarding.

Train operators should consider families when they order new trains because campaigners believe there is enormous suppressed demand for family travel.

As well as letting children travel free, delegates at the conference suggested a ticket should be issued for each child under five so that proper data can be assembled.

The Department for Transport has pointed out that every good suggestion has to be backed by a well thought-out business case.

But there is no excuse for building new trains that are not suitable.

The overlapping needs of different groups were raised at the

conference. Families trying to travel by bike and rail sometimes find "their" space is already taken. People who attended the conference agreed that different user groups are currently being pushed into competition with one another.

The consensus was that everyone should be enabled to travel confidently and comfortably without infringing another's "rights".

The campaign's Abby Taylor and Nick Flynn were guest speakers at Railfuture's *Turning Point* conference in March and held a workshop session for delegates.

Their 35-page illustrated presentation can be seen, along with others from the conference, at:

www.railfuture.org.uk/display3297



Several train operators are keen to encourage family travel by train by handing out free activity packs
Picture: Transport for Wales

Power and politics in Bri

By Richard Faulkner
and Chris Austin

Plagued by strikes, high costs and poorly performing operators, the government's frustration with the railway might be understandable, but there is a long history of government intervention that has brought us to the present situation.

Governments have always tried to regulate and control railways from the earliest days, and the need for parliamentary powers to build and operate new lines gave them the excuse to intervene.

Initially, in the Railway Regulation Act 1844, the aim was to control fares, freight rates and safety.

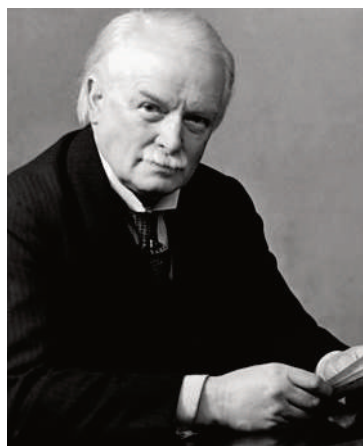
Later in the nineteenth century, this was expanded to regulating hours of work to prevent fatigue and, in the early years of the 20th century, to industrial relations generally.

As chancellor of the exchequer, David Lloyd George was effective in settling a major strike as early as 1911, and so many of his successors have been tempted to intervene, not always successfully.

A driving force behind the grouping of 1923 was the management issue of efficient operation, particularly in relation to common use of wagons, something that the politicians should perhaps have left to railway management to sort out.

During the first world war, the government took control of the railways but mismanaged them badly, leaving them in a state of penury as a result of holding fares and freight rates down at a time of rampant inflation. It also failed to honour the agreements on reimbursement for their use to enable essential maintenance and renewals to take place.

The turning point came in 1919 with the creation of the ministry of transport and the decision to merge 123 companies into the Big Four. In the event, the railways



David Lloyd George in 1911
Picture: BBC



ALWAYS IN THE BACKGROUND: The Houses of Parliament can be seen behind the 11.10 Waterloo to Portsmouth Harbour service as it accelerates through Vauxhall
Picture: Chris Austin

remained under government control until 1921. Rather than pay compensation and reward the railways for their service to the nation, the government reorganisation aimed to create companies big enough to deal with the costs themselves.

Politicians could still exercise regulatory control through the vehicle of the newly created ministry of transport.

After the second world war, the railways again emerged in poor physical shape with arrears of maintenance and six years of under-investment. This time, it was not costs that drove the policy but political dogma built on Labour's commitment to public ownership of the means of production and distribution.

The plans were too ambitious to be practical. Not only railways, but ports, ferries, hotels, canals, buses and lorries were taken into public ownership, in an attempt to create an "integrated transport system".

It was too big to be managed effectively by a single organisation, and was held back by post-war austerity and ill-defined objectives. Integration was never defined.

The Stedeford committee report of 1960 recognised the impossibility of the task and proposed the creation of the British Railways Board, headed by Dr Beeching, Another member of the Stedeford

committee was accountant Henry Benson whose report on railways in Northern Ireland led to closure of much of the network in the name of integration.

Also on the committee was David Serpell, whose own ill-fated report outlining options for retrenchment was roundly denounced in 1982.

In the 1990s privatisation, similar mistakes were made for reasons of political dogma. In this case, the superiority of the private sector was assumed and again too much was attempted simultaneously.

Separating trains and infrastructure would have been a big enough step on its own, but simultaneously contracting out maintenance,

introducing on-track competition and franchising proved to be too much.

At the same time, British Rail was split into over 100 organisations, regulated but not managed coherently. Overseeing it all was the Treasury, which wanted to pocket the sale value of Railtrack and have a cheaper overall railway with a declining subsidy line. There was no recognition that running a railway is a team game, not a competitive sport, recognised a quarter of a century on by the Williams/Shapps report.

A feature of these endless reorganisations and reports is that government rarely took proper notice of railway people. As early as 1845, Sir Daniel Gooch lamented the fact, in his diaries, that no practical men sat on the Gauge Commission.

Nobody with any railway expertise sat on the Stedeford Committee in 1960 and subsequent inquiries involved captains of industry, economists and bankers, but have often omitted anyone with any expertise in running a railway. Fortunately, the Williams report included advice from Dick Fearn, formerly chief executive of Iarnrod Eireann, and its quality reflects his expertise.

When he was transport secretary, Alistair Darling was wrong to abolish the Strategic Rail Authority and take direct control of the



Sir Ivan Stedeford
Picture: Wikipedia

Britain govern rail's future

railway back in 2005. There are competent people in the Department for Transport, but overall they do not have the capability to run the railway, and in doing so Mr Darling got rid of the guiding mind of a complex industry which has many interfaces.

Worse than that, Mr Darling followed the pattern of other ministers who have consistently failed to set out the strategy they want for the railway, while being quick to intervene when public dissatisfaction has been expressed.

Strategic planning is not an easy task because, while the DfT now understands that the railway is a public good, the Treasury sees it just as an asset and thinks of funding it in those terms.

The railway is the core of the national public transport system, and is of huge importance for its users and for many who benefit from the reduction in traffic congestion it brings.

Quite apart from its achievements in transport terms, it is essential if carbon reduction targets are to be met, especially for freight where electrification of road haulage is currently impractical.

The railway must be fully accessible of course and must support diversity and equality.

Even though most people now book and find their information on line and government pressure to cut costs is huge, ticket offices must be staffed. Local and long distance needs must be met, along with the needs of freight, while at the same time government promises local control of services.

Fares must be simplified and reduced, and the lowest fares retained, which makes it impossible to use price to regulate



Trains ran during the pandemic at the government's request, but with few passengers. Now passengers are returning, as this view of Edinburgh Waverley station in May shows
Picture: Lawrence Marshall

demand as the airline and hospitality industries do.

At the same time, the cost of the railway must be reduced, but great stress is laid on undefined efficiency improvements.

In short, politicians and pundits aspire to Swiss punctuality, French TGV speeds, Japanese levels of subsidy and Italian fare levels but this is not a strategy.

The Williams-Shapps review starts to identify these non-transport needs, although it is light on the detail of how they are to be achieved and on priorities.

It also touches on the Balkanisation of the industry, but fails to show how an overall guiding mind would work in respect of devolved responsibilities in Scotland, Wales, London, parts of the north of England and the West Midlands.

A lot of work will be needed to resolve these ambiguities, and no solution will be happily accepted by everyone.

Most importantly, the railway needs to implement more electrification soon if it is to meet government emissions targets.

The priority should be network electrification where train services are most intensive (a principle established by the Weir Report as long ago as 1931), instead of the sideshows of hydrogen and

battery-powered trains. The climate emergency requires this, however interesting it might be to explore alternatives.

All these non-transport targets, and particularly the environmental ones, will need to be reflected in a properly funded strategy.

In the long run, unit costs should be reduced, but the urgency of meeting climate crisis targets, along with the costs of meeting growing demand as mode shift takes place from road to rail, means that, in the short term, more money is going to be needed, not less.

This is the result of too many deferred investment decisions in the past.

Our conclusion from the analysis of the past 100 years is that ownership is not the key issue, it is all about having clear objectives and coherent funding.

Railway people have shown their ability to make public ownership, private ownership and mixed ownership work, even with intrusive regulation and shadow management by government.

This conclusion is well illustrated by the Dartmoor line project, which was delivered early, under budget, and produced results three times better than forecast. Also worthy of note is how much cheaper the railway was under unified public

ownership, without the huge costs involved in the fragmented model of early privatisation when transaction fees outweighed any notional efficiencies that could be achieved.

Given the current rise in the cost of raw materials and labour, transactions must be made simpler and cheaper while financial risk is managed better.

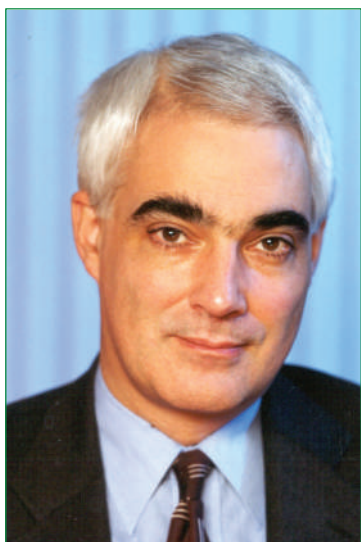
Above all, ministers need to hold their nerve in the face of demands for cuts from the Treasury. This is no longer a question of balancing the books through cuts in production or even the network, as has happened in the past with disastrous results.

It has to be about funding the railway to do the job that the government specifies through its strategy.

First, though, that strategy needs to be defined, and this needs to be done with the rail industry, not imposed from on high.

The history of the past 100 years does not give any reassurance that it will be.

For the full story, read *Signals Passed at Danger, Rail Power and Politics in Britain* by Richard Faulkner and Chris Austin. It is published by Crecy and available from www.crecy.co.uk



Alistair Darling (Now Lord Darling)
Picture: Treasury

Michael Caton, rail campaign hero

Rail campaigner Michael Caton, who died on his 88th birthday in March, was committed to rail campaigning over more than seven decades.

The Railfuture vice-president (and former president) was admired and loved by everyone who met him.

He led campaigners against the 1963 Beeching report and its aftermath when the very future of railways in Britain was in doubt.

One of his successful techniques was to question the suspicious – and sometimes completely false – figures to “justify” closures.

Thanks to Michael and other campaigners challenging powerful vested interests, railways still run to far-flung parts of the United Kingdom, such as Penzance, Wick, Thurso and East Anglia.

He led the fight in his own “back garden” to save the three-mile Upminster-Romford line, at risk of closure twice – in 1964 and 1970.

Michael, who lived in Upminster for many years, was gentle, sympathetic, knowledgeable, wise, and passionate about railways.



RESPECTED: Michael Caton

He once had to be warned at a protest meeting in Hornchurch, however, that he was thumping the table (to emphasise his points) too hard for people listening outside the crowded hall on loudspeakers. Michael never owned a car and reading a railway timetable was a

lifelong pleasure, even during student revision. He nevertheless won a first class degree.

He was chair of the Railway Invigoration Society (forerunner of Railfuture) from 1961 to 1975 and was also editor of its *Progress Report* newsletter until 1967. He was never daunted by naysayers.

Campaigning for a station for Basildon new town, one railway manager told him: “We can’t stop at every gate post.” Two years later (in 1974) a station opened at Basildon on the London-Shoeburyness line.

A grammar school headmaster’s son, Michael won a state scholarship to Bristol university. With a PhD in organic chemistry, much of his life was as a research chemist at the chemical and pharmaceutical company May and Baker in Dagenham, Essex.

Family holidays always involved “lots of trains” and his love of trains was passed on to his three children and grandchildren who happily played with his 100-year-old O-gauge clockwork toy trains. Born in Warwickshire, he moved to Torquay where he met Margaret,

the love of his life who became his wife. He also developed a lifelong passion for walking on Dartmoor and was a key figure in the Dartmoor Preservation Association, writing an excellent walking guide to the national park.

He also co-wrote, with John Stanley, *Railways in the Seventies*, which was published by the Railway Invigoration Society in 1973.

In the 1970s he helped Rowland Banks (his successor as chairman) navigate the merger of three competing organisations into the Railway Development Society, later renamed Railfuture.

With Graham Collett and Trevor Garrod, he edited the *Guide for Rail User Groups* published in 1978 and 1979 by the Railway Development Society.

He spent the last nine years of his life, suffering from Parkinson’s, disease at Abingdon and latterly in a care home in Oxford. Margaret, his wife of 64 years, died last year.

Michael’s funeral took place at All Saints Methodist Church, Abingdon.



GBR customer chief Charley dies aged 52

Former Railfuture director Charley Wallace died in March aged 52, after battling a long-term illness. She was customer director with the Great British Railways Transition Team at the time.

Charley was co-opted on to the Railfuture board in 2017 but resigned later that year because of work pressure.

She was a guest speaker at Railfuture’s first national webinar in 2020, when she was Network Rail’s director for passenger and customer experience.

She leaves a husband and three young children.



Launch of the national railcard report at London Liverpool Street station in 2003 with the then Railfuture chairman Peter Lawrence, left, and Rail Passengers Council director Anthony Smith Picture: Railwatch

How Peter relaunched Railfuture

Peter Lawrence, who helped create a new-look Railfuture from the old Railway Development Society, died aged 86 in early May, after a lifetime committed to bus and train campaigning.

He left the world a better place, said a Railfuture colleague. He was hardworking and unpretentious and always chose compromise rather than conflict. Peter was chairman in 2001 when RDS relaunched itself as Railfuture, winning wider respect in the railway industry.

While chairman, Railfuture won its first-ever significant grant which was used to fund a report showing the financial viability of introducing a national railcard. Support for the national railcard was growing, but the banking crisis of 2008 pushed it off the agenda. Peter was a member of the Railfuture East Anglia

branch for many years, serving both as its chair and committee member. He also served on the national committee of RDS/Railfuture and was chairman at a crucial time – between 2000 and 2004.

“He was a passionate supporter of the railway, especially in East Anglia,” said colleague Peter Wakefield. “He was a lovely, kind man, he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.”

Peter Lawrence was president of Railfuture from 2004 to 2012, when he was made a vice-president. He was born in Waltham Cross, left school at 15 and travelled by bus and train to his work in the City of London.

Even at the age of nine, he was pictured proudly wearing his Ian Allan bus spotters’ badge.

The funeral was at St Mary’s Church, Norwich, on Friday 26 May.



Lifelong rail advocate David dies aged 89

Railfuture vice-president and lifelong rail advocate, David Bertram, died aged 89 in March.

He was a member of the official Central Rail Users Consultative Committee for 13 years, after also serving on the Eastern RUCC.

In an *Independent* interview in 1996, he said rail privatisation had yielded no benefits and he added: “It is doubtful it ever will.”

In 2000, he retired from the CRUCC (which evolved into Transport Focus) and became a Railfuture vice-president. He organised an international agreement to share best practice with Amtrak.

David, who lived in Doncaster, was chair of Doncaster Health Trust for nearly 20 years. The first class lounge at Doncaster station is named after him.

HS2 essential for rail freight future



By Phil Smart

The West Coast main line is one of the busiest freight routes in Europe, carrying 40% of the UK's rail freight.

It has also been the focus of modernisation schemes over the years to improve performance. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s it was electrified, allowing passenger trains to run at up to 110 mph.

Following further upgrades made in the 2000s, speeds of up to 125 mph are possible with tilting trains.

Yet the maximum speed for freight trains has remained much the same as in the 1960s, at around 75 mph.

Running high speed trains on the conventional mixed traffic network devours its capacity.

Because much of the route has four tracks, long-distance passenger services usually travel on the "fast" lines while freight and stopping services share the "slow" lines.

This works fine until we want to run more passenger trains to meet rising demand, and more freight trains to decarbonise long-distance movement.

Higher speed helps to sell rail tickets but the main benefit of HS2 to the rail network was to increase overall capacity.

Those who have argued that the money could be better spent on the "classic" network, overlook the network benefits HS2 delivers.

The promise of many longer distance passenger services from London to Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow migrating to HS2 has focussed attention on how this released capacity on the West Coast main line might be most usefully exploited, and one option is to carry more freight. It is estimated

that nearly 20 additional trains each way, saving up to 1,500 lorries, could use the WCML every day to convey freight from the deep water ports in the south to the major centres of demand in the Midlands and north.

However, this promise is fading fast under the constant threat of delay

and de-scoping of the project.

The axing of the Golborne link, which would have allowed high speed trains for Scotland to bypass the congested area around Warrington, now means that these services must join the WCML at Crewe, 33 miles further south.

That will create more conflict

between passenger and freight trains, unless HS2 Scottish services are cut from two trains an hour back to one.

Uncertainty over the status and timescale for delivering HS2's eastern leg to serve Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham and Leeds is also compromising our attempts at modal shift. Migrating some longer distance services from London to those key cities via HS2 releases capacity through the congested section of the Midland main line between Wigston and Syston junctions through Leicester.

This is a vital route for freight from the enormous container port of Felixstowe to gain access to the strategic rail freight interchanges in the Birmingham area.

The Midland main line is also important for construction traffic from the East Midlands quarries in Leicestershire and Derbyshire.

Although rising construction costs put pressure on budgets in the short to medium term, the longer term cost to the UK economy of relying on unproven battery or hydrogen technology to move long distance freight, will simply store up cost for the future.

An electrified rail freight network is an indispensable tool in a zero carbon economy and must be



DIESEL POWER: A northbound freight train of aggregate wagons works through Bedford station on the Midland main line, which is already very busy with passenger trains. More will arrive from Oxford with East West Rail in a few years time. Electrification of the Midland main line now extends from London for 82 miles to Market Harborough, as well as to Corby. But to make rail freight work more efficiently, electrification of the Midland main line needs to be completed as soon as possible, as well as many short sections of other lines which would allow many freight trains to switch to more efficient electric haulage
Picture: Railwatch

Containers and double-stack pallets

Phil Smart is a member of the East Anglian branch of Railfuture and works for the Rail Freight Group.

He was a guest speaker at Railfuture's Leeds *Turning Point* conference in March. He told the audience that massive tonnages of material are carried by rail freight but, unlike passengers, it cannot use replacement buses.

The logistical problem was growing, along with the size of new container ships which can carry so many containers that they would stretch for 90 miles if laid end to end. If all the containers on one of the big new

ships had to go by road, there would be a convoy more than 100 miles long. Many parts of the rail network need loading gauge adjustments so that larger containers can easily be carried by rail.

In addition, experiments were being carried out so that double-stack pallets could be transported by train. If the tests are successful, it could be a gamechanger for rail freight.

Phil's 19-page illustrated presentation *The Future of Freight* can be seen, along with others from the conference, at:

www.railfuture.org.uk/display3297

50 miles of electrification would work wonders

Railfuture has long campaigned for a rolling programme of electrification for Britain's railways.

Now research by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport has revealed how targeting some key sections totalling 50 miles, would bring significant gains for rail freight.

Rail freight already has massive environmental advantages over road and air transport.

Instead of worrying about electrification of road transport, the government should accelerate rail electrification.

THE TOP FIVE ROUTES

London Gateway to Thames Haven Junction (2 miles)

Currently affecting eight

container trains a day. Electrifying that section would allow electric trains to run a further 2,130 miles of track per day. The annual extra mileage would be 532,500.

At present, trains leaving London Gateway at present are diesel-hauled and run to such places as Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Peterborough, Wakefield, Doncaster, Leeds, Hams Hall (Warwickshire), Cannock, Garston (Liverpool), East Midlands Gateway, Dollands Moor (Kent, for Channel Tunnel), Rotherham and Cardiff.

London Acton West (GW main line) to Willesden on the West Coast main line (3 miles)

Currently affecting five trains per day. Electrification would allow

electric trains to run over a further 1,083 miles of track per day. The annual extra electric mileage would be 272,750.

Diesel freight trains over this section go to Derbyshire, Shrewsbury, Leicestershire, Tonbridge and Grain (Kent) and Wellingborough (Northants).

Nuneaton to Birmingham Lawley Street (19 miles)

Currently affecting 10 trains per day. Electrification would allow electric trains to run over a further 2,186 miles per day. The annual extra mileage would be 546,500.

Leeds Stourton to Hare Park Junction (12 miles)

Currently affecting 10 trains per day. Electrification would allow

electric trains to run over 2,048 extra miles per day. The annual extra mileage would be 512,000.

Felixstowe to Ipswich (14 miles)

Currently affecting 40 trains per day. Electrification would allow electric trains to run over 560 extra miles of track per day. The annual extra mileage would be 140,000.

Railfuture would also urge the government to consider the following lines for electrification:

Basingstoke-Southcote Junction-Oxford-Denbigh Hall Junction, Merehead and Whatley-Newbury, Haughley Junction to Cambridge and Peterborough, Helpston-Nuneaton, Mountsorrel-Syston Junction, Manton-Corby and Whitacre Junction-Birch Coppice.



PROGRESS: Steve Rotheram (right), mayor of the Liverpool City Region, visited the site for the £80 million Headbolt Lane station at Kirkby in March with Councillor Tony Brennan. The station opens later this year and will be served by battery-electric Merseyrail trains from Wigan and Manchester
Picture: Liverpool City Region

arthur.thomson@railfuture.org.uk

Rovers and Rangers on offer

Operator Northern's ticket vending machines now sell the full range of Rover and Ranger tickets for the whole country, including Wayfarer and concessionary Wayfarer tickets. At the moment passengers can buy such tickets only for the current day, but Northern is working on how to post-date Rover and Ranger tickets.

Stockport-Victoria campaign

Denton and Reddish MP Andrew Gwynne has become honorary president of a local campaign to use the line from Stockport to Manchester Victoria via Reddish South and Denton for passenger services. He updated people who attended the AGM of Friends of Reddish South Station on progress of the *Restoring Your Railways* report by Stantec and his ongoing discussions with government ministers and Transport for Greater Manchester. A roughly hourly Stockport-Victoria service is possible but hopes of Stockport-Stalybridge and Stockport-Marple services were "not viable" because of the cost of respectively, signalling and layout alterations to Guide Bridge station and a connecting spur at Reddish Vale.

Transport for Greater Manchester is keen to explore other possibilities for a more regular service from Stockport to Victoria, which would mean modifications to Heaton Norris Junction and double tracking Denton-Reddish South.

The report has gone to the Department for Transport with additional information and the Friends are "keeping their fingers firmly crossed". They thanked Mr Gwynne, Mayor Andy Burnham and TfGM.

Faulty trains cause problems

Recurring mechanical faults on class 175 trains have led to overcrowded trains on Llandudno

to Manchester Airport services and cancellations on services from Chester to Liverpool Lime Street via Liverpool South Parkway.

Transport for Wales which operates the trains were dogged by repair delays and did not provide replacement buses. TfW has endured added problems with its new class 197 trains. There was also disruption to Wrexham-Bidston services (see page 5).

Restoration of hourly trains from north Wales to Liverpool Lime St services via the Halton Curve coincided with the May timetable change although this still left a two-hour gap in the evening.

High hopes for December

Consultation finished in January for the December 2023 timetable proposals and North Cheshire Rail User Group is pleased that Transport for Wales responded to its requests. Lime Street to Chester services via Liverpool South Parkway services will be extended to Llandudno. Manchester Airport to Llandudno services will be extended to Bangor, calling at Llandudno Junction but not at Llandudno. There is, however, the prospect of improved frequencies at Frodsham and Helsby.

The group has also requested extra early morning services from Chester to the airports at Manchester and Liverpool. The potential of this market is considerable but good bus services will be needed from Liverpool South Parkway to the airport.

Women driver appeal

Operator Northern is urging more women to apply for train driver jobs. Chief operating officer Tricia Williams said: "Less than 10% of drivers are women. We want to change that."

www.railfuture.org.uk/
[North+West+Branch](#)
[Twitter @RailfutureNW](#)

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

Single franchise helped Wales

Railfuture vice president and journalist Rhodri Clark gave an address to the Railfuture Wales AGM in April entitled *Twenty years of a single Wales rail franchise: what has been achieved and what challenges remain?*

He pointed out that even in the days of British Rail and the early franchises, rail services in Wales were primarily east-west, focussing on Manchester in the north, Birmingham in mid Wales, and Bristol and London in the south. Connections between these groups of services were poor. One-franchise Scotland performed better.

The single Wales and Borders franchise began in 2003 and was taken over by Arriva Trains Wales on a no-growth basis. One of ATW's notable contributions was the standard pattern timetable where trains left at the same time each hour. This enabled a 28% increase in services without additional rolling stock or subsidy, leading to easier journeys between north and south Wales, and better connections (except on Sundays).

Nine years later, passenger numbers were up by 60%. The standard pattern timetable was eroded when the 2005 reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan line and the 2008 Ebbw Vale reopening (both lobbied for by Railfuture) took up resources.

By 2018, the Welsh Government had control of franchise procurement, but its attempts to have trains run by a public company were thwarted by Westminster. However, Covid did what the Welsh Government could not.

In 2021, the franchise was taken over by Transport for Wales. Franchisee Keolis-Amey was unable to earn revenue from empty trains. In Rhodri's view, the continued expansion and change of role for TfW is one of the reasons for its performance problems. It was set up and structured to oversee the franchise, not to run services itself. TfW had a steep learning curve.

The Welsh Government has supported rail, in part by taking money from other departments. The money helped with the Ebbw Vale line reopening and redoubling a section of the Shrewsbury-Chester line north of Rossett.

Buses, however, have been financially starved, and routes axed. Buses are essential as much of rural Wales cannot be served by rail.

Wales has come a long way, but should emulate Scotland in having more control of its infrastructure. Currently it controls only the core valley lines. At present the Welsh

Government and England-focussed Network Rail have different priorities. One casualty is the much-needed resignalling of the Newport-Crewe Marches line, Wales's flagship route, which is not likely until 2036 at the earliest. Network Rail does not seem interested in doing it sooner.

In the media

Railfuture Wales branch chair Peter Kingsbury contributed to a phone-in on Radio Wales in March, about the performance of Transport for Wales. There was harsh criticism from listeners who reported bad experiences on Welsh trains. Peter gave some perspective by arguing that there is currently a lot of investment in the network.

That evening BBC1 Wales transmitted *How to Fix a Railway*, a documentary featuring TfW's modernisation and development plans. Critics said it concentrated too much on the South Wales Metro, but the programme did include the new trains being introduced across Wales. It also featured Railfuture campaigner Dave Taylor, preparing to board the first train from Bow Street station near Aberystwyth when it reopened in 2021.

The programme can be seen on BBC iPlayer – search for *How to Fix a Railway*.

Reply received

The Welsh Government has told Railfuture it has asked the North Wales Transport Commission to consider alternatives to a third road bridge over the Menai Straits. Railfuture will be putting the case for rail to the commission.

Talgo visitor centre

The new Global Centre of Rail Excellence has appointed former Welsh education minister Kirsty Williams to encourage local involvement in the enterprise. GCRE chair Dr Debra Williams said the centre hoped to create high quality jobs in the Onllwyn area. A donated Talgo carriage is the first rolling stock item to arrive at the £400 million centre. It will be used for visitors while building work is under way.

GCRE has signed a memorandum to collaborate on future developments with Thales Ground Transportation Systems. Thales GTS vice-president Andy Bell said: "We look forward to working alongside the GCRE team to help create the digital railways of the future at this exciting technology hub in Wales."

"We are delighted to have the opportunity to bring our wealth of expertise in digital signalling, communications, ticketing and cybersecurity to GCRE."

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
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Look East for change on the way

By John Stretton
and Ray King

Pictures by John Stretton

The line from Cambridge to Ipswich has seen a big improvement in the quality of services over the past few years.

Greater Anglia's excellent new trains give passengers a very comfortable experience of rail travel. With retractable boarding plates, the trains have been welcomed by people who were previously excluded because of accessibility problems.

Built by Stadler, the trains have a removable diesel section which can be taken out if the line is electrified.

But some of the stations seem locked in the past. Dullingham still has full-width crossing gates which are operated by staff from the nearby signal box.

Trains had stopped at Dullingham only every two hours, which made it difficult to plan a day out or a satisfactory working life.

However, in May Greater Anglia introduced one extra call in each direction. Nearby Kennett gained similar stops.

Newmarket has a train every hour in each direction but, despite recent improvements, the station is a shadow of its former grandeur.

When the shiny new Cambridge-Ipswich trains call, they glide past the unused section of a long platform which was once able to cope with special trains for the racecourse, packed with well-dressed and excited crowds.

The main station building has gone but buildings survive on the secondary side. Trains call at a denuded runt of a platform equipped only with a humble waiting shelter and a ticket machine. How are the mighty fallen! However, passengers do now have reasonably efficient information screens.

Although Dullingham station has two platforms, 16 miles of the line from Cambridge to Chippenham Junction is single-track.

Ipswich-bound trains from Ely and Soham and a succession of freight trains join at Chippenham Junction.

Railfuture is still waiting for the Ely area upgrade which will transform service opportunities and *Railwatch* 175 showed how train services in and around Cambridge can be dramatically improved.

There is an increasing demand among the general public for rail services to match expectations.

If big improvements do come, both Newmarket and Dullingham are likely to see great change. A modernised and electrified line would be a great success, boosting the economy and job opportunities.



An increasingly unusual sight: Full-width staff-operated crossing gates. Dullingham in August 2021



Dullingham Sunday: An Ipswich-Cambridge train



Newmarket's 'remains' and an Ipswich-bound train

Railfuture pressing for improvements

Restoration of double track throughout (with the exception of the single-line Warren Hill tunnel east of Newmarket) from Cambridge station to Chippenham Junction is a priority campaign for Railfuture East Anglia.

Railfuture also backs Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's proposal for the restoration of a link west of Chippenham Junction to enable through running from Cambridge to the newly reopened station at Soham.

In the meantime, Network Rail is making a considerable investment in the route as a part of the ongoing Cambridge area resignalling project.

The signal boxes at Dullingham, Chippenham Junction and Bury St Edmunds will shortly be abolished so the entire line will be controlled from Cambridge power

signal box. All level crossings, including the one at Dullingham, pictured, will be modernised.

Railfuture has been pressing for improvements to services at Kennett, the first station east of Chippenham Junction, and train operator Greater Anglia has responded by squeezing in extra stops at both Kennett and Dullingham stations.

Greater Anglia's new trains, with faster acceleration, may allow timetable planners to work further magic, because the new stops have not affected times at other stations on the line.

Railfuture also supports the train operator, which is impatient in a "very tough funding environment" for the government to give the go-ahead for game-changer long-awaited improvements at Haughley Junction.

Together with long-needed work at Ely, the upgrades would clear

the way for big improvements to passenger services and also allow for more container trains from Felixstowe to the Midlands and north of England, potentially removing many lorries from the area's hostile and polluted roads.

Greater Anglia has also promised to investigate the possibility of agreeing to a request from Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association for later trains from Cambridge and Ipswich to Newmarket.

The train operator has agreed to share its findings with campaigners on the viability of improving services.

Greater Anglia is upbeat after the positive effect that its new trains have had on its punctuality and reliability figures.

Greater Anglia's Jonathan Denby said: "We are determined to make rail travel even more attractive than it is now."

Wasted opportunity at Chester

By Richard Wilcock

Work to improve Chester station, which has listed building status, was scheduled to start in June.

The initiative comes from Transport for Wales, which manages the station, and is in line with its "station improvement vision". It will provide:

A A customer information and ticket desk, customer information screens, ticket machines, "changing places" toilet, concourse seating and new signs

B Refurbishment of waiting room, as well as platform and concourse toilets

C A new concourse clock and CCTV installed along with new benches on platforms 3, 4b and 7, a water refill unit in the toilet lobby area, and cycle locking stands and repair station located to the western concourse entrance

The enhancements are welcome but are a little lacklustre.

There has been some input from Cheshire West and Chester Council, Network Rail and a developer.

But Growth Track 360, a coalition of business and political leaders, wants a more ambitious revamp. So do I. I consider the deficiencies of Chester station to be as follows:

1 Lack of capacity to handle services. This was pre-Covid

2 Platforms too low. The new Stadler class 777 Merseyrail trains need a consistent platform height. All platforms have a large step down

3 Platform 3 has a switch to hold 2 trains while platform 4 has not, due to roof supports in the way

4 The gateline circulation area is too tight on both sides

5 The bridge from platforms 3 to 4, 5, 6 and 7 is too narrow

6 Platforms 5 and 6 have a gap in roof cover between them and the rest of the station

7 Roofing is inconsistent

8 Small waiting rooms

9 No First Class Lounge

10 Car parking inadequate

11 Forecourt inadequate at peak times such as arrival of the London train

The main deficiencies are 4 and 5, although 4 will be addressed by the current upgrade. On race days and when a London train arrives, the station is severely overloaded.

I believe deficiencies 2, 6 and 7 should be addressed to ensure a comfortable travelling experience.

Solving issue 3 would allow more trains to use the station and issues 10 and 11 could be addressed by a wider station redevelopment.

Chester station has had a series of minor upgrades over the years but they have not solved its main problems, which are passenger throughput and comfort.

At least the current proposals do not preclude improvements later but it is a wasted opportunity. The fact that the station is listed does not prevent improvements, they just need to be done sensitively.

West Midlands



LICHFIELD BACKING FOR MIDLANDS RAIL HUB: Railfuture's Tony Thompson (right) with, from left, Alun Rogers of Stoke-Staffs local enterprise partnership, Staffordshire county councillor David Williams, Karen Heppenstall of Midlands Connect and Declan Riddell of Stafford Chamber of Commerce
Picture: Midlands Connect

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

Backing for Midlands Rail Hub

Railfuture is backing a new initiative launched in May by Midlands Connect to persuade businesses to support its Midlands Rail Hub plans.

Midlands Connect is an alliance of councils and wants the £1 billion Hub scheme to boost rail with faster and more frequent services.

The Hub also calls for a west chord between Bordesley and Moor Street to improve access from Hereford and Worcester, and an east chord to create an access to Moor Street from the East Midlands.

Welcome for campaigner Jon

Railfuture West Midlands welcomed a new committee member at its AGM in April. Jon Heal, chair of North Staffs Rail Promotion Group since 2010, brings detailed knowledge of the rail needs of the area. The AGM also welcomed back Albert Thomas, who had been a member of the committee for many years and who was vice-chairman until 2019.

In his annual report, chair Steve Wright said Railfuture had almost every area of the West Midlands represented on the committee except Coventry and Warwickshire. We would welcome a representative from there.

Steve also recorded the loss of William Whiting in the year and more recently John Parry of Parry's People Mover, the inventor of the flywheel-driven railcars operating between Stourbridge Junction and Stourbridge Town. He was an entrepreneur and engineering wizard ahead of his time.

A different kind of loss is that of Malcolm Holmes, former executive director of West Midlands Rail Executive and a good friend of

Railfuture. He has moved to be general manager of Great Central Railway at Loughborough. We wish him the very best. We may even organise a Railfuture trip to Loughborough to ride his heritage railway. We will certainly maintain our contact with him.

We continue to be fortunate that Chiltern Trains allows us to use their meeting room at Moor Street station for our regular committee meetings. However, following our pioneering of hybrid AGMs, it is our intention this year to invite guest speakers on occasions, using Zoom facilities to enable our whole membership to be involved.

Long wait for rail action

Railfuture West Midlands responded to several consultations in the final months of 2022 including the revised West Midlands Rail Executive *Rail Strategy*, Midlands Connect's proposals for the Marches line, Worcestershire *Rail Investment Strategy*, Warwickshire *Transport Plan*, City of Stoke *Transport Plan* and Rugby's *Parkway Station* plan. So far, no results have been published in return.

Our campaigning activities will concentrate on strategic issues, liaising with agencies of the rail industry such as the Rail Executive but also supporting local campaigning groups, which are far better placed to lobby for improvements in their locality. However, where no local group exists or is involved, we shall do our best to campaign for specific local issues. These include the lack of services at Polesworth station and the possibility of reopening stations between Stone and Stoke-on-Trent (Barlaston, Wedgwood or Trentham).

www.railfuture.org.uk/West-Midlands-Branch

East Anglia

paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

State of rail in the east

The railways in East Anglia have another supporter in the form of one of the newer sub-national transport bodies, Transport East, which represents Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.

Transport East published its *State of Rail in the East* report in February, concluding that rail investment was not matching the economic, social and environmental needs of the region. It identified the following gaps:

Poor East West connections

particularly between Norwich-Ipswich and Cambridge-Peterborough

Slow journey times, particularly in comparison to other national main lines

Poor frequencies

Restricted capacity for freight trains

Lack of connections between major towns and cities with some growing places, such as Haverhill,

not served at all.

All of these are issues which Railfuture East Anglia would agree with and are covered by our ongoing work *New Geography for Anglia (NG4A)*, a major study carried out for Railfuture East Anglia by our appointed independent transport consultant, Jonathan Roberts.

One of our ongoing local campaigns covers the reopening of the railway to Haverhill, explored in our *Restoring Your Railway* bid, and we welcome this being explicitly named by Transport East as a gap in the network.

Transport East is planning to carry out a wider piece of work identifying the region's vision for rail, selecting short-medium term actions, and choosing longer-term schemes through multi-modal area connectivity studies, something which Railfuture East Anglia will be taking an active interest in.

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Twitter: @railfuture

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

tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk

Trevithick example

Unique to Cornwall, Camborne Trevithick Day is celebrated every year in April. This year marked the 190th anniversary of the death of the inventor of the first practical steam locomotive. Following Trevithick's example, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall aims to set the agenda for rail campaign activity.

Banner repeater

Following last December's launch of the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign banner at Barnstaple station by GWR's MD Mark Hopwood CBE (*Railwatch* 175), Railfuture D&C funded two more which included the Railfuture logo. The banners now adorn Crediton and Eggesford stations, the places on the Tarka line where all trains have to stop in passing loops for the manual exchange of Victorian-style signal tokens.

Installation of the additional banners generated publicity in the *Crediton Courier*, the *North Devon Journal*, and *Devon Live*.

Tim's Talks

The newly Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign lead Tim Steer has given presentations to parish councils along the Tarka line. The latest were at Bishop's Tawton, south of Barnstaple, and at Chittlehampton, which includes the well-used station at Umlerleigh, the third-busiest intermediate station along the line after Crediton and Eggesford. Both presentations resulted in official declarations of support for the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project.

OkeRail

Okehampton's Charter Hall was the venue for a May OkeRail coffee morning, also attended by TRA/ACE Rail, Tavy Rail and Connect Bude. The collaboration between north and west Devon lobby groups was inspired by the success of the Dartmoor line. In April, Okehampton station was the scene for the handover of authentic replica station signage for the use of those reopening campaigns. Generously commissioned by Colin Burges of the Exeter and Teign Valley Railway, the new station signs were manufactured by former BR signage contractor Rydon Signs of Exeter. The reverse sides of the three signs show the last days of trains at Bude, Bideford and Tavistock, using photos taken by railway photographer and author Bernard Mills.

Rail-Mindedness Index

In February, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall published updated research based on the latest estimates of station usage for 2021-22 from the Office of Rail and Road and on 2021 Census population data. The purpose was



CREDITON, BARNSTAPLE AND BIDEFORD UNITED: Town, district and county councillors, including past and present town mayors, line up at Crediton. Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign lead Tim Steer on the right and GWR's David Whiteway (left) are holding a Railfuture-funded banner before displaying it at Crediton station in January. The train is an Exeter-bound Tarka Line service Picture: South West News

to develop an indicator, however approximate, of the comparative use, and under-use, of stations on lines in different areas in relation to their resident populations. Although an inexact science, it has indicated that the average use of Devon's 50 stations per head of the county's total population in 2021-22 was 12.5, or once a month. For North Devon District's five stations (all on the Tarka line) it was only 4.7. For Mid-Devon District, with seven of its eight stations on the Tarka Line (the other being Tiverton Parkway), the average was still only 7.1 station visits per local head per year.

Those figures suggest huge untapped potential – or suppressed demand – for modal shift to rail, provided that a more attractive train service can be offered. Further Railfuture research published in April showed that,

despite 2022-23 including 29 operating days when no trains ran as scheduled, the year recorded over 700,000 Tarka line journeys for the first time ever. That was 30,000 more than the previous best year 2018-19, and almost 160,000 more than the previous (partly pandemic-affected) year.

Beeching report 60 years on

Monday 27 March 2023 marked the 60th anniversary of *The Reshaping of British Railways* – a euphemism if ever there was one. Devon and Cornwall, like other predominantly rural regions of Britain, suffered grievously. ITV News West Country (South West) went to Bideford to interview Tim Steer on behalf of the Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association. He was supported by Dr Michael Ireland, chairman of last year's Judges' Special Award-winner OkeRail, and Tarka's own

strategic development adviser David Northey, formerly with Network Rail in a similar capacity.

Bigger, better railway

The government has provided £13 million levelling up funding to West Devon Borough Council to develop plans for a new parkway station and transport hub on the A30 road in east Okehampton. Exeter's new station at Marsh Barton opened in May with an hourly service, supplemented by a few extra trains in Monday to Saturday peak periods. The station was funded by the government, Great Western, Network Rail, Exeter City and Teignbridge councils, as well as the local enterprise partnership. More information in the railway reopenings section of the Railfuture branch website: www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch



RUG Awards report – by Awards organiser Roger Blake with judges co-ordinator Vice-President Stewart Palmer

The closing date was Easter Saturday for nominations for Railfuture's ninth Awards for Rail User Groups, which include local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships. Eight groups across five Railfuture branch areas submitted 13 nominations. Five of the eight groups are believed to be participating in the awards for the first time. Awards and commendations for the five categories in which nominations have been received – for best website (the newly named Adrian Shooter award), newsletter (the Paul Abell award), social media, campaign, and campaigner (the

Clara Zilahi award) – have been assessed by the judging panel of Railfuture vice-presidents, under the ever-watchful eye of president Christian Wolmar. He will be presenting the certificates after the 2023 national annual general meeting in London on Saturday 15 July 2023. Winners of gold awards and the judges' special award, will make presentations after receiving their award certificates. The re-named award for Railfuture Member of the Year (previously Campaigner of the Year) is a separate award, only for individual Railfuture members. The closing date for that award was Sunday 21 May 2023. It will be presented at the AGM.

North East rail star in ascendant

By Peter Walker

The North East of England spearheaded a rail revolution that transformed the world. So, in two years time, we will be celebrating the bicentennial of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Now, though, we are also witnessing a rail renaissance. We will welcome next year the restoration of the Northumberland line with trains stopping at six new fully accessible stations.

Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Blyth Bebside, Bedlington and Ashington will be served by trains from Newcastle.

“We are absolutely delighted,” said Dennis Fancett. “It has been a long time coming, but it proves that campaigning really does work, as very few people were listening to us when we first put our ideas forward in 2005.”

Dennis is chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, which predicts the line will have a transformational impact on public transport.

SENUG wants to see further extensions, to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, to Blyth town centre, between Bedlington and Morpeth, and a new station at Seghill.

In 2025, the North East will be at the centre of events to mark the birth of a railway network that grew out of plateways and tramways linking collieries to harbours and expanded to 20,000 miles in Britain. The British example was subsequently copied in nearly every other country.

One of the focal points of the celebrations will be the Locomotion railway museum at Shildon, where £5.9 million is being spent on a new hall. Shildon may also provide a peep into the future. Urban.MASS is planning a demonstration there of its electric “pods” transport system of the future.

The North-East Joint Transport Committee (covering County Durham, Tyne and Wear, and Northumberland, but not Tees Valley as yet) has recently agreed, as part of the Bus Services Improvement Plan, what they hope will be the start of an integrated ticketing system covering all local passenger transport services.

The system will be introduced on buses and Metro during this year, and gradually extended to local rail services from next year. The aim is that journeys on all local bus, metro, rail and ferry services in the region will become part of the scheme which will include a daily cap, covering either a single zone or any combination of zones, and will limit the amount that an individual will be asked to spend



2024 OPENING: Dennis Fancett (right) chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, at Newsham with (left to right) Transport Secretary Mark Harper, Blyth Valley MP Ian Levy and Northumberland Council leader Glen Sanderson
Picture: Northumberland County Council

using these local services in any one day. The initial cost of this new system, which includes substantially lower fares for many individual journeys, will be met, in part, from Bus Services Improvement Plan funds. The ambition is that, with lower fares and a multi-mode ticket, passenger numbers will increase and make the scheme self-funding.

Remodelling Coast line stations

On what, by a fortuitous coincidence, proved to be the date when TransPennine’s change of status was announced, Coastliners’ rail user group had a useful discussion with Northern Rail and with a Sunderland councillor about exactly what services were going to use the extra platforms at Sunderland and Hartlepool (Railwatch 174). Finance, or lack of it, proved to be the keynote at each of the stations, as well as equipping Billingham with its new lifts. As a result, many improvements, particularly at Sunderland, may well have to come later rather than sooner, but it was at least confirmed that Sunderland’s station will eventually boast four platform faces rather than the existing two.

At Hartlepool, a blip in plans will delay completion of its third platform until the end of August. That is unfortunate. One of the hoped-for beneficiaries of the extra platform was the Tall Ships race but that takes place in July.

More permanently (we hope), the proposed semi-fast Middlesbrough-Newcastle trains, calling at principal stations, will start just as soon as Office of Rail and Road approval is given. This in

part depends on availability of additional trains, so limits the extras to two-hourly at first, with a firm intention to run them hourly from the May 2024 timetable. There are several doubtful points in the explanations of our very affable Northern Rail guests about the delays and the shortcomings of these new services, not least arising from the undeniable fact that such trains were agreed to, as Northern Connect services, in a franchise agreement made in 2016 and expiring in mid-2021. The difference is that those were quite specifically routed via the Stockton-Ferryhill line, not the coast. When we reminded our Northern friends of this, one of them let slip that a feasibility study was in progress on that very subject. We await further details.

A blast from the past?

Hand-me-down trains from other areas are expected to be used on the reopened Northumberland line next year. This follows long years when north-east rail services had to make do with inadequate Pacers, after a plan to build a class of four-coach diesel trains was abandoned in the 1980s by cash-starved British Rail.

Sooner or later, the existing fleet of diesel trains will have to be replaced. In other areas of Britain, hybrid trains are appearing, with the capacity to take power from electric overhead lines but fitted with batteries to allow operation beyond the wires.

Much as we understand the financial limitations that exist, Raifuture members know that a rolling programme of electrification is the real answer.



Labour’s shadow transport secretary Louise Haigh promised in February that a Labour government would reopen the 21-mile mothballed Leamside line from Ferryhill to Gateshead
Picture: @LouHaigh

On the Tyne and Wear Metro, the new £362 million class 555 Stadler fleet have auxiliary batteries. This will allow Metro service extensions on non-electrified sections. Washington, south of the Tyne, may be one town to benefit.

Testing of the first three of the 46 new trains was under way in May. They feature Stadler’s sliding step which improves accessibility and conditions for wheelchair passengers, as well as for people with luggage, buggies or bikes.

The existing 43-year-old fleet is being given a deep clean as the transition to the new trains will take two years.

www.raifuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch
Twitter @RaifutureNEast

Digital exclusion and the digital divide

By Neil Middleton

It is a topic that is increasingly in the news. It can impact our experience of the railway – in good and bad ways.

First, it is worthwhile contemplating a definition. London TravelWatch uses:

“A digitally excluded person is somebody who either is unable to, or chooses not to, ever go online, whether using mobile data, wi-fi or cabled internet, on any device.

“A digitally disadvantaged person is somebody who does fewer than five activities online and uses mobile data once a week or less: they may use some online services but be excluded from others”.

For the railway, a key part of being digitally disadvantaged can be a lack of access to the options for making online payments – most typically debit and credit cards, PayPal and the like – often due to low income and consequent low credit scores.

The Railfuture position is that the digitally excluded and disadvantaged must not be excluded from travelling by train and that all reasonable steps need to be taken to allow them to travel at no extra cost.

Thus, ability to buy a ticket from a person and to pay with cash is essential. In addition, we want printed timetable booklets and printed timetable posters at stations, although we do recognise that the frequent changes of train times can make this challenging.

Unfortunately I think it inevitable that some options are going to be available only to the digitally included.

Take the journey I made to Railfuture’s annual conference in

Left behind Londoners

London TravelWatch believes 1.5 million Londoners are being left behind by a digital-first approach to transport.

One in six people in London say they are unable to buy a ticket as they can’t use or don’t have access to a smartphone or internet connection.

One in five Londoners say they have paid more for travel because they are not able to buy tickets online or by using mobile apps.

www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/digital-exclusion/

March. My ticket was valid to Sheffield, and I knew I would need to get another ticket for Leeds. There was the possibility of a three-minute connection.

Through my phone, Realtime Trains told me I was likely to be on time, and that it was likely to be a cross platform change without stairs.

About two minutes before arrival, the Northern website then sold me an Advance ticket (again from my phone).

How close to that does the service for the digitally excluded and disadvantaged need to be?

On-the-day Advance tickets should be available from ticket offices and ticket vending machines to the same timescales (within a minute or two) and prices as online.

But I do not think it is realistic to guarantee that onboard staff are available to sell me my ticket in the two-minute window between me becoming

confident that I could make the connection and the train arriving. As I write this, I am also contemplating Railfuture’s response to an Office of Rail and Road consultation on changing from T-12 to T-8 (weeks) for timetable finalisation.

We do not support that, and part of our response will be a wider observation that tickets should be on sale much earlier.

However, as part of that, a mechanism is needed to be able to update the passenger, and tickets (other than longer period season tickets) bought from machines and ticket offices are ‘anonymous’ with no easy way to contact the future traveller.

Is it fair to be sold a ticket, the train time to change and for it to be your responsibility to visit the station to check?

An important aspect of the above two examples is that the digital element is essential.

However, where a digital product is introduced, the existing product needs to be retained.

For example, contactless payment via bank cards, combined with capping, can be a better offer for regular users who have a bank card with available funds or borrowing status – but it is essential that there is a non-digital alternative as well, such as the traditional London Travelcard.

In the future these could contain “hidden” digital elements such as QR codes, even when obtained from a ticket machine or ticket office, that allow the detailed usage tracking needed for accurate revenue sharing.

We think retention of products like this is essential if the number of people who choose to travel by train is to be maximised – and thus revenue will grow.

Railfuture conference was ‘an inspiring day’

By Neil Middleton

Railfuture’s much-delayed annual conference was held in Leeds on Thursday 30 March. Fortunately the RMT cancelled its rail strike scheduled for that day, which allowed more of the attendees to travel by train.

We had around 65 in the room and around six on Zoom – a good mix of Railfuture members, rail campaigners, community rail members, industry staff and academics.

We had a good variety of speakers giving us updates, and some very useful question and answer segments afterwards.

We also had a very touching video from Platform (a rail education initiative from four

community rail partnerships – see platformrail.org) remembering William Whiting, who was co-organising the conference when he unexpectedly passed away.

The post-conference feedback survey was pleasing, with 88% completely or partly satisfied.

There are brief reports of the conference on *Railwatch* pages 11 and 15 but you can find the full report at

www.railfuture.org.uk/display3297

As I look back on the conference, I have in mind a key message I took away with me from some of the presentations.

Railfuture vice-president Stewart Palmer urged the industry to

focus on the crumbling edge of quality in current service provision. Karen Bennett of the Community Rail Network wanted cooperation with Railfuture on encouraging travel by train.

A comprehensive presentation by Dr Manuel Ojeda Cabral from the University of Leeds identified how rail projects often suffer under the government’s TAG measurement criteria.

As a co-organiser with Wendy Thorne, Ann Hindley and William, it was good to get feedback comments like “very good and very informative. Brilliant mix of speakers” and “an interesting and inspiring day”.

We are already thinking about next year’s conference and would welcome any volunteers..

Thames Valley

andrew.mccallum@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture gets the last word

Railfuture Thames Valley gained media coverage of the Beeching 60th anniversary in March. Our media officer Dave Richardson was on ITV Regional News and BBC Radio Oxford and had an article in the *Oxford Mail*. He pointed out that Oxford is set to gain three new rail routes in a decade (Oxford-London Marylebone in 2016, East West Rail to Milton Keynes by 2024 and Cowley reopening in 2026). EWR and Cowley are dependent on works to build an extra platform and widen the Botley Road bridge at Oxford station which are now under way.

The closure of Didcot-Oxford while the bridge over the river Thames at Nuneham is repaired due to reopen on 10 June) has also attracted media attention. Railfuture had the last word when BBC Radio Oxford covered the story on their breakfast time show, interviewing Network Rail’s capital delivery director Stuart Calvert, GWR managing director Mark Hopwood and Railfuture’s Dave Richardson.

He said that increasing levels of Victorian infrastructure failures are going to require serious levels of investment by the government to resolve. He highlighted the serious consequences for freight with many daily trains to and from Southampton having to be diverted. People who never travel by rail rely on buying products transported by rail.

Railfuture Thames Valley is routinely invited to GWR’s London Thames Valley and North Downs local transport forum, and usually our vice-chairman Nigel Rose and secretary Andrew McCallum attend. At the most recent session, before the Nuneham Bridge closure, we raised problems of overcrowding on Oxford-Paddington trains at busy times, such as Saturday mornings when a five-car set is deployed, and the protection of the local Didcot-Oxford-Banbury stopping services once the Oxford-Paddington fast trains have calls at Didcot inserted, in lieu of Slough.

Railfuture-affiliated group Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee continues to lobby the Department for Transport and the East West Rail company for the Aylesbury link (known as CS2.5) to have a through service between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury.

Frustratingly, this is not yet funded despite the obvious and significant connectivity improvements it will allow, with the DfT hinting that third party funding may need to be brought forward.

One option could be the extension of Chiltern services from Aylesbury Vale Parkway to Milton Keynes.

Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the continued commitment of Oxfordshire County Council to rail development and related work through the allocation of an additional £100,000 in 2023/24, building on the £250,000 allocated last year, and looks forward to a continuing dialogue on how to deploy that funding most productively.

www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch
[Twitter @RailfutureTV](https://twitter.com/RailfutureTV)

janeann.liston@railfutureScotland.org.uk

Good news from ScotRail

The May timetable included a return to a 15-minute frequency for part of the day between Edinburgh and Glasgow Queen Street, plus more stops at Fife's former county town of Cupar on the East Coast main line. Reductions in service in Inverclyde are less welcome.

Mixed news from CrossCountry

ScotRail reinstated all the Fife stops on services north of Edinburgh, albeit there is now only one rather than two trains a day. It is a different story in Dunbar. Despite objections and without consultation, seven trains a day now speed through, stopping instead across the border at Berwick-upon-Tweed. This leaves Dunbar passengers dependent upon TransPennine Express, with extremely poor reliability of late. CrossCountry's actions make little sense. Dunbar is expanding and demand for travel will likely increase when East Linton opens next year, while Berwick's population is shrinking. The only increase in passengers at Berwick is due to Dunbarians driving there to catch trains which no longer stop at Dunbar. Bad for the environment, and no way to run a railway.

With Reston open and East Linton under construction, Rail Action Group East of Scotland has turned its attention to campaigning for reopening Haddington station. The former county town's population is heading towards 15,000, the size of Galashiels which, when reopened, confounded experts by being used by many more people than was forecast, just like Bathgate, Alloa and Edinburgh Park.

Capital improvements

In Edinburgh, the tram extension to Newhaven opened in June, with work on another extension, to Granton, expected to start next

year. With regard to heavy rail, a housing developer has withdrawn house-building proposals, which could impinge upon the potential reopening of Portobello station which Edinburgh City Council has said could happen in the near future. It is reassuring to

see a council pay attention to land for future rail development. Too often, former lines and stations have been redeveloped willy-nilly with no thought that they might yet be part of the transport network again.

Fife building for a rail future

Over in Fife, construction of the new Leven station began in March. A year before reopening, residents can look forward to a twice-hourly 65-minute journey to Edinburgh, a saving of 40 minutes compared to bus. There is disappointment that freight services appear unlikely to materialise, mainly because Diageo, "a global leader in beverage alcohol" appears to prefer using dozens of lorries trundling along rural roads rather than environmentally friendly trains.

'Open' target for St Andrews

Eleven months after the submission of the St Andrews preliminary options appraisal, Transport Scotland has finally met the St Andrews Rail Link campaign.



Carstairs Junction remodelling

It would appear that, thanks to Transport Scotland's delays, all the remaining local rail delivery fund money is now forfeit and returned to the UK Treasury. However, Transport Scotland appears keen to get the detailed options appraisal done, to complete Scottish Transport Appraisal Guide process. There will still be more work to do after that, such as making the business case. Nevertheless StARLink welcomes

this more positive approach and has a target of having the railway running the next time the Open Championship returns to the "Home of Golf", thought to be 2029 or 2030. Last year's St Andrews Open generated £300 million for the economy.

South of the Central Belt

There is much activity south of the Central Belt. Carstairs junction (Network Rail picture above) has been remodelled in a £164 million project to allow faster speeds and reduced journey times. June was the projected completion month. Also, Transport Scotland is meeting regional transport partnership SWESTrans to discuss the appraisal of proposed new stations at Beattock, East Riggs and Thornhill with the hope that they can now proceed to make the business case.

Further east, in the absence of a lead from government, the Campaign for Borders Rail is considering commissioning its own research to support the case for extending Edinburgh-Tweedbank

to Hawick and thence to Carlisle. Reopening would establish a sustainable and socially inclusive communications and economic regeneration corridor throughout the Borderlands, integrated with the national rail network. A new group, the Tweed Valley Railway Campaign, is pushing for a connecting line between Tweedbank and Berwick, via St Boswells and Kelso, to provide resilience and remove the need for people travelling west-east along that corridor to make a large detour via Edinburgh. Were the existing Borders line to be extended to Carlisle as above, then a missing link between the West and East Coast main lines would be replaced.

Contacts

Campaign for North East Rail
www.campaignfornortheastrail.org
www.facebook.com/CampaignforNorthEastRail
info@campaignfornortheastrail.org

Newburgh
<https://newburghtrainstation.org.uk>
<https://twitter.com/NTSCampaign>
<https://www.facebook.com/Newburgh-Train-Station-Campaign>

RAGES
www.rages.org.uk
 Twitter @RailActionGrpES
<https://www.facebook.com/RailActionGroup>

Levenmouth Rail Campaign
www.levenmouth.co.uk/
[facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/)

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

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

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

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

Beattock Station Action Group
www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/
[facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup](https://www.facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup)

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

Thornhill Station Action Group
[facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/](https://www.facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/)

London & South East

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

Flying the Railfuture campaign flag

Volunteers publicised Railfuture campaigns with a stall at Alexandra Palace for the London Festival of Railway Modelling in March. One banner promoted KenEx Tram (Thames Gateway Tramlink Ltd) and a new one promoted Hoo Peninsula Railway. Thanks to Alix Gunn for producing the artwork.

To support our campaign to reopen Uckfield-Lewes, Railfuture flew its *Bridge the Gap* campaign banner in June at Uckfield for the Lions Club's Family Fun Day.

Members have also been representing Railfuture at stakeholder events (some online), such as the South East Councils-hosted All-Party Parliamentary Group for the South East's first evidence session for its second inquiry, on *The South East and 'Global Britain': what role for transport infrastructure in underpinning Britain's plan to trade and grow?* Railfuture also

contributed a written submission. The public discussion sadly deteriorated into complaints about potholes and rail disruption.

Other external engagements included train operator Southeastern's annual stakeholder forum, Greater Anglia's rail user group forum, Southeast community rail partnership steering groups and Network Rail's passenger capacity project for Stratford.

Railfuture gave a presentation to a University of the Third Age group in West Sussex, supported East Sussex members in the Three Oaks and Winchelsea Action for Rail Transport, and took part in the Transport for the South East's Transport Forum.

In two submissions about housing developments to the Planning Inspectorate, Railfuture called for consideration to be given to the needs of reopening Uckfield-Lewes.

You can read consultation responses on the

Railfuture website. Current consultations are under the *Rail dates* section in the *What's on* section.

Members updated on strategy for rail

A hybrid annual open meeting took place in April in Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission near Old Street station, London, combining guest speakers and a formal AGM for members after lunch. Transport for the South East's Head of Strategy Mark Valley updated us on its transport strategy, and the delivery action plan for its strategic investment plan and Railfuture's policy director Ian Brown gave us a *state of the nation's rail* address. The TfSE presentation can be found on the Railfuture website L&SE branch page.

Keep up to date with Railfuture L&SE branch

All Railfuture members can subscribe free to the branch's monthly newsletter *inter-railse*. The newsletters can be viewed or downloaded from

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

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

Short-term threats

Cash is king

Events last autumn demonstrated that governments are constrained by financial reality, so we understand the government's need to conserve cash by delaying investment in rail. Investment in roads has been cut too, with many schemes delayed. However, this will increase the level of investment needed in future years to achieve carbon goals.

Constraining Network Rail's maintenance expenditure will force it to make short-term fixes rather than permanent solutions to resolve problems. This will increase maintenance costs in future and may even force it to close lines which produce minimal revenue. The proposal to end the London Travelcard will discourage people from travelling, resulting in fewer visitors to London, so less money for the visitor economy and Transport for London. See www.railfuture.org.uk/article1903

The key is that decisions made to conserve cash must not destroy future viability.

HS2

The need to conserve cash has forced the government's decision to delay the Euston HS2 station and the sections from Birmingham to Manchester and to East Midlands Parkway. It will inevitably increase cost and delay realisation of the benefits.

It is essential that a clear vision of the end goal for HS2 is maintained. Redesign would increase costs even further. Old Oak Common to Birmingham should be the core, with additional sections being implemented in a rolling programme as they become affordable. London to Manchester services are essential to a viable business case, so Euston-Old Oak Common and Birmingham-Crewe-Manchester sections must be next. Capacity for freight on the West Coast main line, services from London to Scotland and between the West and East Midlands will then require the Golborne link (to which the Department for Transport has no alternative) and the Birmingham to East Midlands Parkway sections.

Vision for growth

Government and unions must both face up to the new rail market reality in restructuring the industry and ensuring its future viability. Revenue and traffic growth depend on resolution of the industrial dispute, leadership, delivery of a reliable service and fares reform: see our letter to Rail Minister Huw Merriman at www.railfuture.org.uk/display3256

Failure to achieve this, as feared by Ian Brown in his *Is there light at the end of the tunnel?* article on page 3, will result in industry decline with the loss of rail jobs.

The focus for growth must be on leisure travel and freight. On LNER, for example, leisure traffic has recovered to more than

100% of pre-Covid figures, but is more evenly spread across the day than business and commuting so does not require so much capacity. Leisure travel is sensitive to reliability, frequency and price.

The comparison between Avanti and LNER shows the impact of cancellations, while the comparison with CrossCountry shows the impact of reduced frequency, and the fact that journeys were at 90% of pre-Covid while revenue was at only 70% shows lower yield per leisure journey.

Innovative solutions are required to attract more leisure travellers. A loyalty card following the concept of Tesco Clubcard would allow the industry to understand the travel patterns of individual passengers and so make personalised offers. The ability of customers to see ticket prices for individual services over a time window of days rather than hours would allow time-rich potential travellers to find the cheapest travel time, filling otherwise empty seats. A better journey experience for passengers will encourage them to return, especially for those that are disabled but not visibly so.

Freight has the potential to treble, using capacity released by a reduction in peak passenger demand, provided key pinch points are resolved. This will require only a relatively small investment for significant revenue and decarbonisation benefits.

The Treasury regards the Elizabeth line as a success, so projects with a sound business case which improve the viability of rail services should receive investment.

TransPennine Express

The record of service cancellations at TPE prompted the government to transfer the franchise to the operator of last resort on 28 May, rather than renew the contract with First Group. Of itself, the change of ownership is unlikely to make any significant difference to performance.

What matters is leadership behaviour: Northern has been run under the operator of last resort regime for three years, with no discernible improvement in performance. LNER, also an operator of last resort, is performing well under the same chief executive, David Horne, as when it was a commercial franchise.

To improve its performance, TPE must reach an understanding with its staff that seven-day working and flexible rostering are the best way for it to stay competitive and so protect jobs, and the government must allow TPE to recruit.

This change creates an opportunity for the government to combine the TPE and Northern franchises before re-letting them. Integrating their services would generate cost savings. It also creates an opportunity for suburban services, for example around Manchester, to be devolved to the local mayoral authority.



railwatch

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Editor: Ray King, 4 Christchurch Square
London E9 7HU

Tel: 020 8985 8548 editor@railwatch.org.uk

Printer: Print-Out, High Street, Histon

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Non-members can subscribe online at

www.railfuture.org.uk/shop

or by sending £12 (cheque to Railfuture) to: Alan Cocker,
11 Derwent Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 0QR

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only).

All other correspondence to 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP

General inquiries: info@railfuture.org.uk

Media enquiries:

Bruce Williamson Email: media@railfuture.org.uk

Tel: 0117 9272954 Mobile: 07759 557389

Elections: Board elections held annually. Nomination forms can be obtained from

www.railfuture.org.uk/Elections

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Rail's golden triangle for science

By Ray King

A reborn East West Rail WILL link the life science powerhouses of Oxford and Cambridge, the government has finally decided. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform travel across the country, an alternative to our existing polluting car culture.

The route between Bedford and Cambridge was announced in late May. It will include new stations at Tempsford (on the East Coast main line), Cambourne new town and Cambridge South.

A new train service will run over a £5 billion combination of upgraded and new rail sections between the two university towns.

Both the Treasury and the Department for Transport have now agreed that building EWR is essential. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said: "Our life sciences sector makes £94 billion for the UK each year and produced the world's first Covid vaccine."

A Treasury statement said: "This region is a globally renowned hub of science, research and innovation."

East West Rail cannot be built soon enough for Railfuture and the many potential users of the line, especially after fears last year that the project was in doubt. But the line also has to be integrated into local bus services, insists England's Economic Heartland, the sub-national transport body.

Oxford and Cambridge are already linked to the third science and economic powerhouse of London by excellent rail services. EWR will make it a golden triangle.

House prices in Oxford and Cambridge are already rivalling London. EWR is expected to increase the price of houses along the line and stimulate new building. Transport Secretary Mark Harper estimates EWR will unlock £103 billion of growth, with new homes, business and job opportunities.

"This crucial line will also serve as a catalyst for development in one of Europe's most vibrant local economies while making travel quicker, cheaper and easier across the region," he added.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of East West Rail will be Bedford, where people will gain access to high-value jobs in Oxford and Cambridge.

Bedford, however, is where there is opposition, including from the newly elected mayor, because EWR proposes to demolish 65 homes to widen the four-track Midland main line north of Bedford to six tracks.

Bedford provided some of the 10,000 responses to EWR's preliminary consultation which took place last year. A statutory consultation takes place next year.



CAMBRIDGE SOUTH: Work on the new station under way in May. Rail minister Huw Merriman visited the site in June to confirm £211 million of government funding for it. He was urged to get full value from the station by also funding the plan to ease the railway junction bottleneck at Ely
Picture: Michael Smyth

EWR is overseen by the East West Rail Co (set up by the government in 2018) and is being built by the East West Rail Alliance – VolkerRail, Laing O'Rourke, Atkins and Network Rail.

A development consent order is now needed, but work is already under way to rebuild the "mothballed" railway between Oxford and Bletchley with a new station at Winslow. Test running should start next year, with a public service starting in 2025 to a new high-level station at Bletchley.

Then the Bedford-Bletchley line will be upgraded, with a relocated St John's station, to serve Bedford Hospital. Capping the EWR line speed at 100mph will allow some existing level crossings to be retained.

EWR will also serve Cambridge South station which is currently being built to serve Addenbrookes Hospital and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

This new railway will revolutionise journey times west of Cambridge. A train is proposed every 15 minutes connecting Cambridge with Cambourne in about 15 minutes, Tempsford in 25 minutes and Bedford in 35 minutes. This unmatched combination of speed and reliable frequency should encourage a massive modal transfer from road to rail.

The announcement was welcomed by the East West Mainline Partnership of local authorities, which stresses that its eventual ambition is for services to continue eastwards to both Ipswich and Norwich.

The chosen alignment permits this without reversal at either Bedford or Cambridge.

Railfuture campaigners also point out that EWR will allow people to travel from Plymouth or Swansea to Norwich and Ipswich – and of course all the stations along the route. EWR will also probably add to the case for reopening Oxford-Cowley, although Aylesbury will not now be linked to EWR. One

drawback is that at present the DfT refuses to accept that EWR needs to be electrified. More time is likely to be wasted on looking for alternatives, and the Great Western main line from Didcot to Oxford is also still awaiting "indefinitely" for electrification.

Cambridge mayor Nik Johnson welcomed the "green light" for EWR but he challenged the failure on electrification. He said: "All future rail developments should be electric, not diesel. I know many local leaders share this view."

Railfuture, and many others, have been campaigning for EWR for 60 years. It should have happened far earlier.

Railfuture's Peter Wakefield said: "This is a time for celebrations. Many of us have spent our lives campaigning for this railway...and we may just survive long enough to see it open."

For most of those 60 years, success for Railfuture has been a reopened station or even a chord brought back into use. But recently, for many rail passengers, just being able to catch a train has been a major problem.

The Treasury did not help by refusing to sanction a return to a full post-Covid timetable, which has led to severe overcrowding.

There have even been signs that the government is lapsing back into its dirty habit of encouraging environmentally damaging travel by road and air, ignoring the fact that, globally, flying is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases. A return flight to Berlin emits the same amount of carbon as eight return trips by train.

Eurostar, the alternative to flying to continental Europe, has been struggling with the passport problems caused by Brexit.

In Britain, some rail operators have continued to run unreliable services, particularly in the north of England, with infuriated passengers looking elsewhere. The government finally stepped in to stop some of the rot by taking

TransPennine Express out of the hands of FirstGroup.

The word Express has been quietly dropped with TransPennine Express becoming Transpennine Trains Ltd, while in 2018 Directly Operated Railways morphed into Operator of Last Resort. Labour's political answer is to promise nationalisation.

Railfuture does its best to keep the party politics at arm's length and to carry on campaigning for a bigger, better railway. We want a proper rolling programme of electrification but also have more modest aims – for example, infill electrification to enable more freight trains to dispense with diesel haulage.

Also required, sometimes, are flyover or dive-under grade separation, platform extensions to take longer trains rather than have to rely on selective door opening, and especially more provision of step-free access at stations.

But Railfuture can celebrate many campaign successes.

You can identify many by flicking through Railfuture's book *Britain's Growing Railway*, still available at the bargain price of £5 on the Railfuture website.

The Railfuture website also includes a list of the successes since the book's 2017 publication.

The Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* programme also represents a significant Railfuture campaign success in itself. Railfuture called for a network development fund to follow on from the new stations fund dating back to 2013.

Great British Railways must build on these successes.

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