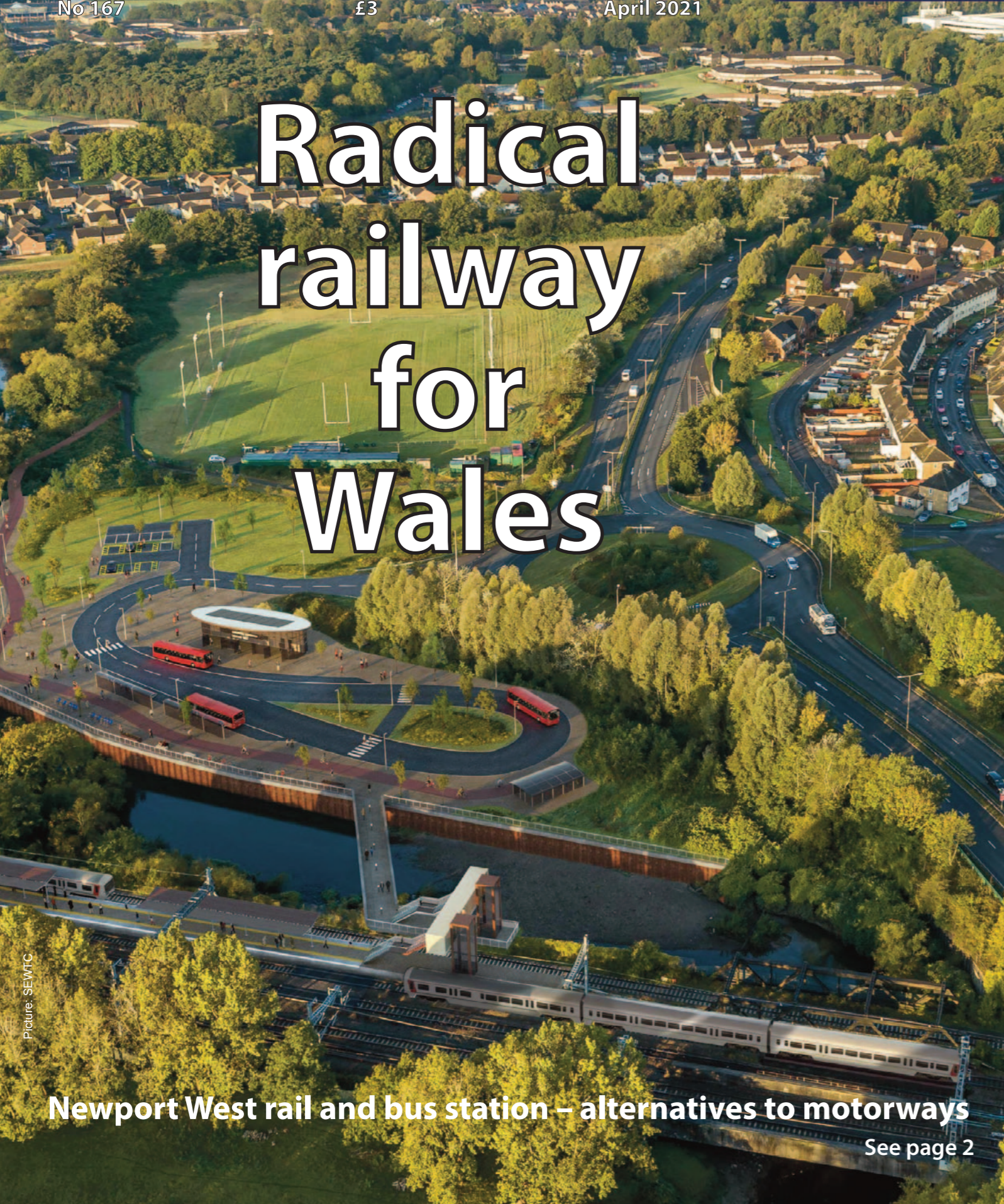




# Radical railway for Wales



Newport West rail and bus station – alternatives to motorways

See page 2



## Railwatch contents

- 3 Covid-19 dark before dawn?
- 4 East Anglia, East Midlands
- 5 Clamour for rail reopenings
- 6 Greens go for Rail for All
- 7 Rail asset Harry
- 8 Your views
- 10 Severnside, Wessex
- 11 Alan Bevan tribute
- 12 What are railways for?
- 14 Thames Valley
- 15 Campaign for railfreight
- 16 Cymru/Wales, North West
- 17 Access for All
- 18 Letters and rail choices
- 19 Scotland and book reviews
- 20 North East and flexi tickets
- 21 Yorkshire, West Midlands, Lincolnshire
- 22 London & South East, night trains resurgence
- 23 Chris Page
- 24 Clouds over open access

# Green alternative to M-ways

A new rail station could be built at Newport West together with an integrated bus station as the Welsh Government prepares to take real action in the fight against climate change and the massive pollution problems caused by road traffic.

The Senedd voted in January to join forces with the Welsh Government to endorse a forward-thinking plan to provide a sustainable alternative to road and motorway expansion by encouraging public transport, walking and cycling.

However, because the plan requires investment in the South Wales main line and six new railway stations, it relies on the UK Government – which controls rail infrastructure investment money in Wales – to halt the British addiction to road building and divert money into sustainable transport.

Eighteen months ago, the Welsh Government decided against building the £1.6 billion M4 relief road and appointed the South East Wales Transport Commission to find alternatives which were published in November in an 88-page report.

All parties in the Senedd welcomed the plans put forward by transport minister Ken Skates and deputy Lee Waters.

The Welsh Government has set up a dedicated development unit to make progress on the recommendations of the commission and has said it will work with “partners” including the UK Government and Network Rail.

Mr Walters said the UK Government would need to step up investment in rail infrastructure if the commission’s vision is to be achieved. He added: “For too long, Wales has been at the back of the queue when the UK Government has been investing in rail infrastructure, but this is a positive



PAGE ONE PICTURE

PROPOSED: Rail station (left) at Newport West with good bus links

opportunity for the UK Government to make good on their under-investment in Wales.” Mr Waters said the jury is out on whether the UK Government would appreciate the importance of the project.

The Welsh Government says the underfunding of Welsh railway infrastructure between 2001 and 2029 amounts to between £2 billion and £5 billion. Professor Stuart Cole, emeritus professor of transport at the University of South Wales, said: “I think the preferred option for the Welsh Government would be to take over responsibility for all of the railways in Wales. Not just the Valley lines, but everything in Wales.”

Professor Cole pointed to the example of the Scottish Government, which has the power to fund and specify where resources are targeted by Network Rail.

“They have electrified a number of lines, including the lines between Edinburgh and Glasgow, because they can decide what to spend the money on,” he said.

■ See Julian Langston’s *Railfuture Wales* report for more information: Page 16

# Covid-19: Is it the dark before the dawn?



Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell considers what lessons Railfuture can learn from the latest phases of the pandemic

The country has travelled a long and often tragic path since the optimistic days of last summer when it seemed our patriotic duty was to eat out to help out.

## A quiet summer

Even though they have been overtaken by events it is worth looking at the most recent figures for passenger journeys to have been published by the Office of Rail and Road, referring to the months of July, August and September 2020 (Quarter 2 of 2020-21).

This was generally a time when many pandemic restrictions had been eased, and the number of passengers had recovered despite rail travel still being subject to measures such as the compulsory wearing of a face covering.

The 134 million passenger journeys recorded by the ORR for the three months represented a 279% increase on the 35.4 million journeys recorded for the previous quarter.

However the 134 million trips were only 29.8% of the 449 million passenger journeys recorded for Q2 the previous year (2019).

Surprisingly, when this 29.8% is broken down into the percentages for the three sectors of London & South East, Regional and Long Distance, the percentages for the individual sectors are quite close – 31.2%, 27.2% and 26.2% respectively.

## Difference between operators

On the other hand, there is a much greater difference between the percentages recorded for individual train operators, the highest percentage being double the lowest.

Numerically, the percentage of passenger journeys compared with the previous year varied from 44.5% (6.0 million journeys) for TfL Rail and 39.5% (18.7 million journeys) for London Overground to 22.3% (1.6 million journeys) for Chiltern and 22.0% (4.5 million journeys) for West Midlands Trains.

The highest figures refer to London operators. They reflect at least in part the difficulty of getting to work in London by alternative transport for those people who could not work from



NO RUSH: One of Northern’s new class 195 trains arrives at an empty Woodhouse station. But the Sheffield-Lincoln service will benefit from these trains for years to come.

home. Then perhaps the Chiltern and WMT catchment areas contain the highest proportion of people who can work from home, or who can most easily use alternative transport to get to work.

The highest absolute number of passenger journeys (27.1 million) was recorded by Govia Thameslink Railway, and represented 30.1% of the previous year’s figure.

Three areas that may be of particular interest to Railfuture campaigners were all at the low end of the scale:

Northern	26.0%	7.3 million
ScotRail	24.5%	6.1 million
TfW	25.8%	2.2 million

## A quieter winter

The more recent picture is given by the Department for Transport statistics published every week for the use of transport modes each day during the pandemic (again as a percentage of a corresponding figure for the previous year).

This percentage was running at 32-34% for National Rail in mid-October, then dipped to around 23% during the November lockdown. The relaxation of restrictions in December took the figure up to around 33% in mid-December, before the January lockdown saw a reduction to around 14% (though this is still much higher

than the 4% recorded in April last year during the first lockdown).

The figure for London Underground was slightly higher in mid-January, at 15-16%, but unlike the National Rail percentage (which hardly varies at weekends) the Underground percentage weekend figures have consistently varied from the weekdays either side. During lockdowns, the Underground figure has regularly dipped by up to 5% at weekends, but the December relaxation saw the weekday percentage rise by 6%, 7% and 3% on the three Saturdays before Christmas.

## What next?

For once, it looks as though the pandemic situation may be much the same when you read these words in mid-March as it is at the end of January, with a gradual decline in infections making it possible to ease restrictions gradually.

Naturally there are hopes that the situation will have eased considerably by the summer, but it seems unlikely that the railways will see passenger traffic return to pre-pandemic levels in the short term.

While some people really do not appreciate working from home for various reasons, and many others are not in a situation where it is an option, there is a

significant number of people who view it very positively, and an even higher proportion of employers who can see the possibility of saving part of the expense of office space.

Hence London train operators are likely to find that their once-captive commuters have broken free of their expensive season-ticket shackles.

In contrast, the future of long-distance travel may gain from a reaction against Zoom meetings in contexts where interpersonal contact is judged to be worth the expense of a journey. For myself I must admit I find taking the minutes of a Zoom meeting to be a much trickier business than when I am in the room with everyone else, never mind the loss of the less formal interactions which normally accompany such live meetings.

Otherwise long-distance operators are going to have to make their offerings sufficiently attractive to encourage discretionary travel by train – perhaps we might even see the return of the restaurant car!

Many Regional services have seen the pandemic loss of passengers immediately follow the introduction of much-improved rolling stock. Happily the improved rolling stock will still be in traffic long after the hoped-for departure of the pandemic, giving train operators, Railfuture campaigners, and everyone else promoting passenger travel the chance to offer an attractive product.

## The elephant in the room

The immediate, widespread and tragic consequences of the pandemic have naturally overshadowed concerns about climate change.

However there is still the basic need over the whole of this planet to reduce carbon emissions, a need which must now be brought once more to a position of prominence, and not lost sight of even if there is an overwhelming desire to reduce public expenditure.

On a national scale, significant decarbonisation of transport has got to mean significant modal shift, and this means significant investment in increasing the capacity of main lines as well as the investment necessary to reverse the more shortsighted “Beeching closures”.

This is a debate to which Railfuture campaigners can make a significant contribution, with our detailed knowledge of the benefits which rail travel can bring to the environment.

Picture: PAUL ABELL

# Little things mean a lot on the railway

## PRESIDENT’S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

One of the worst outcomes of the railway since privatisation a quarter of a century ago is the failure to get costs down. Indeed, quite the contrary. The cost of doing anything seems to have risen at a higher rate than inflation.

In a way, that is hardly surprising, and it has happened in other organisations such as the BBC and the NHS. If you separate out the various components of a big organisation into smaller groups of services, you end up creating a whole lot of quasi-independent separate entities which then require legal agreements and contracts between each other.

I remember finding out that the BBC stopped using its own archival service when it became a cost centre because it was cheaper to go elsewhere, even though that meant the money went out of the corporation and was therefore lost. There have been many similar examples in the rail industry. That is why I have long supported the

idea of an integrated railway, as it means fewer entities and many fewer contracts between them which are inevitably expensive to police. This higher level of integration is clearly a key part of the much leaked but yet to be seen Williams Review. But there is another way to reduce costs in the railway that has also been neglected since the break-up of the industry in the mid 1990s, and that is innovation. There has too often been a focus on the big idea, the silver bullet that will solve all the industry’s problems in one go. This was certainly the case when Network Rail, under its then chief executive Mark Carne, was obsessed with the notion of the digital railway, which would supposedly allow for a doubling of capacity and a reduction in costs. Or looking further back, when

Railtrack reckoned it could create a system of on-board train control by the year 2000 that would revolutionise the railway. We still await it! Thankfully the current chief executive Andrew Haines has a much more pragmatic approach to technology, rather than seeing it as the be all and end all. Instead, there are a myriad of small ways to improve the railway, but innovators often find it difficult to break into the rail industry. I wrote recently in *RAIL* magazine about a clever way of using a camera in the cab to monitor lineside vegetation and how the developers found it hard to convince Network Rail of its value, despite successful trials. Network Rail was developing its own, expensive, system and did not appear open to alternative ideas. After the article appeared,



Railfuture president: Christian Wolmar

other developers relayed similar stories of obstacles in getting their schemes across to Network Rail and train operators.

One idea was for a toilet with a seat that popped up automatically after use. While that may seem daft, it would ensure that the seat remained clean, not something that is always the case at the moment! Train operators though seemed reluctant to take up a cheap and simple way of improving their service offering.

The state of toilets on trains is a major source of complaint from passengers, and in the new post-Covid world the railway will need to sell itself on the basis of the quality of experience, as it can no longer rely on the notion that people have no choice. Innovation will be key to that.

The 20th century railway needs to become a 21st century experience and its managers must encourage new ways of offering and providing the service, and they must use innovation to cut costs. Otherwise, the railway will never recover from the pandemic collapse.





**FEN LINE BREAKTHROUGH:** Cambridge Labour MP Daniel Zeichner, right, and the Conservative Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor James Palmer, left, welcome the first eight-car all-stations King's Lynn to Cambridge service

paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

### ■ ■ Fen line problem solved

One of the biggest problems for Railfuture East Anglia and the Fen Line User Group was solved in November when the 10.44 London King's Cross to King's Lynn was the first eight-car service to stop at all stations between Cambridge and King's Lynn, the culmination of many months of work by Network Rail and Great Northern to fulfil this long promised project.

Chronic overcrowding north of Cambridge was partially alleviated recently when the second fast train each hour from King's Cross was extended to Ely, but the annual five million users at Fenline stations still faced frequent overcrowding.

Platforms at Waterbeach and Littleport have now been extended for eight-car trains and a new siding provided at King's Lynn. A simple-sounding job was complicated by fen soils which are forever on the move. At Waterbeach, exceptionally deep piling was needed and the embankment at Littleport required heavy engineering.

The benefits are immediate with eight-car trains each way every hour. Littleport station is now fully accessible and Waterbeach has a half-hourly service as both Great Northern services are able to stop. In the morning up peak over 2,000 extra seats are provided into Cambridge and capacity is released at congested Cambridge station because the trains no longer need to be split. This also means passengers can now walk between the two class 387 units as the connecting doors are kept unlocked – previously they were kept locked to simplify splitting and joining.

### ■ ■ New station for Long Stratton?

The 20-mile distance between Norwich and Diss stations is the longest interval between any two stations in the East of England – a legacy of 1960s station closures and streamlining of the Great Eastern main line.

Although use of Diss station has more than doubled in the past 20 years, the distance remains a major obstacle to attracting local passengers. However, two miles from the former Fornsett station and midway between Norwich

and Diss is the growing town of Long Stratton, where 2,000 new homes will bring the town's population to around 10,000.

Railfuture East Anglia has sent its new report *Long Stratton – new station for South Norfolk?* to all South Norfolk councillors and local MPs. In the past, voices calling for a new station have been dismissed. This time we intend to create a debate over the benefits a new station can bring and early feedback from local councillors is positive.

A completely new northbound flow would be opened up from Long Stratton to Norwich with a journey time as little as 10 minutes, an attractive alternative to peak hour buses which sometimes take 40 minutes.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Stations](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Stations)

### ■ ■ Timetable consultation

Greater Anglia is consulting about the new Great Eastern main line timetable for December this year. The new timetable will take advantage of the new trains, improving journey times thanks to quicker acceleration and braking, so Railfuture East Anglia is calling for a seven-day-a-week timetable with a minimum hourly service on all routes and better connections at key interchanges such as Colchester, Ipswich, Stowmarket, Norwich and Cambridge. We also question the apparent lack of a third London-Norwich service.

We recommend an hourly Ipswich-Peterborough service is introduced as soon as possible, with good connections at Ely as an interim measure, pointing out the importance of this service as a new station is planned at Soham, with 10,000 new homes planned along the route. Hourly services should be provided to all stations. The quicker acceleration of the new trains should be used to provide these stops without affecting overall journey times where station stops have historically been dropped on alternate hours. In the longer term, the majority of routes should become half hourly. Railfuture East Anglia continues to lobby for the necessary infrastructure provision so they can be added at a future date.

■ ■ [www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia)  
Twitter: @RailfutureEA

anthony.kay@railfuture.org.uk

### ■ ■ Vision 2050 for a post-road-building world

The proposal in Leicestershire's strategic growth plan for a damaging "Expressway" road carving through the countryside to the east and south of Leicester has been dropped, much to the relief of the many campaigners who were fighting it. Following this news, Railfuture's Owen O'Neill and John Harrison have started a *Leicestershire Vision 2050* working group to generate proposals for more sustainable, rail-based transport to serve developments in the county over the next 30 years. We are taking a bottom-up approach, identifying growth locations and then identifying suitable transport solutions to address those transport needs. We welcome any member interested in joining us, especially those who may not be so into the hardware of rail – but relish the potential to identify the right sustainable transport solutions to connect communities together. The working group has been somewhat overtaken by the recent National Infrastructure Commission report, which has upset the HS2 East apple cart, but recommends developing inter-regional links supported by local transport schemes. A separate Railfuture working group has been established to look at the NIC report – though there may well be a considerable degree of overlap between the two.

### ■ ■ Maid Marian line reopening plan may be revised

The bid to reopen the Maid Marian line to passenger trains was successful in the second round of Restoring Your Railway. The line connects the Robin Hood Line at Kirkby-in-Ashfield to the Erewash Valley line, and the plan includes a new station at Pinxton/Selston as well as station improvements at Kirkby, Sutton Parkway and Mansfield. The current business case relies heavily on the connections that the line would provide to the proposed HS2 hub at Toton, but may need to be revised in the light of the recommendation in the recent NIC report to use East Midlands Parkway as an HS2 hub, rather than Toton.

### ■ ■ Peak District National Park loses the plot on rail

The Peak District National Park Authority was consulting on its local plan at the beginning of the year. Of concern to Railfuture was the proposal that the Matlock-Buxton and Woodhead routes should be safeguarded as trails rather than for possible future railway use. This is despite the recent proposal developed by Buxton Town Team for re-provisioning of the Monsal Trail if the route is returned to railway use.

### ■ ■ Bright light may win over Amazon customers

Amazon would like to install some of their lockers, where customers can ask for their items to be delivered, at some of the smaller stations in the region, including Radcliffe-on-Trent. Amazon would pay for improved lighting and it would help raise awareness of stations and local rail services among those who do not currently use them.

### ■ ■ Zoom to Railfuture's new way of campaigning

The guest speaker (over Zoom) at Railfuture East Midlands open meeting in January was Rachel Turner, head of new trains at East Midlands Railway, speaking and taking questions about Aurora bi-mode trains which will enter service on the main line from early 2023. The trains will feature improved passenger information systems, under-floor heating and more space for luggage. There will also be a major upgrade to the Etches Park depot in Derby. Issues that concerned members included space for cycles (only two cycles per five-car unit) and the likelihood that the bi-mode trains may have to run under diesel power between Bedford and London because the existing overhead line equipment south of Bedford may need to be upgraded to accommodate the new trains.

Our next meeting will be held over Zoom on 24 April, the date originally reserved for our AGM, which has been provisionally re-scheduled for September. Please watch Railfuture's East Midlands web page for further information on our meetings.

We do not send out a newsletter, but frequent updates on our activity and other rail-related issues in the region are sent out by the Railfuture East Midlands secretary. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for these updates, please email him at [steve.jones@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.jones@railfuture.org.uk)

[www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch)  
Twitter: @RailfutureEMids

Join Railfuture at [www.railfuture.org.uk/join](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/join)

# Growing clamour for rail reopenings

By Allison Cosgrove

Bow Street station reopened in February, the first in Wales to be reborn since the Welsh rail network was "nationalised" earlier in the month.

As our front page shows, Transport for Wales has high hopes that there will be more new stations in the next few years.

Bow Street is on the Cambrian line between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth.

Throughout Britain, elected leaders are waking up to the growing clamour from the public to reinstate rail services to areas without trains.

Scotland has been setting the pace with the reopening of the Borders Railway from Edinburgh to Galashiels and Tweedbank in 2015.

Now work is under way to reopen stations on the East Coast main line from Edinburgh to Berwick upon Tweed.

Eight miles north of the Anglo-Scottish border, Network Rail has been on site in Reston since 4 January, clearing ground in the area of what will be the station car park before starting work on the station itself.

The planning application for the station was approved in February by Scottish Borders Council.

Barrie Forrest, chair of the local community council and a Railfuture member, said: "From my home in the adjacent orchard, I can see work going on every day to reopen our station, which closed in 1964, and served the whole of Berwickshire, from the larger towns of Duns, Chirnside and Eyemouth to the smaller coastal holiday villages of St Abbs and Coldingham.

"The lack of speedy public transport to Edinburgh has greatly inhibited access to further education and employment for our residents, and the reopening of the station will allow our young people to enjoy the educational and work facilities enjoyed by other residents of the Scottish Borders."

Local rail group RAGES, of which Barrie is also chair, has been campaigning for the reopening of Reston for 23 years.

The station is scheduled to open later this year or early next, with train services to be provided by TransPennine Express.

Another station, 25 miles from Edinburgh on the East Coast main line – East Linton – is also expected to be approved very shortly by East Lothian Council. Attention has already turned to



**FIFE:** Vegetation cleared to allow trains to run again from Edinburgh over the Firth of Forth to Levenmouth



**RESTON:** Work on the car park for station to open this year

Haddington, and a petition to rebuild the six-mile-long branch line has been launched by Labour MSP candidate Martin Whitfield.

### Levenmouth

The railway is also slowly on its way back to Levenmouth, on the Fife side of the Firth of Forth.

The former rail line has been virtually cleared of vegetation and detailed site investigations have started.

The online Network Rail public consultation on station sites has been completed. Health and safety regulations have ruled out sites close to the distillery, leaving only one option for Cameron Bridge station, east of the A915 road/roundabout, not the former station site. Four options remain for Leven.



◆◆◆◆ You can join the Railfuture lottery at [www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/)

Picture: ALLAN ARMSTRONG

Picture: BARRIE FORREST



Picture: DENIS BATES

**WEST WALES WINNER:** The first train called at Bow Street station, four miles from Aberystwyth and 14 miles from Machynlleth in February

rail services. Improved path, bus and road connections will be needed but also skills, training, business investment and environmental improvements.

In Wales, because of Covid restrictions, the £8 million park-and-ride Bow Street station reopened in February with no fanfares. "This is an important milestone for us and we would have liked to celebrate it more but it is not safe at the moment," said Transport for Wales chief executive James Price.

One of the station's tasks is to reduce traffic on the A487, which is far too dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians.

The Welsh Government wants UK Government cash help to build stations at Carno (on the Cambrian line), Deeside Parkway in Flintshire and Ely Mill in Cardiff. Carno campaigners say the 27-minute

The timeline for reinstatement is: Selection of preferred options (stations and infrastructure) 2021, planning and consenting process for stations 2021, main construction works start on site 2022.

Train services should start by December 2023, with two trains per hour to and from Edinburgh Waverley, one via the western Fife circle and one via the eastern. Freight services are also envisaged but a terminal site needs to be agreed.

The Levenmouth Reconnected project, led by Fife Council, is closely related to the railway and is slowly taking shape.

£10 million, contributed equally by the Scottish Government and Fife Council, is being made available to maximise the positive impact of the reinstated

Continued on next page



# Rail for All is the Green way ahead

By Jane Ann Liston and Ralph Barker

The Scottish Green Party has produced a plan for future railways with even more ambitious targets than Railfuture.

In the run-up to the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May, the Greens' £22 billion plan calls for a rail station for every town with more than 5,000 population and a new rail tunnel under the Firth of Forth to ease congestion on the Forth Bridge.

The railway must be affordable, accessible to all and zero-carbon within 20 years, with emissions cut 75% by 2030 as a first step.

Electrification, shifting freight from road to rail and tram-trains are crucial.

The convoluted Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) and Governance for Rail Investment Projects (GRIP) should be combined and streamlined.

ScotRail and Network Rail should be integrated into a single publicly owned operating company.

The Far North line, the Highland main line and the West Highland line need faster journey times and the antiquated Girvan-Stranraer route must be upgraded.

Hawick is identified as a town crying out for a rail station, along with Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Forfar and St Andrews, with the potential for Haddington, Banchory, Strathaven and Newburgh (Fife) to be explored.

The most striking proposal is for a twin nine-mile railway tunnel under the Firth of Forth to connect Edinburgh Waverley to Seaford near Kirkcaldy, via a new station at Leith. Aims of the £6 billion project include

removing bottlenecks at Haymarket and on the East Coast main line west of Kinghorn, thus freeing up capacity to accommodate new services to Levenmouth and St Andrews.

Reducing journey times by 25 minutes from Edinburgh to Kirkcaldy, Dundee, Perth and Aberdeen would make rail more competitive than road from East Fife, Dundee and the north east of Scotland to Edinburgh.

The restricted clearance at Kinghorn, including the kinked tunnel where the speed limit is only 30 mph, would be avoided, and the new tunnel would also create a diversionary route for the Forth Bridge when required.

Such a scheme would be akin to the Channel Tunnel in cost and timescale, although most of the money would be retained in Scotland.

It could however be argued that many of the environmental benefits could be achieved by simply imposing a £20 toll on the two road crossings.

Perhaps the most controversial proposal, though, is not the tunnel but effective renationalisation, described as "a return to the very successful ScotRail that existed before privatisation". Perhaps debatable.

With us all now more aware of the environmental advantages of rail, the Scottish Greens are to be commended for coming up with such innovative thinking for the future of Scotland's railway.

Rail for All can be read or downloaded at:

<https://greens.scot/sites/default/files/Rail%20For%20All.pdf>



Graphic: SCOTTISH GREEN PARTY

# Harry, 14, proves he's a rail asset

Teenager Harry Burr joined Railfuture last year to help in his campaign for a new station on the West Coast main line near Daventry.

He was shocked by the few rail choices in the road-dominated area when he moved there with his family from Canterbury, which has much better rail links.

He is now aiming to persuade the authorities to open a station at Weedon Bec on the WCML which could also serve as a parkway station for western Northampton and Daventry. He is also keen to see a passenger rail link reinstated for Daventry, perhaps light rail.

He said: "It's ridiculous that if you want to go from Northampton to Banbury you have to go up to Coventry then back down to Banbury. It's stupid to go up then down but this plan would avoid that."

He aims to improve the rail, bus, road and other public transport networks in Northamptonshire by campaigning for new lines, linking new places and building stations and stops on existing routes.

He wants to see a south Northants corridor which would put Towcester and Brackley back on the rail network.

He supports the campaign for a public transport link from the WCML to the Midland main line, preferably on the alignment of the former Northampton to Wellingborough railway.

He is grateful for the support he has been given from Railfuture



HARRY BURR: A train, a laptop and loads of good ideas

East Midlands members and for the contacts they have provided him with. He is keen to see more effort in bringing campaigners together so that regional and

national voices can lend their support to local efforts. He is delighted to see HS2 going ahead as he knows this will relieve congestion on the WCML and

provide capacity for more local services.

He has become so interested in public transport that he is considering a career of some kind in the industry, perhaps in consultancy.

He has already set up several non-profit organisations to support campaigners, including the Weedon Station Project.

Steve Jones of Railfuture East Midlands said: "Harry is a very energetic member of our Railfuture East Midlands branch and is already making a name for himself."

He has appeared in several newspaper and magazine articles, including the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*.

He also wants to improve public transport in Wales, including Cardiff, Newport, Shrewsbury, and parts of Shropshire.

His interest in rail services in Wales was prompted when he travelled on a school trip to Abergele & Pensarn station on the main line between Prestatyn and Colwyn Bay.

He was surprised by the poor standard of rail services in North Wales compared to those in the south of England.

"They were very infrequent and the trains were very small," he said.

He said his family had been supportive of his rail campaign "especially my Nan".

You can find out more via Harry's Sustainable Transport website: <https://transport.click>

# Growing clamour for rail reopenings

Continued from previous page

journey between Machynlleth and Caersws is the "longest stretch of railway in Wales without a station".

Carno Station Action Group secretary John Ellison said: "We are heartened to see stations anywhere reopen for communities – and it gives groups of volunteers like us hope to keep campaigning and hopefully we one day get our station back."

Welsh deputy transport minister Lee Waters said: "We have lots of ambitions for reopening stations but without the UK Government stepping up to the plate, we don't have the means to deliver them. We are stuck in the sidings a little bit."

Aberystwyth Business Club chairman John Glasby told the BBC: "The railway project people in Aberystwyth really want is the reopening of the line to Carmarthen and the South Wales



OPEN DAY: The first train on 15 February at Bow Street

main line." Travelling between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen on the train currently takes about six hours compared with an hour and a half by car, but the UK Government has so far failed to provide the £755 million to rebuild the railway.

In England where Government money has at last been allocated to reopen the Northumberland line to Ashington and Blyth, rail user group chair Dennis Fancett said "It has been a long campaign with many highs and

lows during the 15 years thus far. "We remember that when we first started, no one would listen to us and everyone said it was impossible, or had been tried before."

"But, bit by bit, through diligent campaigning and lobbying, and particularly our special events such as our charter train round the line in 2008, and schools' DVD competition in 2014, we have won support not just from the key stakeholders such as Northumberland County

Council but, we believe, from the community as a whole."

The South East Northumberland Rail User Group has already achieved a significant increase in long-distance trains at Morpeth station and will continue to push hard for a local service between Newcastle and Berwick.

One hundred miles south of Morpeth, the fight also continues to reopen the trans-Pennine rail link from Colne to Skipton.

A campaign video is to be made for the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership by Scott Dawson Advertising of Burnley.

Another 200 miles further south, work is progressing on East West Rail which will reinstate an Oxford-Cambridge train service.

But the EWR "main line" project is crippled by cheese-paring which will mean it will not be an electric railway, and there are even doubts whether it will be able to accept freight trains.

Penny-pinching also appears to threaten the plan for trains to/from Aylesbury to run on EWR.

Picture: TRANSPORT FOR WALES

## RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNER OF THE YEAR 2020-21

Following the inaugural award at Railfuture's annual general meeting at Cardiff in 2019, in recognition of the dedication and achievements of volunteers, we had hoped to present the award for Campaigner of the Year at our annual general meeting in 2020.

A certain pandemic stopped us in our tracks!

However, we are hoping to be able to hold our AGM this year, and so those nominations previously sent in will be carried forward and added to any further names received before the closing date.

So, do you know someone who has contributed to the success of Railfuture or someone who has raised the profile of Railfuture on key issues?

Perhaps they work behind the scenes, helping their local branch? Whoever they are, if you think they deserve recognition we would like

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

■ Nominations may be made by any Railfuture member

■ All Railfuture members are eligible to be nominated

■ You may nominate yourself

■ The nominee must be a member of Railfuture

■ The deadline for nominations to be received is 30 April 2021

For further details or to submit a nomination please email membership director Wendy Thorne at

[wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk)

## Geoff, champion of forgotten Ivanhoe line

Railfuture East Midlands is counting the cost of Covid as members mourn the loss in November of Geoff Bushell, chair of the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line. This freight-only "forgotten line" links Leicester with Burton upon Trent via a string of towns in an area crying out for a passenger service.



Carl Benfield, vice-chair of CRIL, writes: "Starting with a meeting in a pub in late 2018, Geoff used his gentle powers of persuasion to form a team of volunteers and garner the support of hundreds of people keen to see the Ivanhoe line open to passenger traffic. With huge experience and a long career in both military and civilian environments, Geoff retained a humility and calm that always put people at ease and made him an instantly likeable character. The CRIL team will honour Geoff by continuing his work and are expectant to see ongoing success based on the foundations he has laid."

It is a great tribute to Geoff that he led CRIL to early success in the first round of bids under the Department for Transport's Restoring Your Railway scheme. He never saw himself as an expert, more a facilitator who brought people together and kept the wheels oiled. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.



## German lesson

Without entering a debate as to the merits, or otherwise, of individual rail reopening schemes, I would like to comment on suggestions being made by some Railfuture members that people who advocate new or reopened railway lines are being too ambitious.

For those who do not read *Modern Railways*, the October 2020 issue referred to a suggestion by the Association of German Transport Companies (in German, abbreviated VDV) – not exactly a fly-by-night organisation. This was that 4,000 km of closed or freight-only lines, serving 291 mid-to-large sized towns, should be considered for reopening.

Allowing for the larger size of the German railway system, an equivalent programme of reopenings in the UK would probably add about 1,200 route miles to our network. Such a figure would seem to exceed considerably the mileage that has, to date, been the subject of what might be termed serious reopening proposals. Indeed, there remain quite a number of significant but non-rail served UK towns which have yet to be the subject of any proposals, on top of which there are several cross-country and former main line routes.

If the Germans can do it (as one sincerely hopes), then surely so can we!

*Philip Bisatt, Wiltshire Close, Taunton TA1 4JT philbisatt@gmail.com*

## Across the Clyde

The lack of a north-south link across the river Clyde is mentioned in *Railwatch* 166. However, there is already a suburban service from Glasgow Central to Hamilton and Larkhall which crosses the river between Dalmarnock and Rutherglen.

There is also the freight-only line from Shields Junction across the river which would allow through running for passenger trains from Paisley to Cowairs.

A Glasgow Crossrail would have to avoid the problems associated with London's Elizabeth line (Crossrail).

I have enjoyed several books by Christian Wolmar but I do not think the Railfuture president should use *Railwatch* to promote his own books.

*Richard Lloyd Jones, Heol Isaf, Radyr, Cardiff CF15 8DX*

**Editor's note:** It is the freight-only line which Railfuture would like to see used for passenger trains. It would allow a new central station at Glasgow Cross and would allow for a

wide variety of Crossrail travel opportunities, without the complexity of the construction of London's Crossrail.

*Christian Wolmar writes voluntarily for Railwatch without any payment. Editor Ray King was happy for Christian to "promote" his new book on the basis that it is relevant to Railfuture members.*

## Market forces

I must protest at the article in *Railwatch* 166 promoting a book by Richard Lysons which is not even remotely related to any discernible rail issue.

It is one thing prominently promoting Mr Wolmar's latest offering as it is at least relevant (although his offer of a signed copy is a bit rich) but I personally do not subscribe to this magazine to read about a music venue.

*Martin Garvey, Nottingham garvey57@yahoo.com*

**Editor's note:** Richard Lysons writes voluntarily for *Railwatch* without any payment. It was hoped that personal information about Richard's achievements might be of interest to Railfuture members.

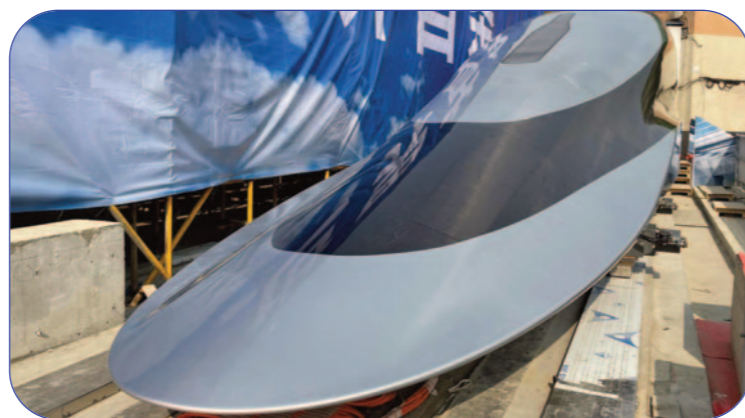
## Woodland watch

The negative comments on HS2 in the Your Views section of *Railwatch* 166 seem to lack vision on future sustainable transport needs.

The claim in a letter that "post Covid, HS2 is no longer viable or sustainable as fewer people are travelling" is short sighted. The first phases of HS2 will not open until 2026 at the earliest, and Covid will be controllable by then (if not eradicated). People will be travelling normally and our rail network will once again be creaking with capacity issues. Commuter patterns will probably change, but HS2 is not a commuter railway.

Another letter states that "the most serious issue about HS2 construction is the destruction of ancient woodland". I suggest that the writer has succumbed to the highly exaggerated spin of some environmentalists. The Woodland Trust claims that 108 ancient woodlands will be "at risk of loss, or damage" from HS2. The definition of the word "damage" is the questionable issue here, as it includes what the trust describes as "disturbance and noise pollution" in woodlands up to 1km away from the new line. Only 62 ancient woodlands are directly affected, and in many of those only a very small number of trees are being felled.

The Woodland Trust website states that there are 609,000 hectares of ancient woodland in the UK. HS2



Picture: CRRC

## Twice the speed of Eurostar

**China unveiled a super bullet maglev train at Chengdu in January that is expected to travel at 385mph, twice the speed of Eurostar.**

**Xinhua News Agency said the carbon-fibre train was designed and manufactured in China by state-run China Railway Group and CRRC Corporation, with input from Southwest Jiaotong University where a test track has been built.**

**"High-temperature superconducting technology can make the train float without electricity, and it can be moved with just one hand," said Professor Deng Zigang.**

**China already operates the world's first commercial maglev line, an 18-mile link connecting Shanghai Pudong Airport and Shanghai city centre.**

will actually destroy around 60 hectares, about 0.01% of the total. Regrettable, but hardly the biggest environmental disaster since World War 1, as Chris Packham has suggested.

HS2 is our one chance to create a step change in domestic travel and actually has strong environmental credentials. Decarbonisation will be helped by electrification of our rail network, but more importantly it requires an urgent modal shift away from road and air travel to rail.

We have to look only to our near European neighbours to see the success of high speed rail. Domestic air travel has been substantially reduced in France, Spain, Germany and Italy. Indeed, the recent financial bailout of Air France was dependent on them giving up the majority of their domestic air network to French Railways.

We also have the proof of modal shift with the Channel Tunnel. Until 1994, air travel enjoyed a 95% share of the London to Paris and Brussels market. Eurostar now has around 80% of that market share, with much of the remaining 20% taken up by interconnecting passengers on long haul flights who are simply transiting these airports. There is no reason why a fully built high speed line would not see the same result for Anglo-Scottish travel.

Few would argue that Northern Powerhouse is not also essential for

improvement of trans-Pennine travel. It is also partly dependent on completion of HS2. You do not hear the mayors of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield or Leeds challenging the value of high speed rail.

*Nick Hurrell, Lea Acres, Bridport Road, Drimpton, Dorset DT8 3RD nickhurrell@nickhurrell.com*

## Wood loss

Like one of your letter writers in *Railwatch* 166, I too would prefer not to lose ancient woodland. But how much will be lost in the construction of HS2?

We are talking of a thin corridor for a railway and not a vast residential or industrial development. I did a back of the envelope calculation for the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty and, using conservative assumptions, the loss seemed to be about 1%. That does not seem much of a price to pay when weighed against just one of the spin-off advantages of HS2 – getting more freight on to the West Coast main line and off the roads. That will make an important contribution towards achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050.

*Roger Hand, Stoke St Gregory, Taunton TA3 6EW roger.hand2@btinternet.com*

## My Y for HS2

Living north of Newcastle upon Tyne, you can imagine what I think

of The North. Leeds and Manchester are both south of me. I believe HS2 should have taken Sir Edwin Watkin's Great Central route to Nottingham and Leeds, then onward to the Newcastle to Carlisle line, probably somewhere around Haltwhistle.

It could then become a proper Y and go north-east to Edinburgh, and north-west to Glasgow

*AJB Browne andybeinggood@hotmail.co.uk*

## Double track bonus

I wonder how many *Railwatch* readers conjectured that our magazine would be hard-pressed to find anything to write about in the December issue (*Railwatch* 166)?

But the publication has surpassed itself and is packed with interesting items. So thanks as usual for a gripping read.

I live near the Heart of Wales line, which was largely built for freight and, at one time, had many lengths of double track. Now the line is largely single track. To allow for a more frequent service, many more passing places or sections of double track are needed.

Much could be achieved for Wales by reopening the line from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth with double track all the way.

However, I am grateful to the railways in general for allowing people to travel with their dogs. There are often problems taking dogs on road coaches and I wonder if this creates problems when there are rail replacement coaches.

*J Evered, Goylands Close, Landrindod Wells LD1 5RB*

## Gateshead station

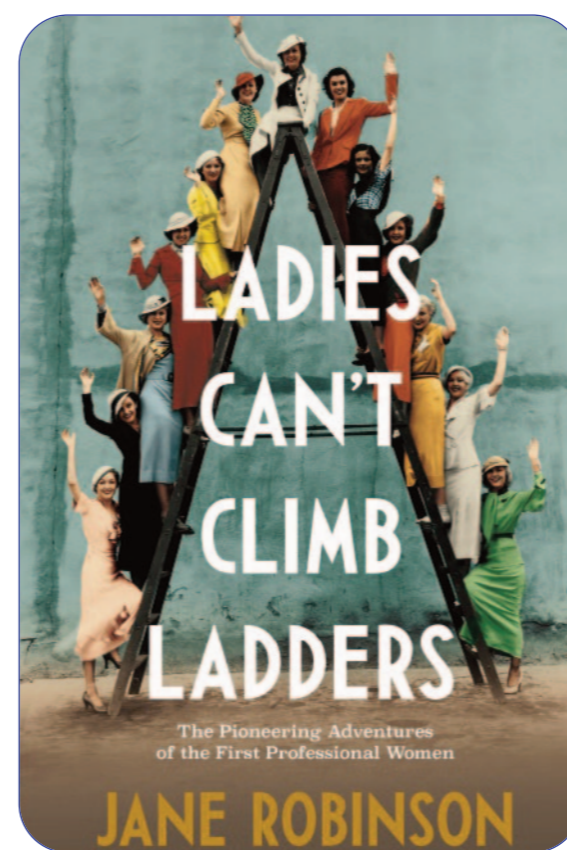
Nigel Warner argues in *Railwatch* 166 that Gateshead is "the biggest community not served by a railway line running all the way through". But has he forgotten the Tyne and Wear Metro? Gateshead station is on both of its loops, and is just a stop away from the Metro station situated under Newcastle Central's main line station.

*Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP timmickleburgh9@gmail.com*

## Reopen Semley

I read with interest Railfuture Severnside's leaflet about train services in the South West. Quite rightly, there is a focus on getting traffic off the roads.

I wonder, therefore, why no suggestion has been included to



## But they can drive trains

**The first female London Underground driver was Hannah Dadds in 1978 and the first British Rail main line driver was Karen Harrison in 1979.**

**They are part of the story told by Jane Robinson in Ladies Can't Climb Ladders, which was published last year by Doubleday and costs £20. It is described as the pioneering adventures of the first professional women.**

**It is a myth that the First World War liberated women, explains this 368-page book.**

**The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 was one of the most significant pieces of legislation in modern Britain.**

**It should have marked a social revolution, opening the doors of the traditional professions to women who had worked so hard during the war, and welcoming them as equals.**

**But what really happened? Ladies Can't Climb Ladders focuses on the lives of pioneering women forging careers in the fields of medicine, law, academia, architecture, engineering and the church.**

**ISBN: 9780857525871**

reopen Semley as a park-and-ride station for Shaftesbury. The former station building and yard are well occupied, so reinstating the former down platform would seem to be the best solution.

Looking at Google maps, there are open spaces off the A350 to the south of the line which could be utilised for parking.

From the parking area, a slope down on to a new down platform could be provided, giving step-free access.

*Martin James, Egham, Surrey thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com*

## Cheap line of action

It is always difficult for the government to find funds for rail, it seems. But one cost-effective way to extend the network would be to bring the many heritage railways back, by reconnecting them into the national network.

Preserved railways know how to make the best of any money they receive and relatively small grants to them could relay lots of track.

I have to state here that I have no vested interest but glaringly obvious examples would seem to be:

Connecting Malton-Pickering (North Yorkshire Moors) to the York-Scarborough line.

Connecting Redmire (Wensleydale Railway) to Hawes and then on to Garsdale (Settle-Carlisle). What an incredibly useful east-west rail link that would create at a fraction of any standard government-funded costing.

A bit of thinking outside the box just might help us resolve many of the problems left in the disastrous aftermath of the Beeching Report.

*Brian Jones, Bradford, West Riding of Yorkshire stars@starlight-nights.co.uk*

## Access for All

The "Action on accessibility" article about Ian Cook in *Railwatch* 166 reflects the truth unfortunately of the past 25 years.

We must not wait another 25 years. The rail industry must get to grips with the issues now.

It has taken nearly two years to get a simple hand rail installed at Cooksbridge station, near Lewes, and we are still waiting for work to reduce the 10 inch gap between platform and train.

*Ian Ginn iginn@btinternet.com*

## Private promise

Christian Wolmar presents in *Railwatch* 166 a prospectus for the Friends of British Rail.

The public sector has always had the advantage of stability and something of a family atmosphere. But it lacks the innovation and positive outlook which the private

sector can bring, exemplified by the massive increase in passengers under privatisation. Clearly there was an enormous demand for rail travel which British Rail had wholly failed to recognise or address.

This is an ancient problem. There is an object lesson from Napoleonic times when there was a contrast in the building of warships between the Crown Dockyards (excellent quality but slow and expensive) and the private contractors (fast, relatively cheap but lower quality), set out by N A M Rodger in his 2004 book *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815*.

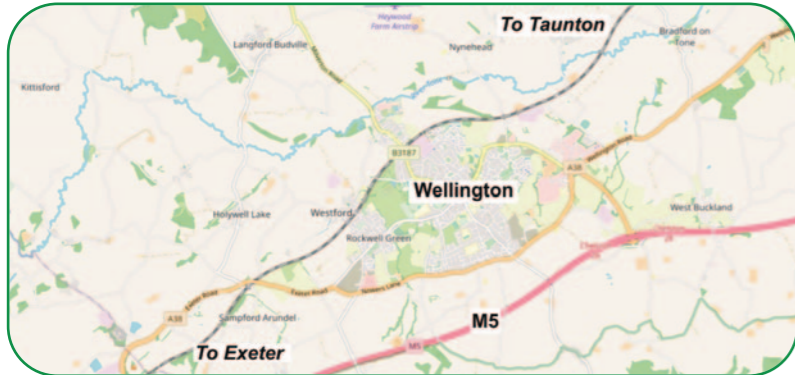
What we need now is a railway industry which combines the best of both public and private sectors. The franchise system, while far from perfect, did try to achieve this and, in many cases, was successful. The most notable example has been Chiltern where a long franchise encouraged investment and marketing, surely an example from which we should learn.

Franchising has latterly failed because the dead hand of government has dictated too much and tried to over-ride commercial realities.

Sadly, the immediate future seems to be in that vein. Can we hope that the person for the hour will emerge with the vision to find a successful public/private blend?

*Mike Keatinge, Highbank, Marston Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4BL mike@keatinge.mail1.co.uk*





Map: OPEN STREET MAP

nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ **Backing for Wellington rail**

Railfuture Sevenside is giving strong support to plans for a reopened station at Wellington which could become part of a Devon and Somerset Metro. In early January Railfuture responded to a public transport “task and finish” exercise conducted by Somerset West & Taunton Council. We pointed out that Wellington – with a population of 14,500 – is the largest settlement on the Paddington-Penzance main line without a station. A station would give the town fast access to Taunton, Bristol, Exeter and many other places. The Metro plan project is also backed by Rebecca Pow (MP for Taunton Deane) and Neil Parish (MP for Tiverton and Honiton). A consortium of councils was awarded £50,000 last year from the government’s Restoring Your Railway ideas fund to develop a strategic outline business case for reopening Wellington (Somerset) and Cullompton (Devon) stations.

In Taunton, a multi-storey car park has been built next to the southern entrance to the station. Railfuture sees this as an opportunity to dispense with the existing car park on the north side where a new bus station could be provided to create a transport hub.

In view of the success of the Taunton-Bishops Lydeard shuttle trains, which ran on eight Saturdays in 2019 linking the West Somerset Railway with the national network, Railfuture recommended a similar operation on more days this year. In the longer term, a regular Minehead-Taunton train service is needed to improve access to jobs and revitalise the economy of West Somerset.

Our response stretched the definition of public transport by promoting light freight carriage by passenger train. Great Western is already working with InterCity RailFreight to deliver perishable items, and Taunton is well placed for time-sensitive goods such as medicines by rail.

■ ■ **Cash for station campaign**

Sixteen miles east of Taunton, our affiliated Langport Transport Group was delighted to learn in late November that its application for Restoring Your Railway funding had been successful. The group was awarded £50,000 towards a feasibility

study into a station in the Langport and Somerton area. LTG chair Phil Edge says the group will now need to work with local authorities, Network Rail and Great Western to take the project forward. Railfuture has called for the reopening of a station in the area, to be served by an expanded Exeter-London Paddington semi-fast service.

■ ■ **Dezives Parkway plan**

Railfuture Sevenside’s response to Wiltshire Council’s local plan consultation supports the proposed Dezives Parkway station; improvements at Melksham station and service frequencies on the TransWilts route; extension of MetroWest to Westbury, to give an improved frequency to Bath and Bristol; and reinstatement of disused platforms at Westbury and Chippenham.

■ ■ **Campaigners’ challenge**

Gloucestershire County Council’s local transport plan was subject to public scrutiny at a virtual cabinet meeting in January. The working group campaigning for reopening Stonehouse Bristol Road station, following the Sevenside Branch meeting in 2019, submitted a question to the cabinet asking why the local transport plan did not treat the station as a priority when it would serve the county’s third largest urban area and a large industrial estate with an emphasis on high technology. A vague reply from the council said it was committed to studying all options for a new station south of Gloucester. Undaunted, Railfuture and the working group continue to campaign with the support of sympathetic local MPs and engage with the Department for Transport.

■ ■ **Post-Covid planning**

Our affiliated group Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways held its virtual AGM on 29 January. It reported that the new station at Portway on the Severn Beach line was expected to be completed by December 2021. I spoke on the theme of attracting passengers back to rail by creating confidence in train travel, marketing of services when Covid restrictions are eased, and reforming ticketing including flexible season tickets.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/SevensideBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/SevensideBranch)  
Twitter @RailfutureSSide

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ **City transport strategy**

Railfuture Wessex had the opportunity to comment in December on rail aspects of Portsmouth City Council’s draft transport strategy. Rail received scant mention in the council’s document so we submitted our comprehensive strategy for rail development, urging the council not to overlook the potential of the city’s existing railroads to solve many of the transport problems it had identified. Railfuture argued that access to the city’s five stations could be improved with measures such as e-bike rental, and there needs to be a zonal travelcard for the region covering all modes including buses and ferries. You can read our five-page response via the Railfuture website’s consultations page.

Following this submission, Railfuture entered into further correspondence with the city council about how to improve the overall journey experience on rail services to London and other key destinations. Railfuture has since compiled a briefing paper entitled *Service Improvements in the South* which you can read by following the link on the Wessex Branch home page.

Next in line for our attention in the summer is the consultation stage of Hampshire County Council’s local transport plan.

■ ■ **West Coastway success**

In the autumn, Govia Thameslink Railway proposed terminating its Victoria-Portsmouth service at Portsmouth & Southsea station on weekdays instead of Portsmouth Harbour, due to the tight turn-round time there. Railfuture immediately wrote to the company expressing our misgivings, and is pleased that GTR reconsidered. It now says trains can continue to serve the Harbour station seven days a week by making minor

adjustments to the timetable. The company is also looking to run some Brighton-Southampton trains via Eastleigh, which would give passengers from West Coastway stations a direct link to Southampton Airport.

■ ■ **Reopening candidates**

The Isle of Wight Council is reported to have appointed a consortium of transport experts to deliver a strategic outline business case for extending the Island line south to Ventnor, and providing passenger services between Ryde and Newport. It is hoped their report will be ready for submission to Government by May 2021.

Hampshire County Council is continuing to work on its strategic outline business case for reopening the Waterside line between Totton and Hythe, with a public consultation expected during the first half of this year. The council’s resolve to continue with the project is tempered by the need to consider adverse effects on bus and ferry services, and the down time at level crossings. There are no such caveats impeding the business case for improving the parallel A326 road, which is likely to cost more than double the rail reopening scheme.

A new station at Chineham to the north of Basingstoke was first proposed over 30 years ago, and is being looked at again with the recent allocation of developer funding. Residential and commercial areas have grown considerably since the 1990s, but so too has rail traffic on the line between Basingstoke and Reading. Railfuture is not confident an extra station stop can be accommodated without a wholesale route upgrade, particularly to signalling.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch)  
Twitter @RailfutureWessex



## Railfuture bargains

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

[www.railfuture.org.uk/shop](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/shop)

# Farewell to a founding father of Railfuture

By Peter Hughes

Rail campaigning lost a tower of strength with the death of Alan Bevan – one of the founding fathers of Railfuture – on 27 October 2020.

One of his major achievements was as pioneer editor of the *A-Z of Rail Re-openings* in 1988.

The most recent edition, now called *Britain’s Growing Railway*, was published in 2017.

Alan was national treasurer on the formation of the Railway Development Society in 1978 and chairman in the late 1980s.

Closer to his Birmingham home, Alan was a driving force for decades in the West Midlands branch, combining that with a busy family life and aided by early retirement.

His passion for rail brought him into conflict with some but he commanded respect from people at all levels of the many bodies he lobbied on behalf of, including the RDA, RDS and Railfuture. I have very fond memories of attending meetings with Alan when he, firmly and



Alan Bevan in the 1980s

politely, pressed the West Midlands passenger transport authority and others for improvements to light and heavy rail, much of which we see in the area today. Alan was the author of *The Story of the North Warwickshire Line 1908-2008* in which he understates his contribution to the defeat of the proposed partial closure of what is now the



**PIONEER:** Alan edited the first edition of the *A-Z of Rail Re-openings* which has grown to be *Britain’s Growing Railway*

Shakespeare Line. That campaign dragged on from 1983-87 and both before and after those years, Alan promoted the line by chartering trains for day trips to destinations such as Southport, York, Llandudno and Portsmouth.

Alan was also a *Railwatch* contributor, sub-editor – and a man of few words, said John Barfield, who met him for the first time 62 years ago – in the waiting room at Banbury station. John said: “We were both in our teens at that time so we have

both ended up spending most of our adult lives campaigning for railways.”

Alan was at the forefront of negotiations which led to the creation of Railfuture. He was secretary of the Railway Development Association (Birmingham) when the RDA (London) held their regular joint meetings at Banbury with the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom, which was represented by John.

Alan Bevan 1941-2020

## Railway honours



**OBE:** Network Rail’s Loraine Martins was awarded an OBE in January for her work to improve diversity. Ms Martins has been Network Rail’s director of diversity and inclusion for seven years.



**BEM:** Sharon Sear of London Underground was awarded the British Empire Medal for her “frenetic” work to protect staff and passengers from Covid-19. Mother of three and commercial manager Ms Sear has worked for the Underground for six years. She helped secure millions of items of personal protective equipment in the early stages of the pandemic.

## Restoring Your Railway – seven decades of success

By Roger Blake  
*Railfuture’s Infrastructure & Networks group*

In the 70th anniversary year of our founding predecessor SRUBL (UK)\*, and in the wake of the closing date for bids to the third and final round of the Department for Transport’s Ideas Fund for Restoring Your Railway, it is notable that the lion’s share of openings and reopenings of lines and stations have occurred in the second quarter of various years across that period.

Our individual and affiliated members have often played leading roles in securing such openings and reopenings (May being a particularly favoured month), involving more than 50 lines since 1970 and 180 stations since 1960, as documented in our book *Britain’s Growing Railway* published in 2017. Railfuture has a proud record as Britain’s longest-established and leading national independent voluntary and exclusively pro-rail membership-based campaign organisation.

**Campaigning through consultations**

Responding to official consultations is one of the tools in Railfuture’s kit-bag, and one which is often effective in opening doors for us to be able to continue our lobbying and influencing. Infrastructure decisions are decisions about the nature, location and timing of investment as a reflection of policy priorities, so seeking to shape those policy priorities is the route to the investment decisions which we wish to see made.

The winter months have seen a steady flow of Railfuture feedback, be it on a draft Local Transport Plan for Luton, a draft Transport Strategy for Portsmouth, a survey for a West Sussex Transport Plan Review, a Direction of Travel for a new Local Plan for Wealden, the

first Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for East Sussex, or the Strategic Vision of the Oxfordshire Growth Board. The DfT has heard from us on the heavier intermodal freight trial and ending the longer semi-trailer trial, and on the Hendy review of Union Connectivity. The House of Commons Transport Committee has received evidence from us for their Inquiry into the appraisal and delivery of major infrastructure projects, while EDF Energy have heard from us again on Sizewell C and Network Rail again on Cambridge South station.

All our submissions are in the campaigns, consultation responses or library sections of the Railfuture website’s home page. Current consultations can be found on the Railfuture website in the what’s on and rail dates sections.

**Structures transfer to Highways England**

In response to concerns raised by Railfuture members about a programme of works to some historic structures inherited by Highways England, detailed follow-up investigations by some members have not revealed any structures on routes of interest to foreseeable credible schemes for new or reinstated rail lines.

\* Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines

Stay in touch with Railfuture’s national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight Groups via

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/articles> and our dedicated campaign web-page <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway>

Also on Twitter: @RailfutureNetws and @RailfutureFret



# What are railways for? To provide economic, social and environmental benefit for all

By Ian Brown

It may seem a strange question to ask, nearly 200 years after the Stockton and Darlington Railway opened in 1825.

Yet, if we do not provide a proper answer in a post-Covid world, we will struggle in our campaigning for a bigger, better railway.

Reforms to the railway industry structure were promised when the over-hyped Williams review was launched in September 2018.

There was to be a white paper, followed by a “unique” opportunity to improve “outcomes” for passengers, freight users and taxpayers.

The review team was to be independent, with little knowledge of railways (with one exception) to ensure fresh thinking.

All the usual management speak was there: root and branch, accountability, and value for money of course.

Not mentioned was the purpose of our railways in the 21st century.

The question was addressed when the report by Dr Richard Beeching was published 58 years ago in 1963.

## Addressing the question in 2021

Throughout those 200 years of railway history, it is clear that money was absolutely crucial – making it in the early years, and trying to minimise losing it in more recent times.

The original railways were about making money for mine and quarry owners. The railway was the enabler, a key part of the production process in getting materials to wider markets, often via the ports. The profits came from the product, but railways provided efficient, high-volume transport to make it happen.

## The enabler model

This logic for railways still applies for mineral extraction. We are witnessing massive, mainly Chinese, investment in new mineral railways from mines to ports in Africa and Australia.

Mauritania, for example, operates some of the largest freight trains in the world in the Sahara desert. The Mount Newman Railway in Australia runs iron ore trains up to 100,000 tonnes (seven kilometres long), 10 times bigger than the 10,000 tonne coal trains in the USA.

The price of the product, such as iron ore, is dominated by the cost of transportation, not of the extraction itself. This is equivalent to what happened in Britain 200 years ago with, for example, the Ffestiniog Railway efficiently

taking slate from quarries to the sea – for worldwide distribution. The change from a horse and cart to a Ffestiniog freight train was as dramatic as what is happening now.

## Soon to be replaced by the money making model

The 19th century freight facts were so dramatic that it was only a few years before people realised the potential of railways for carrying people.

The Liverpool and Manchester high speed railway opened in 1830, originally conceived to connect Manchester with the sea port at Liverpool, but was an instant success as a passenger railway.

This project was far more dramatic than HS2. The Rocket managed 36 mph, faster than a galloping horse, and much faster than the average 3 mph speed of a horse and carriage.

The rationale changed from the enabler model. Railway promoters could make money from the railways themselves, from carrying passengers, and indeed general goods. They did not have

to own a mine, but having loads of capital available to invest was key, leading to the infamous Railway Mania.

## The rise and fall of completion

The purpose of railways was firmly established as to make money – tons of it. There was a parliamentary process for promoting railways, which allowed dramatic expansion until diminishing returns set in with schemes becoming less and less viable.

Railways were built to smaller and smaller places and duplicated on competing routes, so building in future obsolescence. Interestingly, just as the mine owners wanted railways, the railway promoters wanted to expand their customer base so promoted seaside resorts with railway hotels and commuting.

The development of Metroland suburbia in London was one example, but the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway did something similar around Liverpool and Manchester.

This railway building provided Britain with a comprehensive

network, which became a total transportation system when supplemented in cities by tram networks.

It was sustainable while the structure of our towns and cities developed alongside the railways. Losses, however, began to mount, leading to mergers. Parliament's 1921 Railways Act squeezed the 120 separate railway companies into the big four groupings of 1923: GWR, LMS, LNER and Southern.

One of the main aims was to reduce competition between railway companies, the complete opposite of the British Railways privatisation which later sought, and largely failed, to encourage competition.

## An integrated railway network

Throughout all this time and through two world wars, the railway companies remained vertically integrated and largely provided all services on their networks.

We think of nationalisation as the creation of British Railways. However, the government was well used to controlling railways through the Railway Executive Committee during the two world wars.

It was probably inevitable that after the Second World War, with railways run into the ground by war work, the final step would be taken to create a single railway – British Railways – through the Transport Act 1947.

In fact the BR railway regions were largely autonomous, albeit reporting to a London-based bunch of grandees based in the former Hotel Great Central at Marylebone.

The question “What are railways for?” should have been asked then. It was not.

BR just continued where the private companies left off, building steam locomotives, with occasional attempts to modernise the system.

Without addressing the crucial question, the BR modernisation plan of 1955 aimed merely to replace old equipment with more modern equipment while essentially running the same service as before.

In the absence of an acknowledgement and understanding of the wider value of what the railways bring to the country, operational losses were becoming unsustainable.

The writing, however, was on the wall with the development of coach, car and air travel, and one wonders whether the grandees



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

**BARMOUTH BRIDGE:** This half-mile vital railway over the Afon Mawddach estuary is currently being repaired by Network Rail in a £25 million project. Rail-mounted cranes are supplemented by caterpillar-tracked vehicles at low tide. The strong currents can be seen in the megaripples near the bridge. Barmouth Bridge survived the Beeching axe and the 1980s shipworm crisis



Picture: IAN BROWN

ever looked out of the window. The competition exploded, typified by the construction of the M1 motorway in 1959. The railways rapidly looked obsolescent if judged solely against the long-standing objective of making money.

Four years after opening the M1, Transport Minister Ernest Marples tasked Dr Richard Beeching with finding answers to the railway “problem”. But the standard question was: “If you lose money, where do the losses occur?” And the simple answer was: “Close down loss-making activities.”

Nothing strategic here. Just like many of our traditional industries at the time, the drive was cut your losses, usually after it was too late. Cutting losses to make smaller

losses without a strategic reason for doing so would not pass muster as a business strategy with any business school.

It avoided the bigger question: Why not close down the whole thing? which is what happened to other UK industries.

Dr Beeching, as we know, did start to address the question by identifying areas where our railways could potentially be viable against the making money imperative, but he failed to take into account the wider economic, social and environmental benefits of the railway. This profit-led approach focused on inter-city, intermodal freight and block merry-go-round coal trains. Everything else must go. Pretty simplistic stuff. Close the secondary routes and branch lines.

What is troubling is that many of the benefits of railways are outside such a simplistic approach. An example is the Cambrian Coast line, which actually survived Beeching, but was challenged later in the 1980s when *Teredo navalis*, or shipworm, attacked the Barmouth Viaduct requiring a large amount of money to repair it at no notice. The task then was to persuade BR

chairman Sir Peter Parker that the money should be spent. The argument, now a familiar one with Railfuture members, was that even though the line had minimal earnings, revenue contribution to the network was much larger. This argument is important in many of our branch campaigns such as Levenmouth and St Andrews in Scotland.

It was not enough in itself to justify keeping the line open. The benefits of the railway to the economy, including tourism income, were much greater and the line is still open. Even though the line was saved, these wider benefits were not part of the railway cost equation so we were lucky. But these benefits must be considered.

This starts to address our question. The railway, in this case, is there to sustain the economy of the Cambrian Coast region. If Beeching closures had been approached on that basis, an altogether different picture would have emerged. Where a line was actually closed down years ago, it is all the more difficult now to rectify the mistake by reopening it. The capital cost and convoluted planning procedures are enormous hurdles. These

arguments also apply to developing the existing network. Few reopenings or even HS2 can be justified without recognition of rail's wider contribution.

With the Railways Act of 1993, which ushered in franchising (and competition), money took to the merry-go-round.

With the pretence that infrastructure owner Railtrack (at that time) was a private company, the edifice soon proved to be spectacularly and tragically unsustainable.

## Franchising for passengers, open access for freight

Franchising is a sustainable model if the market is growing and if incentives can be aligned to give better service to passengers.

Risk has to be properly shared and bidders have to refrain from over-bidding to win contracts.

But competition for franchises and over-bidding led to short term perceived gain, followed by major problems later.

Open access and private operation for freight was the right decision, because access to the national network is increasingly important as freight becomes a national operation. This has eased the transition from short-distance local flows to long-distance intermodal and bulk flows.

The original freight privatisation was not intelligent, giving most of the operation and the assets to a single operator. Ministers saw freight as a problem for privatisation, whereas Freightliner and emerging, now large-scale, freight operators saw it as an opportunity, tailoring their product to customer requirements and modernising to provide efficiency and a better work-life balance for operational staff.

Franchising, as a result of these built-in flaws, was on its last legs before the Covid-19 pandemic. Franchising can work where revenue risk is low but does not where revenue growth is key to profitability, as we have seen repeatedly with the East Coast main line franchise which now runs quite well as a public sector operation. It is probably more dependent on the quality of its management and staff, as opposed to its ownership. The Williams report was to be based on the general move towards concessions as successfully applied by Transport for London to the London



Picture: RIO TINTO

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA:** A huge iron ore train near Pilbara where there are several private railways. Rio Tinto operates the Hamersley & Robe River railway while BHP Billiton owns and operates the Mount Newman Railway

Continued on next page



# What are our railways for?

Continued from previous page

Overground system and the Docklands Light Railway where service levels, fares, service levels and even cleanliness are strictly enforced. With no sense of urgency, the process was overtaken by the onset of Covid-19. What will emerge from government later this year post the pandemic will be branded as "Williams".

The emergence of Covid-19 and the enforced drop in passenger numbers to 5% of pre-pandemic levels meant that the franchising approach had to be replaced quickly by direct contracts, called emergency recovery management agreements.

These agreements are an operator's dream, with a guaranteed rate of return and no revenue risk. This is not nationalisation, as widely reported, just a direct mechanism to prevent existing train operators from walking away from the franchise contracts and closure of the system. None did of course, but the situation is likely to be altogether different if the government attempts to return to a franchised-based approach. This cannot now happen. Time has passed.

## Concession approach

The concession approach begins to address the question of what our railways are for. London has city-wide governance – with a mayor and the Greater London Authority – required by law to make long-term plans for the city. In this setting, railways are not on their own, they are part of the armoury to address economic, social and environmental issues facing a growing city. This approach applies both to railway operations and investment in railway capital projects. The Crossrail project, then costed at £17 billion, was seen in business plan terms as the most cost-effective way of addressing these issues, just like the decision to keep the Cambrian Coast Line open. The London Overground concession would work only if TfL was properly funded and had the capacity to increase journeys on rail. Railfuture contends that these arguments apply to the whole of the rail network and any losses on rail operation are offset by the wider benefits, which in the case of London, were quantified. The London Overground was the enabler to sustain the city's viability.

Concessions should be designed to provide rail services to address particular requirements of cities, as they are a service contract to use assets for a defined purpose. The contract focus is on operational quality. In London governance is in place to act as client, but it is not elsewhere in the country and, in our other cities, station control should and is likely to move to local control.

A wider nationwide rail planning approach is taken in Scotland and Wales. With its wider strategic approach, Transport Scotland has replaced the respected Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive. Scotland as a whole now needs an integrated rail network that SPT earlier provided just for the Glasgow area. The

Welsh Government is taking more direct control of its railways and is upgrading the dense Welsh Valley network into a modern, largely electrified transport system. The Welsh Government is also planning for a nationwide rail system responding to wider economic, social and environmental needs.

Both these systems require good rail links into the wider British network.

The government's ongoing Union connectivity review reflects this, although it remains to be seen if it is a strategic exercise or a political one. Devolution of rail responsibility is clearly the future direction of travel and concessions are a way of positioning railways to respond to these needs.

It has to be done in a way that provides a national network with strategically planned longer distance services and the capacity for rail freight growth.

## Post-pandemic railway

Now is the time to ask the question "what are railways for?" and not speculate how they will emerge from the pandemic.

We want a railway that is sustainable for the future. There is already evidence that, between lockdowns, passengers returned for all the reasons that sustained continuous growth over the previous 20 years. There may be less commuting, but more general travel. The railway must respond with simple ticketing that emulates car or bus travel, flexible in ticketing and pricing.

Post-pandemic growth will have to be fast because so much of the cost is fixed, such as track and signalling. From such a low base, this is unlikely, so the emergency funding agreements will have to be maintained, possibly with

lower service levels on commuter routes until the passengers return. We need to convince stakeholders that the economic, social and environmental benefits of railways make this worthwhile, and we need a viable network as a basis for this to happen.

Both UK and foreign governments are well aware of the need for economic stimulus. Our government is pursuing major rail projects such as HS2 as well as other strategic projects such as East West Rail.

We need to stress the value and benefits in assessing new projects. We can help focus stakeholders on the true value of our railways as a cost-effective way of achieving national, regional and local economic, social and environmental objectives.

Our railways are enablers ensuring that national, regional and local objectives are supported. The governance of our railways must reflect far more accountability at all levels, so that operational costs and capital projects are seen as value for money ways to achieve these objectives. We in Railfuture have our work cut out.

■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture policy director

## Thames Valley

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### ■ ■ East West Rail progress but . . .

The formal go-ahead for building stage one of the East West Railway between Bicester and Blechley was given in January by the Department for Transport. Preliminary works have been under way over the past year. Before we get too excited about the promised funding of £760 million, we should note that this amounts to a £250 million cut from the original estimate.

Oxford MPs Layla Moran and Anneliese Dodds objected to the decision not to electrify the line. Railfuture believes it makes no sense to introduce new diesel trains, if it is intended to decarbonise railways by 2040. Network Rail has not identified any capacity for freight trains, when we expect freight traffic to increase in the coming decades.

The link to Aylesbury which features in East West Rail's promotional video as part of stage one has been put on hold. In a response to Railfuture, a letter from the East West Rail Team states: "We continue to explore options on how to connect Aylesbury. The original plans would not have provided local communities with a reliable service, and this section requires more investment than originally planned." This seems to be an admission that a single Aylesbury-Calvert line and a service of only one train per hour would be inadequate. If new plans and new estimates for a double-track line have to be drawn up, will the Aylesbury connection still form part of stage one, expected to open in 2025, or will it have to be deferred? Railfuture will campaign to ensure the Aylesbury link goes ahead before Bedford-Cambridge, which involves designing and building a new railway.

### ■ ■ Level crossing alternative way ahead

One issue of concern arising from East West Rail is the level crossing at Bicester London Road, which at present has four passenger train movements per hour. Once there is a service to Milton Keynes, that will increase to eight an hour, and when the line is reopened to Bedford and Cambridge there will be at least 12 an hour, plus freight services. With so many houses in London Road close to the level crossing, replacing the crossing with a bridge is probably out of the question. A possible solution, which would be very unpopular with car drivers, would be to close London Road to through traffic and divert traffic to alternative routes. Sheep Street has already been pedestrianised, in order to reduce traffic in the town centre. If we want to encourage modal shift from private to public transport, it will be necessary to take bold decisions.

### ■ ■ Oxford's delayed decarbonisation

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council are supporting plans to introduce battery-electric buses in Oxford. This is a more realistic proposal than some of the schemes which have been suggested in recent years, such as tram subways, monorails and aerial ropeways. There may be scope in the future for considering Very Light Rail vehicles in Oxford, on the Coventry model, but we shall have to wait several years for that. Older readers may remember when we had an experimental electric bus service in Oxford, as far back as 1994.

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## THE CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL FREIGHT

# Space for jumbo trains

Since last year, Network Rail has permitted freight trains to be temporarily lengthened to 775 metres on rail routes between Southampton and Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. This will continue until May 2021, and Network Rail is looking at their impact with the possibility of making these freight trains a "priority". The jumbo trains have also operated between the Daventry rail freight terminal in Northamptonshire and Grangemouth on the Forth of Forth. To increase capacity, Network Rail has re-laid sidings at Darlington, two of which can

accommodate 750 metre long trains. This was to accommodate growing container traffic from PD Ports Teesport which, for large containers on standard wagons, is restricted to only one route out of four (via Dinsdale). Hull University is developing plans to help one of the world's biggest food manufacturers to go green with rail freight. It organised a successful trial trainload of Kraft Heinz products from the Netherlands to its distribution centre in Wigan via Hull docks with help from operator Freightliner. The aim is to create an East West freight corridor for key stakeholders.



DARLINGTON: Relaid siding for 750 metre long freight trains

# UK must back rail freight to the full

The UK Government is proudly burnishing its green credentials by backing two new railways but it has failed both of them on major counts.

It has not required that the East West Rail main line will be capable of carrying freight throughout – and it has shilly-shallied away from the original aim that EWR should be electrified from day one.

Maggie Simpson of the Rail Freight Group warned a conference in January that the central section of EWR may not be freight-capable.

You can hardly call it a main line if it is not suitable for freight, she said. Once Highways England start building main roads for cars but not lorries, maybe the railway could reappraise what a main line is, she joked.

The second failure is with HS2. The UK Government has been courageous by starting to build HS2 in the face of a concerted campaign of disinformation from "green" campaigners.

But it has failed to mandate that a large percentage of the materials needed to build it must be transported by rail. It is relying on encouragement to persuade HS2 contractors to do the right thing.

This is out of line with best practice in Europe where Switzerland, for instance, insists on environmentally friendly rail freight being used to transport material for major infrastructure projects.

In East London, freight trains which brought in most of the material for building the 2012 Olympic Park still regularly arrive with building material for the next stages in the development.

The strategic case for rail freight has never been so strong as it is in 2021, said Ms Simpson. It produces 76% less carbon dioxide than lorries for equivalent loads and decarbonisation is essential in the fight against climate change.

Businesses are already re-evaluating their supply chains after the shocks Covid-19 brought to many supply chains. But to compete, rail freight needs access to a network giving it national coverage.

In the Oxford-Cambridge development arc there are plans for one million new homes. It is estimated that 50-200 million tonnes of building materials will be needed in the construction of the new homes, and that could generate 2.5-10 million lorry

movements. There should be a plan for freight railheads to support construction of the new homes, and of course rail can efficiently deliver pre-fabricated material.

It is also important that when the new homes are built and people are living in them, the infrastructure is suitable for rail parcels to be brought in with "last mile" delivery by electric cargo bikes to the million extra addresses in the region.

Warehousing at rail-served sites will also be needed to sustain online consumer deliveries.

At the moment it is not even clear if EWR will be able to be used by freight trains from Britain's biggest and busiest container port at Felixstowe for services to the Midlands.

Freight demand has remained robust throughout the pandemic, said Martin Woor, senior manager for strategic rail at Felixstowe.

The port deals with 72 trains per day and there is significant pent-up demand from shippers and importers.

As ships get bigger, rail freight has the potential to move large volumes of containers quickly and efficiently.

## 48-tonne threat

Railfuture responded to a Government consultation on the use of 48-tonne lorries in an intermodal trial by insisting that the lorries should be limited to specific routes and the lorry leg of the journey should be restricted to 50 miles. At seaports, containers over 44 tonnes should automatically be consigned by rail. Severe penalties should be applied to operators and hauliers who allow overweight containers on to the public road. Railfuture pointed out that in an earlier trial, 44-tonne lorries were only permitted to move containers from a railhead to a local destination. Now they can go almost anywhere. As a result there is public suspicion about what is promised and what is actually delivered. Traffic from Scotland to Europe qualified for the 44 tonnes exemption even though it was loaded to rail only at Didcot.



## Enter the trimode – electric, diesel and battery

A batch of Spanish-built trimode locomotives will be heading to Britain in two years time to help decarbonise freight transport. Rail Operations Group has signed a deal with Stadler for the locomotives, which will be able to operate over most of the rail network.

The class 93s can be powered by electricity from the overhead wires and by a 1,200 hp Caterpillar diesel engine with help from a

536 hp lithium battery pack, which will probably be used for shunting. The 110mph locos will be built in Valencia and based on electric and diesel dual-mode locos already being operated by operator DRS in Britain.

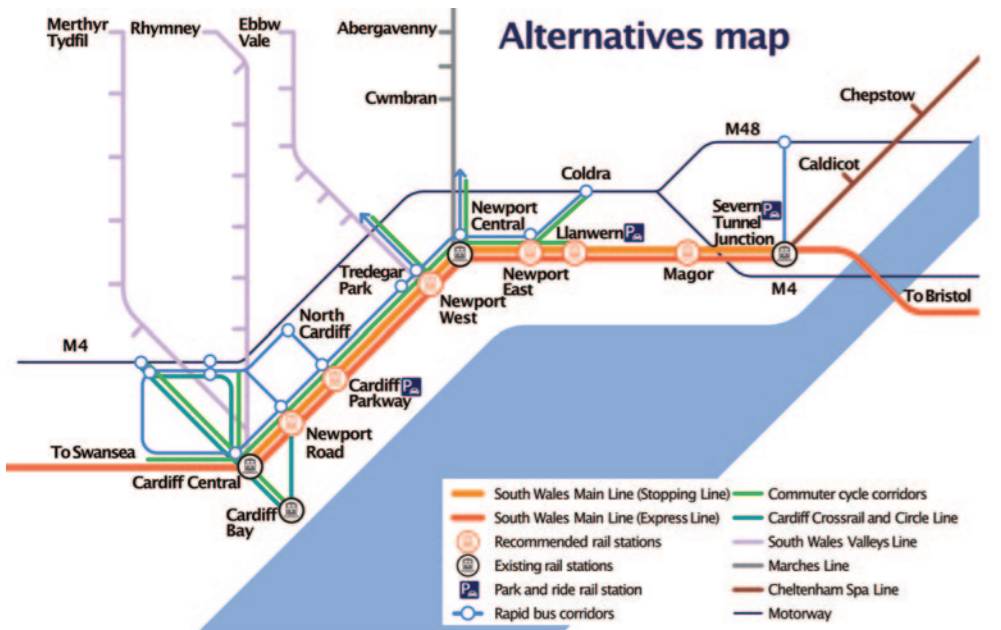
Camilla Mirza of Rail Operations Group said the locos would help to achieve a significant reduction in carbon dioxide and could aid a modal shift to rail. The loco can pull both freight and passenger trains.

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

railwatch April 2021 15

Picture: © Ontrackimages





**Cymru Wales**

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■ ■ Rail alternatives to motorway

Alternatives to building a new motorway around Newport have been published by the South East Wales Transport Commission, which supports up to £800 million being spent on infrastructure to encourage people out of their cars. This would represent an overall saving because building the road would cost £1.5 billion. The SEWTC recommendations include:

**NEW STATIONS:** Six new rail stations between Cardiff Central and the Severn Tunnel

**MAIN LINE:** Revising the four-track South Wales main line so the southern pair is for high speed and freight, and the northern pair is for stopping services

**CARDIFF CROSSRAIL:** Extending a proposed tram-train link from the north west of Cardiff through Cardiff Central and Cardiff Bay to a new station at Newport Road in East Cardiff.

**MORE TRAINS:** Enhanced local services on the Abergavenny, Ebbw Vale, Chepstow and Bristol lines.

Altering the main line is a bold proposal. The report reasons that all branch lines leave from the north side, so if these services use the northern pair of tracks there will be less conflict with other traffic. This would leave high-speed and other long-distance trains sharing the southern pair with freight. Freight operators are therefore worried that their operations may then be marginalised.

Railfuture contributed ideas, including better local services, to the commission in late 2019. The recommendations can be seen at

<https://gov.wales/south-east-wales-transport-commission-final-recommendations>

■ ■ Railfuture supports West Wales link

Railfuture is in principle backing campaigns to reopen Carmarthen-Aberystwyth and Bangor-Afon Wen (between Pwllheli and Porthmadog). Reinstating these missing links will recreate a western rail route between north and south Wales. Members of the group campaigning for reopening Carmarthen-Aberystwyth (Traws Link Cymru) answered probing questions from the Railfuture Wales committee at an online meeting. Carmarthen-Aberystwyth has the potential to improve social mobility in areas with poor transport links, especially by providing local trip options. There is growing

evidence of political support to recreate this crucial rail link. Bangor-Afon Wen features in recent Welsh Government proposals. Traws Link Cymru wants to see five new stations on the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth section.

■ ■ Railfuture backs Welsh network control

Railfuture has responded to two government consultations. The House of Commons Welsh affairs committee launched its inquiry into rail infrastructure in December, and asked how effective the current management of infrastructure is in Wales and how it could be improved.

Railfuture called for the Welsh Government to take control of infrastructure. This approach is being trialled after the transfer of the Cardiff Valleys lines from Network Rail to Transport for Wales last year.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2561>

Meanwhile the Welsh Government is developing its own transport strategy. Its Llwybr Newydd (New Path) is a high-level document which calls for rail to play a significant part in Welsh transport. However, the document, published in November, is light on detail.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2560>

■ ■ Former railway with future potential

Railfuture has called on Vale of Glamorgan Council to protect the alignment of a disused railway from development where it runs through a site proposed for 500 new houses at Cosmeston near Penarth.

Hundreds of houses have already been built nearby since the line, south of the current terminus at Penarth, was closed in 1968. Most of the former trackbed still exists and Railfuture believes it could be a candidate for either a heavy or light rail extension to connect the new housing with Cardiff and beyond.

■ ■ Online conference

Railfuture attended the *Modern Railways* Fourth Friday Club online conference in January: Rail in Wales and the West. Three sessions on consecutive Fridays included such diverse topics as sustainable changes to trains with decarbonisation on the horizon, opportunities for freight in the region, and the possible role for heritage railways in meeting public transport requirements.

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■ ■ Manchester rail congestion

Passengers have been invited to choose between three options to tackle congestion in Manchester by cutting trains using the Castlefield corridor from May next year. Public consultation opened in January on proposals developed by a "Manchester Recovery Task Force" which involved the Department for Transport, Network Rail and Transport for the North. Each option, however, appears to create significant gaps in services and to show little understanding of travel needs. All options propose withdrawing the direct Southport service to Manchester Piccadilly which will have a severe impact on half a million people in Southport, south and west Lancashire, Wigan, Hindley and Westhoughton. The Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers Association is upset by the proposal after building up a good case for the service after it was curtailed in 2016. With passenger surveys and data analysis, OPSTA showed the importance of journeys to specific Manchester city centre stations, especially Piccadilly, for connections to elsewhere in Britain. During the pandemic, Northern has been operating the service through the Castlefield corridor reliably and punctually. Transport for Wales direct services to Manchester Airport from Chester and North Wales are also threatened with diversion. One option has those trains diverted over the Mid Cheshire line to terminate at Piccadilly, this would provide a half-hourly service there, which rail user group MCRUA supports. Liverpool and Sheffield are set to lose their direct services to Manchester Airport in some of the options. On the basis of traffic generated, this seems a mistake. Railfuture responded to the consultation and has called for a realistic assessment of specific travel needs for people travelling into Manchester. The consultation closed on 10 March. The options are here: <https://bit.ly/3aa1XVK>

■ ■ Access denied at Ulverston



**IT CAN BE DONE: Light controlled pedestrian level crossing at Market Rasen, Lincs**

The 2009 closure of a passenger level-crossing at Ulverston station, Cumbria, has created major access problems and inconvenience with some passengers reportedly being told to avoid Ulverston and board trains at either Cark (12 miles away by road) or Dalton (five miles away). Furness Line Action Group points out that pedestrian crossings are still in use at Kirkby-in-Furness, Kents Bank and Silverdale, and FLAG is calling on MPs to support the low-cost option of Ulverston's single-track crossing being reinstated with safety lights. Network Rail is preparing a bid for a £3 million lift at Ulverston as part of the government's Access for All programme, which has limited funds and has many demands made on it. Only 61% of rail stations in Britain provide step-free access.

**Emily trials smartphone app to beat railway access problems**

A new smartphone app is being released to help people with access problems to travel by train. The app is designed to revolutionise the current system of assistance being provided at stations for the 85 million-plus train journeys made every year by disabled people.

After a series of delays, the passenger assist app was expected to be launched in March, just as *Railwatch* went to press. The app was developed by TransReport with help from Emily Yates (pictured), allows staff and allows passengers to be updated with information in the light of changes to train operations, and it replaces the system of staff relying on paper instructions.

Passengers can use the app to explain their specific access problems, for instance whether they have sight problems or need to travel with a wheelchair. Tickets can also



be bought on the app and train operators now claim that they are fully committed to everyone being able to travel by train. However, they have been given another year

to ensure that all vehicles, including bus replacements, are suitable. One of the big problems for passengers travelling by train is the dreaded bus replacement service. It disrupts journeys, and makes life exceptionally difficult for passengers with disabilities and also those with luggage, bikes, small children or pushchairs.

Many problems exist on the rail network. Access campaigners have heard of guide dogs falling between the train and platform and people being left stranded.

The Leonard Cheshire charity believes 54,000 people may be prevented from getting jobs because of access problems on the rail network.

One in five people are disabled in some way according to official government statistics.

**Northern sets the pace on tackling accessibility**

By Graham Collett

[Graham.Collett@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:Graham.Collett@railfuture.org.uk)

A major new project involving a detailed accessibility audit of 160 of its 480 stations was announced by Northern at a joint meeting with Railfuture branches in January.

Railfuture welcomes this initiative by Northern and hopes that other train operators will follow its example.

"Accessibility has to be a key part of our long-term strategy for stations," said David Byrne, Northern's head of stations.

Although lots of work on accessibility had been done with stakeholders, Northern wants to involve passengers directly.

Northern's audit will form part of its station business plan.

Its accessibility and integration manager Craig Alexander explained that, as a first step, a pilot of six stations is being undertaken at Levenshulme, Prescott, Salford Central, Warrington Central, Morley and Meadowhall.

Northern has asked for help from Railfuture and affiliated rail user groups to review the pilot assessments and to provide input to the remaining 154 assessments. The busiest stations will be a priority, although others which particularly need accessibility improvements or are due to have significant works carried out may be included.

Railfuture Yorkshire and North East have already supplied details of stations where improvements are needed.

An initial workshop was held on 28 January. Detailed mapping of each station is being led by Seed Architects, supported by ARUP and an independent accessibility adviser. Current accessibility



**STEP TOO FAR:** The challenge that faces many rail passengers, even if not in a wheelchair

standards (drawn up in 2015) will be reviewed with a view to making recommendations for improvements.

A very ambitious timetable for the project involves completing the assessments of all 160 stations by the end of May. Railfuture branch boundaries will be included in the mapping project.

**TransPennine Express**

TransPennine Express is also carrying out accessibility audits of its 19 stations. A joint meeting of Railfuture branches took place with Natasha Marsay, TPE's accessibility and integration manager, also in January.

A project is in progress to provide lifts at Thirsk to avoid the need for the board crossing. We pointed out that use of the board crossing is still required to access the platform at Seamer.

Natasha has set up a group with

disabled people's organisations to find out what type of improvements they would like to see. Tactile signage, disabled accessible toilets, improved station layouts and hearing loops are expected to feature.

**Mobility scooter policy**

TPE is partnering with Northern on drawing up a mobility scooter policy and some great work has already been done by Maxine Myers, Northern's accessibility improvement manager.

A new scooter permit scheme was rolled out by Northern across more than 21 of its routes and at 140 stations in October.

The intention is to provide a marked area on the floor of each station to indicate the position for scooters to board the train.

Natasha said that 64 stations have to be checked (measured) to enable the area to be marked. Stickers will be issued by staff to

confirm that the scooter meets the space requirements on the train. TPE has already assessed all its trains.

The stickers will be available at all staffed stations. Passengers wishing to travel with scooters will still be able to apply for a scooter card as long as they meet the requirements. Dozens of applications have been submitted so far.

**Railfuture Lottery winners**

**November:** D Scott, P Glover, A McFie, A Colquhoun, J Savage, S Morrow

**December:** G Smith, M Edgell, A McFie, M Robinson, B Berridge, M Breslin

**January:** R Blake, G Smith (2nd and 3rd prizes), T Sheppard, R Crockford, B Buttigieg

Queries: [lottery@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:lottery@railfuture.org.uk)



Poor service

The Bedford-Bletchley line has had a torrid time recently – and probably with the Department for Transport’s collusion – with repeated cancellations and poor performance.

It is sad that the line receives such a low (or non-existent) priority. Perhaps because it has a community rail partnership, it gets very poor treatment from the train operator.

I can understand passengers’ frustration with the situation, and there is a risk that passengers hit by the shocking performance over the past year will be lost to the railway.

At least the Vivarail units are performing better now.

The Government talks about levelling up, but what about levelling up between main and branch lines?

The outlook for Marston Vale and many other lines is a real worry in 2021.

Richard Crane, Hatfield Crescent, Bedford MK41 9RA  
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DfT needs a reboot

Peter Bryson is to be congratulated for his demolition of the Department for Transport’s current methods of assessing likely passenger demand when considering line reopenings (Railwatch 166 Your Views).

The DfT’s assumption that “poor people” will never want to travel by train seems typical of its pro-road mindset.

It is this sort of antiquated thinking which holds back numerous promising rail development schemes in the Midlands and the North, of which Skipton-Colne is an obvious example.

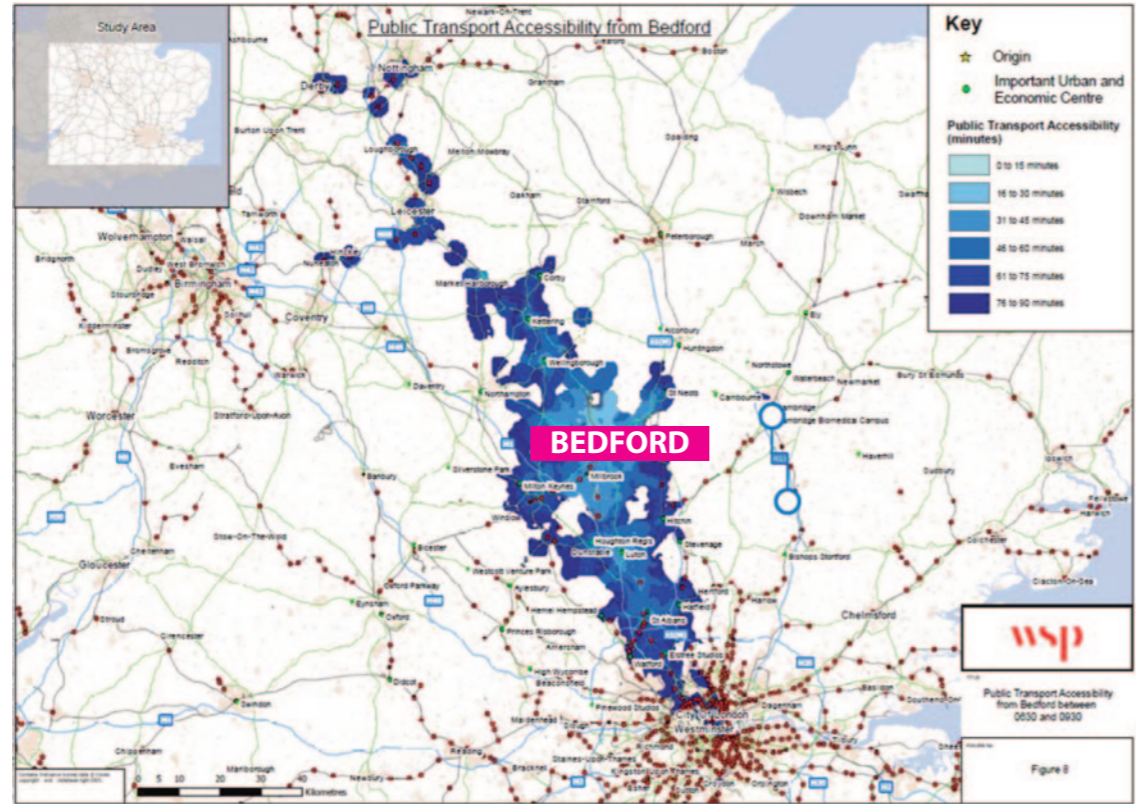
But let his revelations about the DfT’s forecasting methodology spur the rest of us to ensure realistic evidence is used in assessing the merits of new lines and services, rather than projections emanating from algorithms loaded with “facts” based on misplaced assumptions.

Tony Walker, Belmont, Durham DH12AW  
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Railwatch welcomes articles/pictures from rail users and user groups

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

Limited choices that East West Rail must correct



The map above shows the limited options for someone travelling from Bedford by public transport. The lightest blue shows how far they can travel in 15 minutes, while in dark blue are the places that can be reached in one-and-a-half hours.

By contrast, the map below shows the much wider zone which is available to people who travel by car. The two maps were shown to a conference in January on the plans to build the East West

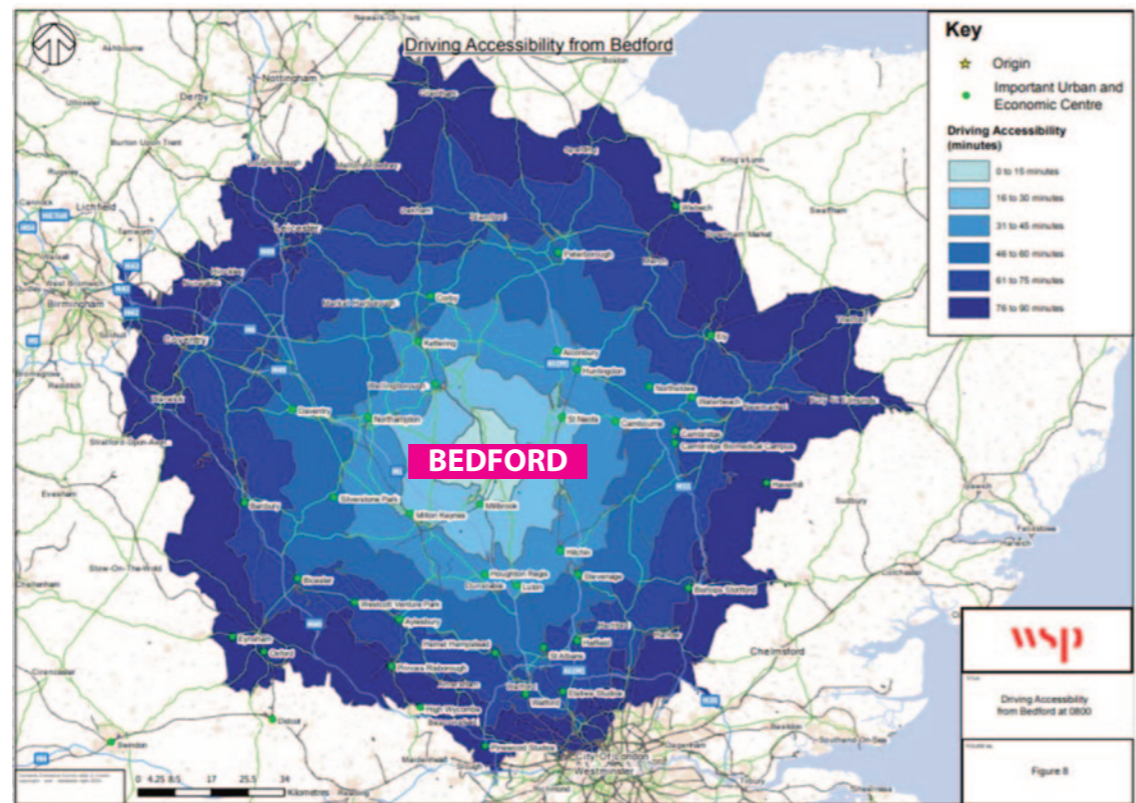
main line from Oxford to Cambridge, via Bicester, Bletchley (Milton Keynes) and Bedford. Naomi Green of England’s Economic Heartland, said East West Rail has the potential to improve rail’s connectivity.

She added: “Our area has six radial rail routes running through it. EWR will connect all six routes, avoiding the need to travel to London.”

EWR will restore some of what was lost 60 years ago when

parts of the line were closed. Without the railway, car use has grown so much that it is well above the national average.

Ms Green said: “We have to reduce our car dependency.” Planned house building is almost on the same arc as East West Rail but the current transport system is not sustainable. Improving connectivity is all about EWR and interchanges such as the proposed Cambridge South rail station.



Maps: ENGLAND’S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND

Alba Scotland

janeann.liston@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Railfuture responds on UK connectivity

Railfuture Scotland has responded to consultations on Union Connectivity (a.k.a. Bridge to Ireland), HS2 North, where the capacity for freight is being reduced, and Heavier Lorries for intermodal rail journeys.

Covid-19 cuts leave a barebones rail service

With worsening Covid-19 restrictions, ScotRail cut down to 60% its services and ran shorter trains. Where services were infrequent, the cuts have been greater, resulting effectively in two return trains per day. Usage is now very low, except in urban areas where low car ownership and bus service cuts see trains used for essential local journeys. On the Anglo-Scottish services (Avanti and TransPennine Express) there have been limited cuts in frequency but the trains seem emptier than ever which is very sad. Freight trains have also been reduced but are often longer, combining loads, with some running 40 wagons.

Wrangle over windfarm station bid

On campaigning, a simple request four years ago for windfarm funds towards a reopening study for a station at Symington in Ayrshire rumbles on, with the authorities insisting it must be a large multimodal study covering a larger area, including a station at Law (36 miles away) which was never asked for. The promoters of the windfarm did not consider a railway station to be a community benefit!

Liberal Democrats call for Scottish smart card

The Scottish Liberal Democrats’ transport programme features powerful regional transport partnerships to take control of bus services, and aims to create a Scotland-wide smart card system for all forms of transport, and allowing regional transport. It wants to allow partnerships to control transport infrastructure schemes.

Long wait for West Lothian new station

Residents have been assured that the new railway station in Winchburgh (served by Edinburgh-Glasgow

trains) will still go ahead, despite a gap of several years since it was approved. Planning consent was granted by West Lothian Council, conditional on the business case for the delivery and operation of the station being agreed with the council and Transport Scotland. Discussions with these parties and Network Rail are continuing, with a view to agreeing the business case in conjunction with wider rail transport improvements.

Newburgh station reopening edges closer

Following the Case for Change study, the initial options appraisal for a station at Newburgh in Fife has been accepted by Transport Scotland. This project has now entered the final part of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance process.

Contacts:

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

Beattock Station Action Group: [www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/](http://www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/)

St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink): [www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/](http://www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/)

[facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign)

Levenmouth Rail Campaign: [www.levenmouth.co.uk/](http://www.levenmouth.co.uk/)

[facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/)

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

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

Forth Rail Link (Dunfermline-Kinross-Alloa): [www.forthraillink.com](http://www.forthraillink.com)

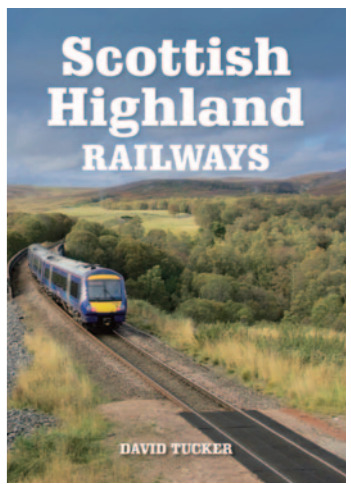
[facebook.com/forthraillink/](https://www.facebook.com/forthraillink/)

Thornhill Station Action Group: [chrisandmimi@supanet.com](mailto:chrisandmimi@supanet.com)

Bonnybridge Railway Campaign: <http://bonnybridgerailway.scot>

[www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway](https://www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway)

Friends of the West Highland Lines [www.westhighlandline.org.uk](http://www.westhighlandline.org.uk)



Railfuture Scotland was one of the sources used by author David Tucker in researching Scottish Highland Railways, published this year by the Crowood Press.

David lives in Stirling and developed his railway interest while working as a Scottish tour guide for 10 years.

He points out that reopened stations have been much more successful than anticipated.

He says: “The future is encouraging because there are signs that the millennial generation may become as keen on train travel as their baby-boomer grandparents.”

The 160 page book details the history and present-day experiences of travelling, with maps and photographs, several by Norman McNab.

ISBN: 9781785007927 £19.99

Take a trip to an excellent rail campaigning tool

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

I make no apology for reviewing a book published a few years ago. These are not normal times and my review reflects this.

Originally published in 2014, this second edition (2017) of Julian Holland’s *Railway Day Trips* has been updated and extended. This book is described on its back cover as “an essential guide to exploring Britain by train”.

I cannot think of a better book to encourage people to use trains for leisure travel.

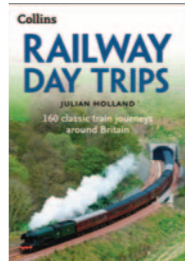
The format is straightforward, with eight sections: West Country, South & Southeast England, Day Trips From London, Eastern England, Central England, Wales, Northern England and Scotland.

Each section has between a dozen and 30 different routes with a consistent format of one page per trip. Each page contains a simple thumbnail map and three or four paragraphs describing the route. Heritage railways and light rail are

included. There are superb colour photographs on every page, showing highlights of the route from viaducts and bridges to cathedrals and other historic buildings. There are enough photographs of trains – along with their class number – to satisfy most *Railwatch* readers. Conveniently, Holland provides the reader with a sidebar of the stations along the route, with destination highlights, frequency of trains and the distance and approximate timings. At the front of the book a double page map of Great Britain shows the location of the 160 “classic train journeys”. You may find yourself – like I have done – ticking off the stations on each route.

My previous review for *Railwatch* dealt with the *Rail Atlas Great Britain And Ireland*. I suggest that the *Atlas* and *Railway Day Trips* are all that most leisure travellers need on their trips. Holland’s paperback is A5 size, so would fit in all bags and rucksacks and most larger

pockets. It weighs just over 400g. Perhaps the time has also come for some lateral thinking? More than £10 billion of public money has been spent on keeping the trains running. So, could not the Department for Transport, transport authorities and train operating companies purchase bulk copies of this splendid book



and distribute them through playgroups, schools, colleges, doctors’ surgeries, shopping centres and tourist information centres? The train operating companies could offer a 50% discount to anyone purchasing off-peak tickets who is holding a copy of the book. If such a suggestion seems unrealistic and impractical, perhaps Railfuture members can come up with their own! Rail travel is not going to recover without exceptional measures. Prayer and superstition will not be enough. I would like to see a new post-Covid edition of the book,

perhaps issued in conjunction with the Community Rail Network, transport authorities and train companies, as part of some joined-up thinking in how to revive the railways. I have seen encouraging trends all around me: rail campaigners volunteering in community rail partnerships, rail confidence programmes aimed at diverse groups (who have not used trains before) and Community Rail Network’s outstanding *Scenic Rail Britain* initiative.

The *Discover Amazing Women by Rail* project (for which I was the chief researcher) showed the huge interest in exploring women’s history by train. We all need to consider what WE can do to assist this revival. We could start by buying copies of this book for ourselves and our loved ones, particularly the young. *Railway Day Trips* – 160 classic train journeys around Britain by Julian Holland (2017). Collins £14.99 ISBN 978-0-00-797820-5

Richard Lysons is chair of the Friends of Littleborough Stations.



peter.walker@railfuture.org.uk

### Through trains to Middlesbrough?

Rail operators up and down the country have worked wonders with revised timetables during the Covid-19 lockdown. Northern's initiative in restoring practically the entire planned service in December between lockdowns was welcome, although it has now been reversed. Grand Central took pains to ensure that restored services from July last year were run as generously as could be, until all workings had to cease for another lockdown period. Grand Central's publicity for advance tickets, to ensure seats once its trains resume at the beginning of March, is encouraging. Of course we do not yet know when we will be free to travel.

However, there have been no long-distance services to or from Eaglescliffe or Hartlepool, and just one LNER train to Sunderland. Frequencies have been vastly reduced on the Tyne Valley line and the line linking Saltburn, Redcar and Middlesbrough to Darlington. TransPennine's Redcar-Manchester services have been halved, and these trains leave Redcar just before the Saltburn-Bishop Auckland hourly trains arrive. As Northern Rail managers explained at a joint January Zoom meeting of Railfuture's branches in northern England, the operators have been struggling with sudden staff absences. Seven drivers had to sign off to self-isolate on just one afternoon.

While not criticising the reduction process itself, in a response to a draft transport plan from the North-East Joint Transport Committee the Coastliners rail user group underlined the need for far more through, direct trains, rather than ingenious arrangements to connect at a distant junction. At present, thanks to Grand Central's absence, the Coast line has none at all. Even when Grand Central resumes, we know that there is so much engineering work planned around King's Cross station itself in the ensuing three months that there will be fewer than five Sunderland and four Bradford trains each day.

On the plus side, however, Middlesbrough MP Andy McDonald has received news that LNER will be introducing London-Middlesbrough through trains later this year. We welcome improvement to Teesside's limited range of long-distance trains, but would prefer to see them running beyond Middlesbrough, seven miles further to Redcar, as TransPennine Express does now.

### Go-ahead in Northumberland

A preliminary Treasury grant of some £34 million has been promised to Northumberland County Council, to pay for more studies of what construction work is needed to restore passenger trains from Ashington, Bebside, Newsham and Seaton Delaval to central Newcastle by 2024. This sum is only a fraction of the £200 million minimum that will be needed to restore track and build five new stations. A public consultation has just been held. Northumberland's aim is to present a full business case to Network Rail and the Department for Transport this autumn to release the rest of the funding. Once the

scheme is complete, Ashington will be 35 minutes from Newcastle Central, and Newsham 21 minutes. Trains will run hourly – half-hourly in peak periods. The link with the Metro at Northumberland Park will provide connections throughout the Tyne and Wear conurbation.

### Electric opportunity in Blyth

Blyth's former power station could be used to manufacture batteries for electric cars, with 30,000 batteries being despatched by rail. The plan, submitted by Britishvolt, includes reopening a rail depot at Cambois, North Blyth. Existing freight services include biomass from Port of Tyne to Lynemouth power station, alumina imported at North Blyth and taken to Fort William, and coal, also imported at North Blyth, taken to various destinations.

### New signals for a bright future

Amid the rigours of winter and the reduced traffic during lockdown, first steps towards resignalling the south end of the Durham Coast line have been taken by closing nine boxes, mainly in the Norton and Stockton areas, plus Greatham. They are being replaced by colour-lights controlled from York. Level crossings will be looked after by a new Hartlepool workstation.

One signal box, in Billingham at a main road level crossing in the west of the town, will be sadly mourned by many. It has a particularly tall and spectacular 110-year-old building that also controlled access to the freight line past ICI works and eastwards towards Haverton Hill. Despite protests locally, the box has not survived the cull. All the semaphore signals nearby, between this junction and Norton's four boxes on the line towards Stockton, will also disappear.

### Step-free Billingham station

Fifty years ago Billingham station lost its staff. The island platform was accessible only by a steep staircase and footbridge. Now funds have been pledged to make it step-free, although maybe not until the end of next year, according to Alex Cunningham, the MP for Stockton North, who welcomed the funding. Tees Valley Combined Authority personnel are unable to say whether step-free means lifts or slopes.

### Bon appetit at Morpeth

Morpeth station, recently refurbished in a £2.3 million project, now has a tenant for its buffet.

### Leisure market will speed recovery

In common with many others, Northern is keen to rebuild rail patronage as soon as circumstances allow, and has surveyed existing users to see how their use of the railway might change. Evidence suggests the leisure market will expand fastest, especially for coastal resorts.

A good proportion of Northern's diesel trains will need replacing before long. Availability of funding for electrification will be crucial, especially after the recent 40% finance cuts imposed on Transport for the North. Is this compatible with the government's levelling-up policy?

[www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch)  
Twitter @RailfutureNEast

# Flexi-tickets

By Neil Middleton

Railfuture is calling for a new type of rail ticket for people who spend only part of their working time in the workplace.

There is often an enormous gap between the price per journey for someone travelling five days a week with a season ticket and someone who travels two or three days a week. Our proposal aims to bridge this gap.

Some train operators already regularly offer carnet tickets.

In return for buying a bundle of tickets in advance, a small discount is given (typically 5% or 10%) and all the tickets need to be used within a set period, often two or three months.

Railfuture's preferred approach is for season tickets to be sold only on smartcards, although alternatives may be needed where stations do not have the necessary readers.

Railfuture also believes that a larger scale reform of ticketing and pricing needs to take place, but it is unrealistic to expect that to happen while Covid-19 remains a major problem.

More information on the Railfuture website at:

<https://bit.ly/2ZdAkVF>

Neil Middleton is a director of Railfuture and is leading the fair tickets campaign. Email: [neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk)

## New British Transport Police chief

**Luci D'Orsi took over as chief constable of the 5,000-strong British Transport Police force in February.**

**Ms D'Orsi was a deputy assistant commissioner in the Met, had a key counter-terrorism role and was formerly the Met's East London commander**



Picture: BTP

home. When lockdown ends, and social distancing starts to ease, we are confident that many people will continue to spread their working time between their home and the workplace.

Railfuture chair Chris Page said: "We are keen that passengers who do not commute to the workplace every weekday get a fare reduction as compared to the more occasional user."

It is important to remember that some workplace attenders will still need to travel in peak hours every day, and so the traditional season ticket needs to be retained.

The station is expected to be built on the Leeds-Harrogate line, on the outskirts of Leeds just north of Horsforth station, and may open in 2024.

It will include shops, toilets, lifts, buses to take people to the airport, staff, and a cycle access route for nearby Cookridge. There will also be charging points for electric road vehicles.

Before the station consultation closed in February, Leeds City Council approved plans to expand Leeds Bradford Airport with a £150 million new terminal.

However, the Aviation Environment Federation has warned that expanding the airport is a backwards step in the fight against climate change and entrenches an expanding carbon-intensive industry.

"Flying is one of the most environmentally damaging things an individual can do," said the AEF's Cait Hewitt.

Leeds University climate scientist Jefim Vogel said: "It is like road-building, you build another road and there will be more cars on the road overall. Airport expansion drives demand for flights."

### Halifax rail gateway

Halifax station could see large-scale investment to make it into a "gateway" for the town. Public consultation took place in January and February over plans by Calderdale Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority for shops and toilets in a new two-storey station building, a footbridge, and improved walking

Graphic: LEEDS CITY COUNCIL



PROPOSED STATION: Leeds Bradford Airport Parkway

### £42m airport station

Public consultation took place in January and February on plans for a £42 million parkway station to serve Leeds Bradford airport.

The station is expected to be built on the Leeds-Harrogate line, on the outskirts of Leeds just north of Horsforth station, and may open in 2024.

It will include shops, toilets, lifts, buses to take people to the airport, staff, and a cycle access route for nearby Cookridge. There will also be charging points for electric road vehicles.

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BRIGHT SPOT: The new Cross-City train being built at Derby

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

The final phase of resignalling Birmingham New Street station started in January and will be completed by the end of next year. Railfuture West Midlands members were told in an online meeting in January.

Network Rail's Dave Penney said that one benefit of the new set-up would be to accommodate new six-car electric trains in platforms 8 and 11. West Midlands Railway has ordered 36 new Derby-built Aventura trains for the Cross-City line. The trains enter service this year, but the main benefit of the resignalling will be to increase exit speeds and reduce platform occupation times.

Railfuture's Colin Major promised to provide Dave with suggestions for improving passengers'

experience of the station. Dave is carrying out a review of the station signs after passengers complained of getting lost when they were changing trains. Railfuture is calling for more seats to be provided where passengers can see the information screens.

### Wellington goes green

Friends of Wellington station near Shrewsbury have been awarded £45,000 to install new signage, improved pedestrian links to the nearby bus station and to develop a wildlife garden.

Kath Howard of the Friends said: "The station is a key entry point to the town and all that Wellington and the surrounding area has to offer, so this is great news for both the town and for the station."

[www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/WestMidlandsBranch)



### Dive-under to keep freight off the East Coast main line

A prefabricated concrete tunnel box to allow freight trains to dive under the East Coast main line at Werrington (four miles north of Peterborough) was installed during a nine-day operation in January. Network Rail said the project was designed to avoid major disruption. The main line was kept open but with a reduced level of service while the work took place. The tunnel will be in operation by the end of the year.

### Covered link and accessibility bonus at Retford station

Access for All work started in January to install new lifts and a covered walkway at Retford to link the low level and main line parts of the station. Twitter @RailfutureLincs

Picture: NETWORK RAIL



# England's new map for rail campaigners



The map of England has been dramatically changing over the past few years with the creation of sub-national transport bodies which cover several local authority areas.

They are described as ad hoc bodies but they will have statutory powers for transport.

In theory this should make it easier for rail projects to be given the go-ahead, but in practice control of the purse strings remains with the government.

The theory was challenged in January when the Treasury announced a £10 million cut to the grant to Transport for the North.

The sub-national transport bodies are intended to provide strategic transport governance on a much larger scale than existing local transport authorities by grouping councils together.

They are there to bridge the gap between national transport projects and the smaller projects funded by local transport authorities.

Current sub-national transport bodies are: England's Economic Heartland, Midlands Connect, Transport East, Transport for the North, Transport for the South East, Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport.

The Local Transport Act of 2008 was amended in 2016 by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 to allow the creation of sub-national transport bodies

However, in October last year, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps blocked Transport for the South East's request to become a statutory body. Whether that block is temporary is an open question.

<https://bit.ly/3qv3lrx>

## Railwatch on the television

BBC1 Television broadcast a series of programmes over five days, called Railwatch, in February 1989. It began with programmes on passenger and freight operations on the East Coast main line.

On the first day, an InterCity 125 power car was named BBC Television Railwatch at London King's Cross. The programmes can still be seen on YouTube. Search for Railwatch.

## London & South East

[roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk)

### 70 years of rail action

2021 is the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom and of the Railway Development Association. They merged in 1978 to form the Railway Development Society, which adopted its campaigning name Railfuture in 2000.

In those 70 years, there has been a succession of great achievements, many of them in the London and South East area, and we can celebrate some of their birthdays this year.

The month of May marks birthdays for 18 of them, including the reopenings of Moulsecoomb (East Sussex) 1980, Homerton (London) 1985 and Lea Bridge (London) 2016.

### Transport for the SE

Railfuture is now represented on all three of the area study forums currently run by Transport for the South East: the Outer Orbital south coast area between the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Thanet; the Inner Orbital between the Thames Valley and Medway Valley; and the South Central Radial from London to the south coast between Littlehampton and Eastbourne, which includes the newly recognised Brighton-Tunbridge Wells economic corridor.

Our target is to secure proposals for investment in rail infrastructure enhancements in next year's TfSE strategic investment plan.

### Network Rail workshops

Railfuture is represented in Network Rail's workshops for its North and East Kent connectivity study, which will feed into TfSE's South East Radial area study. A key feature will be the programme to extend HS1 services to coastal East Sussex. Network Rail's strategic outline business case for that is imminent.

### Volunteering our views

Responding to consultations remains a core part of our influencing activities. Our most recent responses have been to the Surrey Rail Strategy survey, Luton's draft local transport plan, Homes England's plan for at least 10,000 homes near Ifield (Horsham), a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan for East Sussex, a West Sussex survey for its transport plan review and the "direction of travel" document for Wealden's next local plan. These and others can be found on the Railfuture website.

### London & SE updates

London and South East branch members can subscribe free to our monthly two-page e-newsletter inter-rail. It is published between issues of the quarterly *railise*, sent out with each *Railwatch*. They can be viewed at:

[www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East)  
[Twitter: @RailfutureLSE](https://twitter.com/RailfutureLSE)



## Flight shame France plans sleeper trains

By Trevor Garrod

The French transport minister has commissioned a report into expanding the country's night train network, as well as supporting Europe-wide plans for more sleeper trains.

The map above shows some of the options being considered. France wants to have 10 night train routes running by 2030, and seven possible routes have already been identified with Paris and Nice acting as hubs.

France currently has two night train routes and is set to open two more by the end of this year. Night trains run from Paris to Briançon (Alps) and Cerbère (Pyrenees). Paris-Nice and Paris-Tarbes are scheduled to begin by the end of the year.

But transport minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari wants to go further. He said: "I am convinced that when the means are there, with a good quality of service and the right commercial offer, there is a clientele for night trains."

"With the ecological stakes, flight shame and the pandemic that is reshaping the way we travel, the night train has everything to attract travellers."

"Look at Austria, they have 28 night lines. In France, the development of the TGV has eaten up the night trains and the offer has deteriorated. All that has to change."

Austria, Germany and Switzerland have publicly supported the idea for more night trains.

In December the EuroCity Wawel train was reintroduced between Berlin and Wrocław and Krakow in Poland.

The European Union has commissioned a study into cross-border long-distance passenger trains, including night trains, and campaigning group Back-on-Track will have input into this.

The EU Covid-19 £1.7 trillion economic recovery package could be used to fund the network, and there are hopes that a four-hour Paris-Berlin train service could be introduced.

The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies supports the idea of the fund being used to create a European ultra-rapid train network.

Last year I took part in a *Train instead of Plane* webinar organised by Swiss campaigners UmverkehrR, who want to reverse transport policies that favour cars and planes over public transport and cycling. They say one modern tram offers room for 253 passengers, equivalent to the number transported by 210 cars.

<http://www.back-on-track.eu>  
<http://www.aera.co.uk>  
<https://www.umverkehr.ch/>

## Chair's column by Chris Page

# A challenging year ahead

2021 will be a challenging year for rail. The pandemic has changed attitudes to travel and many people have learnt to work from home while using the car more when they have had to travel. The rail industry must keep its trains and stations feeling safe, reshape its services and market its offer aggressively to win passengers when the pandemic has subsided. The government can make or break the rail recovery. It must take the risk of changing fares and ticketing to match new travel needs and attract passengers.

It must create a new structure for the industry with effective leadership that responds to customer and community needs and grows the business while preserving the benefits of a national railway. It must continue to invest in rail with a rolling programme of electrification to decarbonise, reduce operating costs and facilitate modal shift, particularly of freight.

Railfuture will be there to ask the difficult questions and publicise our honest feedback to the government, the industry, stakeholders and our potential members. We have published our recommendations for flexible ticketing, based on an evolution of existing carnet products, which could be implemented with a mid-2021 launch date when commuters will be ready to return to rail. See [www.railfuture.org.uk/article1872](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1872).

It is reassuring that the government is continuing to invest in expanding the rail system, with funding for the next phase of East West Rail and reopening the Northumberland line. However, the link

with Aylesbury is not yet included because the budget for East West Rail has been constrained. Given the rail industry's record on cost, the budget constraint may be understandable, but the industry must learn to deliver value for money. The National Infrastructure Commission has completed the first really strategic assessment of rail needs in the Midlands and the North, concluding that investment in better connectivity between regional centres delivers more benefit than connectivity with London.

Railfuture has prepared its view of the priorities for rail investment in the area, with Midland main line electrification to Sheffield and Leeds front and centre. The government may have published its plans for the rail industry structure by the time you read this. Whether they bear any resemblance to Williams' unpublished draft recommendations would be pure speculation!

A petition has been started by the Historical Railways Estate Group against plans by Highways England to infill or demolish a number of disused rail structures.

While Railfuture regrets the potential loss of cycling or walking routes, our focus is on rail, so we are investigating whether any of the structures identified are ever likely to be re-used for rail traffic, and will engage with local authorities to protect those which might.

Finally, new directors Neil Middleton and Mike Rose have been co-opted on to the Railfuture board, taking responsibility for communications and freight respectively.



## Have your say on future campaign priorities

By Graham Nalty

Big changes in how the UK rail infrastructure will grow may result from the December report from the National Infrastructure Commission.

Gold-plated projects such as the whole of HS2, with a long lead time for returns, may be difficult.

Short term upgrades with a much faster investment return from new city-to-city links are more likely to be encouraged. However, this is against a background of a government wanting to minimise its expenditure while at the same time encouraging the economies of the Midlands and North to grow to a level closer to

London and the South-East. The UK Government is soon expected to publish its integrated rail plan.

In the East Midlands we were pleased that the NIC recommends building HS2 in phases, starting with Birmingham to East Midlands Parkway.

This will enable Derby and Nottingham to benefit from direct London HS2 trains as well as Sheffield. But it is also a much smaller project than the full HS2 eastern leg and could be built sooner as a stand-alone, giving benefits to the East Midlands economy much earlier. Full-scale electrification of the Midland main line plus

infill in a steady rolling programme has to happen to combat climate change. To frame our branch response (for input to Railfuture's national response), we set up a 10-strong task force led by me. I am a former chair of the North Midlands branch.

You can read our initial conclusions at:

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2588>

*Railwatch* readers outside the East Midlands use rail services in the region and I would like to hear what our region can do to encourage you to leave your car at home. Please email me with your ideas:

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# railwatch

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# railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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# Cloudy skies for open access

Picture: RAILWATCH



**HULL PARAGON STATION:** Open access operator Hull Trains provides direct trains to London King's Cross from here

By Graham Collett

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Open access train operators have been hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, and a further blow to the concept was delivered in February when high hopes for a new London-Carmarthen service were dashed.

Grand Union Trains had hoped to operate from 2023 from London Paddington with calls at Bristol Parkway, Severn Tunnel Junction, Newport, Llanelli and Swansea.

A London-Cardiff service would have started this December.

In a lengthy 12-page explanation of its decision, the ORR accepted that there would be few operational problems but feared Grand Union might abstract revenue from Great Western's existing service.

Freightliner, Great Western Railway, MTR Crossrail, Transport for London and CrossCountry objected to the London-Carmarthen service, which was backed by the Welsh Government.

Although open access services do not feature in many passengers' plans, in Yorkshire and in the North East they provide a valuable alternative to the formerly franchised operators.

## Current services

Grand Central runs from Sunderland and Hartlepool and from Bradford Interchange to Kings Cross. Hull Trains operates from Beverley, Hull, Brough and Selby to King's Cross. These operators offer a service that LNER does not.

LNER has a limited service from Bradford Forster Square via Shipley and Leeds to London, while Grand Central picks up plenty of passengers in Halifax

(connections from Calder Valley), Brighouse and Mirfield (connections from Huddersfield). GC also serves Pontefract on a limited basis. The GC Sunderland service provides a direct York and London service from Hartlepool, Eaglescliffe, Northallerton and Thirsk. Hull Trains runs several times a day in each direction, whereas the LNER service has only one return working.

## Benefits of open access

These services provide competition on routes to London, but also give direct trains to London from several stations without a direct LNER service.

Both services inspire great loyalty from their passengers. One said: "There is nothing quite like turning up at King's Cross after a stay in London, seeing Brighouse, Halifax and Low Moor on the departure screen and proudly thinking – that's our train!"

Rail campaigner Dr Paul Salvesson has described Grand Central as "the longest community railway in the country".

## Future services

Already agreed is a new First Group service from Edinburgh, Newcastle and Morpeth to London Kings Cross, offering a fast journey with low fares. Awaiting approval is a proposed London-Stirling service.

A new GC service from Blackpool and Preston to London Euston, having been agreed, stock obtained and crew recruited, was due to start in Spring 2020. However, this service was dropped last September due to economic uncertainty caused by Covid-19. Existing services are suspended

at present, as they were during previous lockdowns, and have had no Government support, unlike other rail operators. A request by Railfuture to reconsider this decision was rejected.

These open access services are essential because they serve large catchment areas ignored by the Department for Transport's franchises and contracts.

## East Coast capacity study

The government has asked Andrew Haines to carry out a review of East Coast main line capacity. Although Mr Haines is Network Rail's chief executive, the review must be fair and neutral.

Rail operators have to apply to the Office for Rail and Road to run services. Strong opposition by franchised operators, backed by the Department for Transport, has made it difficult for open access operators to get licences for new services.

Whilst GC and Hull Trains were fortunate in being able to continue their licences following the last round of access hearings, the situation on the ECML has changed, with a particular capacity issue on the section north of York.

There are now more TransPennine Express services on this route, as well as the already authorised First Group Edinburgh service and a new enhanced LNER timetable, both expected from May 2022. We consider it vital that open access operators continue running and serving their catchments. The Haines Review must be truly independent in assessing bids by all operators.

## End of franchising

The end of the franchising system – announced in

September – raises issues about the future of open access.

If, as anticipated, the new system is based on the Transport for London model of passenger service contracts, open access services could be incorporated into these.

But the extra cost – particularly given the £10 billion of support already provided under the current emergency recovery measures agreements introduced in September – is likely to make the government very unwilling to do so.

## The future for open access

The future way in which our rail network is managed and operated will depend on the long-awaited Williams Review.

Even after it is published, there will have to be a White Paper, followed by legislation.

Open access operators will need all the help they can get in negotiating an uncertain future.

Background information:

<https://bit.ly/3s2MSM9>

<https://bit.ly/3qp5KV4>

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