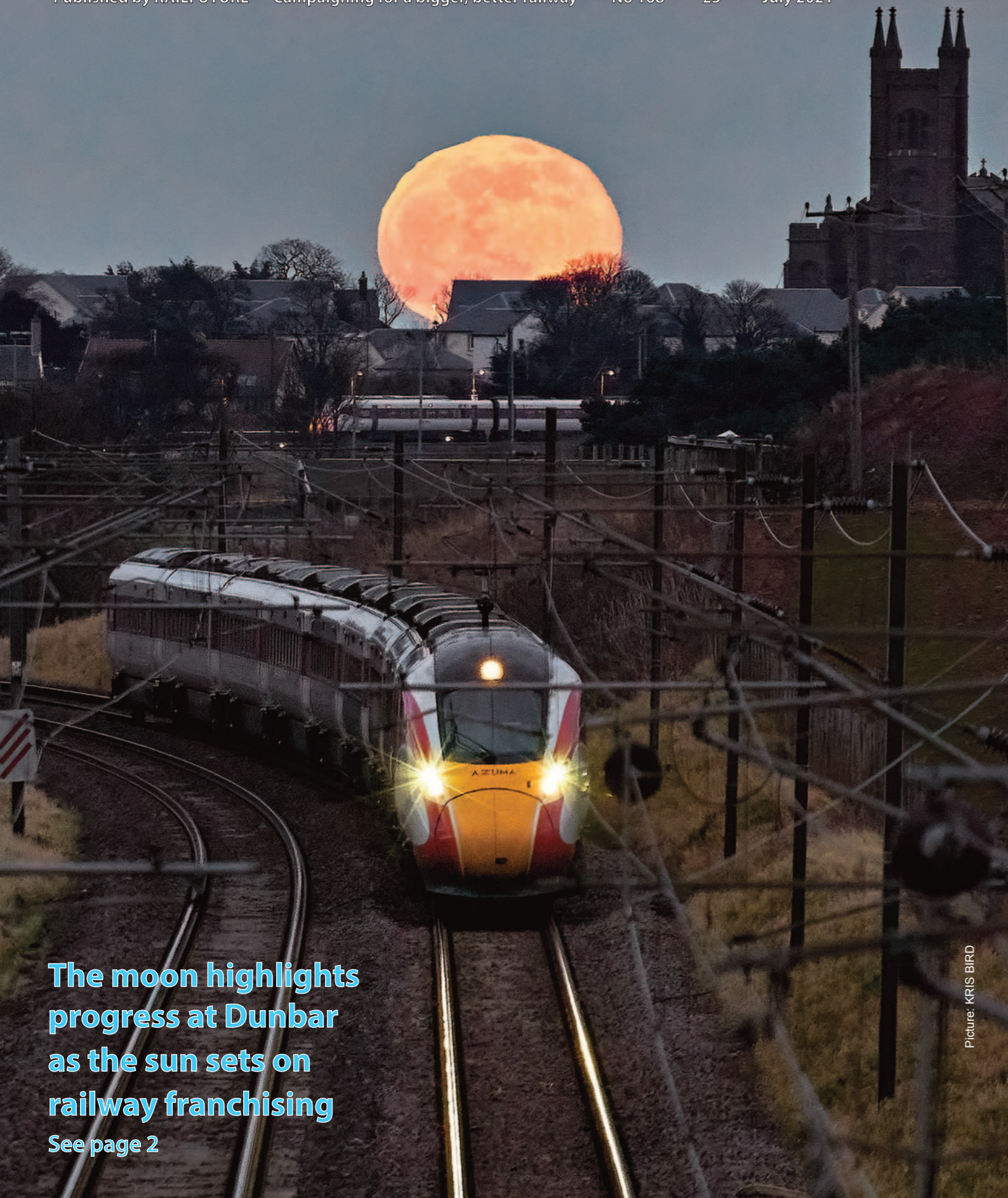


railwatch

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The moon highlights progress at Dunbar as the sun sets on railway franchising
See page 2

Picture: KRIS BIRD

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Sun sets on rail franchising

Our page one picture shows a dramatic moon silhouetting Dunbar Parish Church.

The full moon followed the completion in February of improvement work at Dunbar station. Rail services for the coastal town on the East Coast main line improved in 2019 when TransPennine Express began calling at the station already served by ScotRail and CrossCountry but station improvements were delayed by Covid-19. There is more progress to come. Future work includes providing direct cycle and pedestrian access to the new platform. The car park will also be extended once Scottish Water has carried out a drainage investigation.

The town is steeped in history and was one of the most important Scottish fortresses in the middle ages.

Its ruined castle, which stands guard over the town's twin harbours, once sheltered Mary Queen of Scots when she fled Edinburgh after the murder of her private secretary David Rizzio.

While the moon was highlighting the beauty of Dunbar, the sun was setting on what some have called the ugly story of rail franchising.

How the new Great British Railways proposals will affect Scotland is not yet clear. The ScotRail Alliance already offers some degree of vertical integration and was seen as an example of the way forward. There is a risk that Scotland's current well-integrated structure will be replaced by a confusing system based on an untried English model.

The UK government says it will explore options with Transport Scotland to enable the railway in Scotland to benefit from the reforms

Great British Railways

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

PAGE ONE PICTURE

on the wider network of Great Britain. GBR has been welcomed with cynicism in some quarters. Mick Whelan, general secretary of the train drivers' union Aslef, said: "What does the government do? It takes policy out of the Labour Party manifesto, rebrands it but leaves out the good bits, and goes light on detail, representation and green investment, and removes private risk."

Rail union RMT has warned that the rolling stock leasing companies, which are accused of extracting large amounts of public money from the system, are not affected by GBR.

Labour's Jim McMahon also warned that £1 billion of cuts to Network Rail are already threatened and that GBR raises more questions than it answers.

The UK government is expecting that after five years the GBR arrangement could save around £1.5 billion a year. Ministers say GBR is simplification of the existing complicated railway structure but insist it is not renationalisation.

For the first time since Labour's transport secretary Alastair Darling abolished the Strategic Rail Authority in 2006, the railways will have a single public body overseeing their direction and development.

■ Great British Railways: Back page

Covid-19: Proceed with caution in 2021



Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell takes stock of the challenges as rail prospects begin to look more optimistic

Writing on the last day of April, I feel the country is in a happier place than it was at the end of January.

We still have a global pandemic, and I am not oblivious to the great suffering still occurring, but we can hopefully look forward to seeing the Covid restrictions fade away here.

Passenger numbers up but it's a slow process

Looking at the Department for Transport statistics, you can see that there has been a significant relaxation of lockdown restrictions since January.

The national rail passenger figure has risen from 14% at the end of January to around 25% in late March, then reaching 33-37% in mid April, although the statistics are affected by Easter being earlier this year.

In London, Underground passenger numbers are in line with these national figures.

Partly because they were high to start with, the figures for car usage have not increased so much in proportion, but they have actually risen by a few more percentage points than rail: 57% in late January, 73% in late March, and 84% in mid April.

Bus passenger percentages also look healthier than rail.

London bus passengers were around 32% in late January, then 48% in late March and 57% in mid April.

Corresponding figures for bus passengers outside London were 26%, 45% and 50%.

Questions for train operators and the rest of us too

What do these numbers mean? Train operators must not take passengers for granted. Many new habits have been formed since March of last year, not least because of relentless Government encouragement to avoid public transport if you possibly can. The percentage of rail passengers still travelling got nowhere near 50% even when restrictions were eased last summer, so the business has lost more than half its passenger traffic, with a corresponding loss of revenue. By contrast, expenditure is difficult to trim because many of the costs are fixed however many people



With its many attractive features conveniently within walking distance of the station, the historic city of Lincoln is ideally suited to railborne tourism, but passengers will not want to go home at a time to suit LNER's compulsory reservations



Castlefield Corridor: Looking from Oxford Road towards Deansgate station, the corridor is an obvious bottleneck, exacerbated by the Oxford Road-Liverpool service leaving by the tracks on the right, then having to use the far crossover, before its call at Deansgate station

travel. The emergency contracts for existing operators to run train services at government expense may not incentivise a proactive approach in attracting passengers back to rail.

Railfuture must nudge operators in the right direction.

The Treasury may be less inclined to support the railway industry if it seems unwilling to take its own remedial action.

Compulsory seat reservation a disincentive to travel

The railways are certain to suffer a loss of business travel and commuters in the short term and possibly for years to come.

Encouraging leisure travel (and gaining revenue from people's discretionary spending) does not come easily to the modern railway industry.

Compulsory seat reservation on long-distance trains has an obvious appeal for tidy-minded train companies but is a turn-off for prospective discretionary

hours on a visit if it is a sunny evening. Have train operators been spending too much time on the minutiae of franchise requirements and too little on the basic marketing of their products?

They must encourage me – and others – to travel by train!

85% cannot be the capacity benchmark for Castlefield

The early part of this year saw a public consultation on possible train service reductions to resolve the severe congestion which was occurring pre-pandemic along the line from Castlefield Junction through Deansgate and Oxford Road stations to the through platforms (13 and 14) at Manchester Piccadilly – as discussed in more detail in Railwatch 163 last year.

It looks as though there may still be a congestion problem even after the proposed reductions. The Network Rail Castlefield Corridor Congested Infrastructure Report of September 2019 declares: "...13 trains per hour is the maximum number of services which can be dependably operated through the Castlefield Corridor (of which two terminate at Manchester Oxford Road).

"This is approximately 85% of the theoretical capacity of the Castlefield Corridor which is acknowledged as the threshold for reliable performance (International Union of Railways, UIC Code 406 report)."

The three options offered in the recent consultation all offered a maximum of 12 trains per hour each way off-peak, and a maximum of 13 trains per hour each way in peak hours.

This will "deliver a robust timetable with spare capacity", to quote Network Rail's capacity enhancement plan of February 2021.

Unfortunately UIC 406 quotes 85% as the proposed occupancy time rate for a line carrying "dedicated suburban passenger traffic", and even then only for a peak hour.

UIC 406's "daily period" rate is 70%. For mixed traffic lines such as the Castlefield Corridor, with a mix of freight and passenger, UIC 406 suggests 75% only for the peak hour, with a daily rate of 60%.

It seems 85% is simply the wrong benchmark for ever getting a reliable solution to the Castlefield Corridor problem.

If the existing viaduct is simply inadequate for the required train services, we need to start planning now for a tunnel.

Pictures: PAUL ABELL

Rail needs promise of a green agenda

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

Of all the ways to ensure the railways emerge successfully from the pandemic, one thing that must be retained is the walk-on railway. LNER, which has effectively, yet again, been renationalised, has made it mandatory to have a seat reservation before getting on the train.

Other companies such as Great Western and Avanti West Coast strongly recommend that only those with reservations board the train. Indeed, Avanti says on its website that once all the socially distanced tickets have been sold, "we can't guarantee you'll be able to board your preferred train". Such mandatory bookings are already necessary if travelling on French high speed services and there are murmurings within the UK rail industry that such restrictions may become permanent.

No one is suggesting this will be applied to local or suburban services, but there are, of course, advantages for the long-distance

rail companies. They can manage demand better and ensure that there are no standing passengers who will then file complaints about their awful train trip.

Moreover, making everyone book in advance would provide a wealth of information about their customer base, which would be invaluable for their marketing efforts once rail travel is no longer constrained by social distancing and the need to wear masks. However, Anthony Smith, the chief executive of Transport Focus, which represents passengers, is worried that under the cover of the pandemic there will be a permanent change: "It is understandable that there have been these changes but they must be temporary. Forcing people to have reservations would undercut one of the great advantages of rail travel." The

whole economics of rail travel have been wrecked by the pandemic. Even now, as we emerge from lockdown, loadings are at best 20 per cent of those in 2019.

To attract people back, the railways need to be open and available, and offer value for money. Making it more difficult to travel is not the way to do that. Instead, there

need to be incentives to encourage people to travel by train. But there is a lack of imagination or coherence about the policies that seem to be emerging from the Department for Transport. How many times, for example, do we have to hear that the DfT is "thinking" about flexible season tickets? Yet, nothing has

changed apart from very tentative offers. C2C has offered flexible season tickets since June 2016 but offer only a five per cent discount. Great Northern has launched a carnet scheme but again with just

a 10 per cent discount. It is the lack of imagination that gets me. And the lack of coherence. The railway needs both but is getting neither.

To recover from the pandemic, the industry needs really adventurous thinking – and a strategy that covers not just all aspects of the railway, but blends in with other transport modes.

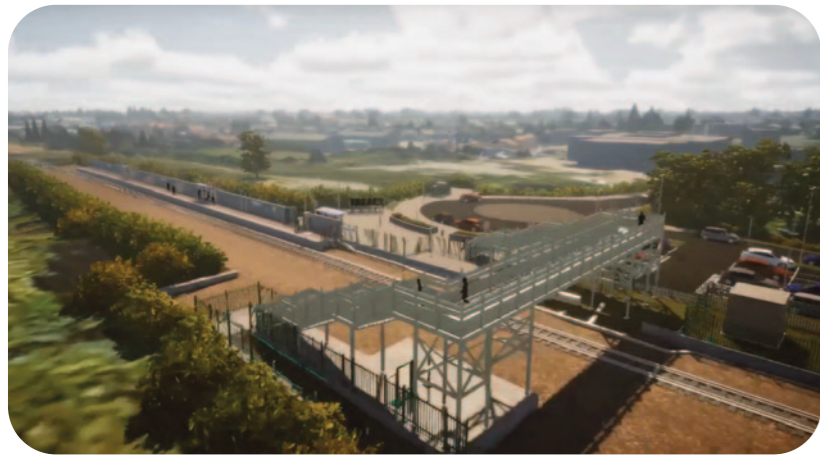
The government promises a green agenda, but has put up rail fares while by contrast, for too many years has been capping fuel duty for motorists.

It is building a new line – at vast expense – between Oxford and Cambridge, yet not electrifying it. Let us hope the Williams-Shapps report and Great British Railways move the railways in the right direction and above all, demonstrate a coherent and consistent pro-rail approach.

In one of the most shortsighted and meanest diktats from the Treasury, existing railcards are not being renewed for free, despite the fact that people have effectively been banned from using them for the past year.



Railfuture president Christian Wolmar



STEP ONE AT SOHAM: The single-platform station now being built will eventually accommodate a second track – and platform

paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Soham station progress

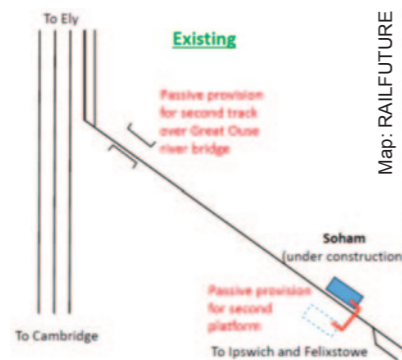
Work to construct Cambridgeshire's second new station in five years at Soham on the Ely-Newmarket line continues apace. The single-platform station is just north of the point where the double-track line from Newmarket Chippenham Junction becomes single for the final five miles to Ely Dock Junction. Soham station will have a footbridge to the site of a second platform that will be necessary when the line is eventually doubled for the final miles into Ely. The footbridge also carries a public right of way over the line.

When Soham station opens at the end of the year it will serve a town of 11,000 people with an Ipswich-Peterborough service every two hours. This service should increase to hourly once more capacity is created by the Ely area capacity enhancement project. Further public consultation on the Ely scheme is expected this year. Another improvement should follow when Newmarket's west curve is restored, which is included in the long-term plan of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. That should allow the introduction of an Ely-Soham-Newmarket-Cambridge service.

■ ■ East West consultation

The East West Railway Company is carrying out a preliminary non-statutory consultation about its plans for a new railway from Bedford to Cambridge. Railfuture's response will be supportive of its preferred route from Bedford to the St Neots area and on to Cambourne and Cambridge South. Both St Neots and Cambourne are planned to grow in population very rapidly over the next 30 years, so getting the stations right for both places must take into account both that growth and the time scale.

A site that is right now may not be in the future. Wherever the stations are built they must integrate carefully into local active travel networks of pedestrian and cycle ways that will ensure the new railway is central to moving people around the new



Map: RAILFUTURE

settlements. The new stations must not be at the centre of vast park-and-ride sites but be part of travel hubs which can bring together pedestrian, cyclist, bus user and rail user needs with some car parking provision, and car drop-off. St Neots will also become a major interchange between East West's four trains per hour serving Bedford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, and Thameslink's two trains per hour serving Peterborough, Alconbury, Huntingdon and Biggleswade on the East Coast main line. Passengers changing trains must be the absolute priority in the design of the station. Beyond its local function, the East West line will link the areas of huge jobs growth taking place around the new Cambridge South and other Cambridge stations with the city's vastly expanded travel-to-work area. To do this properly the new railway must enter Cambridge from the south with each of the planned trains pausing at the constricted Cambridge station before terminating further afield at places such as Ipswich and Norwich, and now Wisbech is being mentioned. Massive housing and population growth is expected at Wisbech, March, Ely, Waterbeach and north Cambridge, necessitating a frequent service.

Railfuture achieved good coverage for its campaign for East West Rail, with a double-page spread in the *Cambridge Independent*, calling for electrification of the route from day one, especially as both the Midland and East Coast main lines and the line to King's Lynn are already electrified.

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

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■ ■ Railfuture points the way to a bigger, better railway

A task force led by Railfuture's Graham Nalty has produced the East Midlands branch's position statement on *Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North* which was published by the National Infrastructure Commission. Railfuture East Midlands recommends:

Electrification of the Midland main line, including beyond Sheffield to Leeds and York via Moorthorpe

Early completion of HS2 East from Birmingham to East Midlands Parkway, and eventual full completion of the high speed railway to Leeds

Improved speeds for rail travel between the East Midlands and the North-West, and between those pairs of cities that currently have slow connections

Direct Leicester-Coventry services and improved connectivity at Nuneaton

Increased capacity around Leicester, as recommended in Network Rail's recent *Leicester Area Strategic Advice*

Levelling up by increasing rail funding in our region so that it is comparable to that in the South-East.

■ ■ A railway for heritage fans and commuters

David Rae, chairman of the East Midlands Railway Trust, told Railfuture East Midlands' April meeting about the trust's bid to the government's *Restoring Your Railway* fund. The trust owns the northern section of the heritage Great Central Railway from Loughborough to Ruddington, and its vision is to combine commuting, heritage and freight functions. For commuting, the railway would connect the rapidly expanding settlements of Ruddington and East Leake southwards to Leicester, while options to connect northwards to the Nottingham tram system are also being explored. As a heritage railway, the aim is to reconnect to the Great Central Railway south of Loughborough. Freight use would be mainly from the British Gypsum works near East Leake, although the southward connection may also attract traffic from Mountsorrel granite quarry. A major expense will be the replacement of the bridge over the A60 Nottingham Road at Loughborough, which has deteriorated to the point of being unsafe. The bid is sponsored by Rushcliffe MP Ruth Edwards.

■ ■ Rail projects for Midlands Connect strategy refresh

The two Midlands Railfuture branches teamed up with Railfuture Lincolnshire to respond to transport researchers at Midlands Connect who were updating its transport strategy. Midlands Connect asked four questions concerning east-west connectivity, levelling up, environmental sustainability and new technologies. Our response included a comprehensive list of rail infrastructure improvements needed in the region, as well as measures such as smart ticketing and better integration with other sustainable modes.

■ ■ Electrification continues its progress north

With electrification from Bedford to Corby now complete and the fourth track restored between Bedford and Kettering, half-hourly electric services between Corby and London St Pancras began in May. Meanwhile, work has started on the new electrical substation at Braybrooke near Market Harborough, and on clearing lineside vegetation in preparation for electrification from Kettering to Market Harborough.

■ ■ Trent Junction cannot cope with train service boom

A report prepared by Railfuture's Graham Nalty indicates that if current proposals and aspirations for new services and increased frequencies at Trent Junction are fulfilled, the eight passenger services per hour would increase to 22. As the current layout is inadequate, Graham's report suggests possible mitigations and layout changes, but there is a need for more detailed modelling work to develop solutions.

■ ■ Loughborough's Brush Traction train factory to close

The Loughborough Falcon works of Brush Traction – which was established 156 years ago – is to be closed down by its American parent company Wabtec, putting 300 jobs at risk.

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

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

All change with Amtrak Joe

Letter from New Orleans

From John Sita Jr of Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

The Covid Relief bill was passed in early March and Amtrak received \$1.7 billion (£1.2bn), and within a couple of days of passage Amtrak announced the recall of furloughed employees and the reinstatement of daily services.

The City of New Orleans resumed daily operation on 31 May and the Crescent on 7 June. Amtrak bookings for the summer are looking better than expected with many trains doing well with advanced bookings, and Amtrak planned to sell 100% of the seats by the end of May.

The Biden administration has proposed a massive \$2.3 trillion (£1.6 tn) infrastructure plan that would spend \$80 billion (£58bn) on passenger rail improvements over 10 years.

The new spending would build out 30 corridors, including New Orleans to Baton Rouge.

The Obama administration had \$10 billion (£7.2bn) for passenger rail with the 2009 recovery stimulus, but many states refused to accept the funds.

What Biden proposes is much larger and would be direct federal expenditure via Amtrak or other parties, bypassing states that would refuse the money for political reasons.

The entire plan is supposed to be budget neutral, so it's not supposed to increase the deficit. It's possible that this infrastructure plan could be passed with budget reconciliation and 50 votes like the Covid Relief bill, but President Biden is attempting to negotiate with Republican Senators to get bipartisan buy-in.

It's unclear at this point whether there would be 10 Republican votes to overcome a certain filibuster, but Biden wants to try this approach first. The initial Republican counter-offer was under \$600 billion (£432bn) so it remains to be seen if a compromise can be reached.

Amtrak is asking for nearly \$5.5 billion (£4bn) for Federal Year 22 starting in October of this year, a pretty big increase over the \$2 billion (£1.4bn) that Amtrak has received in the past few years. Amtrak actually received about \$5 billion (£3.6bn) with its regular appropriation and two rounds of stimulus, so \$5.5 billion (£4bn) is not really out of the realm of possibility. With an appropriation of \$5.5 billion (£4bn) Amtrak could start building new cars for the national system, or put money into track work to decrease choke points.

See also Ian Brown's report: **Pages 6-7**

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



CELEBRATION: President Biden, pictured at Amtrak's birthday celebration in Philadelphia on 30 April, announcing the largest rail investment programme in Amtrak's history. It is not clear why Amtrak used a departmental locomotive built in 2004 as backdrop



NEW LOOK: Amtrak's high speed electric train set to be delivered this year to the north east corridor

Progress around the world

■ ■ Turkey has electrified 2,000 miles of railway lines, more than half its network (compared to 42% in Britain), while also building 550 miles of high speed lines (70 miles in Britain).

■ ■ The European Union has agreed to fund provision of new rail connections to factories and logistics centres. It has earmarked £35 million for the first four-year period to 2024.

■ ■ Belgian Railways is considering introducing an hourly inter-city Ostend-Koln service using dual voltage electric trains, once the line is fully upgraded with the European train control system.

■ ■ China is investing in improving Argentinian freight lines, with £3.3 billion on the 1,000-mile San Martín line from Buenos Aires to San Juan and Mendoza in the Andes, £1.8 billion to reconstruct 550 miles of Belgrano Cargas lines, and £550 million to rebuild 400 miles of the Norpatagonica line from Bahía Blanca on the Atlantic coast and extend it 50 miles to Añelo in the foothills of the Andes, with the aim of exploiting the Vaca Muerta shale oil and gas fields.

■ ■ An entrepreneur has proposed a 63 mile undersea rail link between Finland and Estonia, which would be the longest in the world.

Open access bid in Portugal

The Portuguese transport operator Barraqueiro, which runs buses and coaches, has established an open-access rail subsidiary called B-Rail to provide north-south passenger train services from Braga to Faro. It will need an operating licence for the scheme, which will serve Porto and Lisbon if B-Rail can show it will not undermine the state operator.

B-Rail wants to operate 12 daily non-stop services using spare slots on the busiest section between Lisbon and Porto.

It also aims to offer a multi-modal service with integrated ticketing and timetables.

Some rail campaigners would like to see it or some other operator run services to the Spanish capital of Madrid.

■ ■ The southern German Land of Baden Wurttemberg has drawn up a list of 42 rail lines that could be reopened. Top of the list is the 12-mile Reutlingen to Engstingen route, followed by the 50-mile Marbach to Heilbronn line. It has also approved a tram train project for the 10-mile Tubingen to Reutlingen section and 40 miles of electrification from Ulm to Aalen.

Can we at last begin to believe that this is a worldwide age of the train?

By Ian Brown

British Rail launched its Age of the Train television campaign in the late 1970s, featuring its new InterCity 125 train.

The then chairman, Sir Peter Parker, had misgivings, but the campaign continued until 1984.

The aim to promote an image of rail as a modern, relevant form of transport succeeded but the decline in rail ridership continued, year on year.

It was not until privatisation in 1995 that rail ridership started growing, and UK rail ridership has grown consistently since. It has doubled in the past 20 years.

The jury is out on the forces behind the growth of rail. Congestion on the roads and economic growth are probably major factors, and it is certainly more complex than being dependent on privatisation as alleged by some industry players.

In fact, BR was privatised on the basis of a little or no growth scenario and privatisation actually led to an infamous 1,000 day investment famine. The privatisation focus was on stemming losses by cost cutting and focusing on products seen as for the future, particularly InterCity. There was also an acceptance that railways must be efficient. There are three reasons why railways continue to attract public and private investment and operational subsidy:

- 1 Contribution to national, regional and local economies
- 2 Contribution to alleviating social inclusion issues by improving mobility
- 3 Contribution to environmental objectives

This is an altogether different scenario from 1970s BR and offers the hope of a much more resilient recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is the difference between a pessimistic and an

optimistic future for rail in the UK and worldwide, even in the United States.

European Union

2021 was designated the European Year of Rail by the European Commission to highlight rail as a sustainable, smart and safe means of transport and looks happily consistent with Railfuture's position in Britain.

A variety of activities will put rail in the spotlight. Throughout the year, people and businesses will be encouraged to use rail as a way of contributing to the European Union Green Deal goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050.

"Our future mobility needs to be sustainable, safe, comfortable and affordable," said Adina Valean, European Commissioner for Transport. The European Year of Rail gives us the opportunity to re-discover this mode of transport.

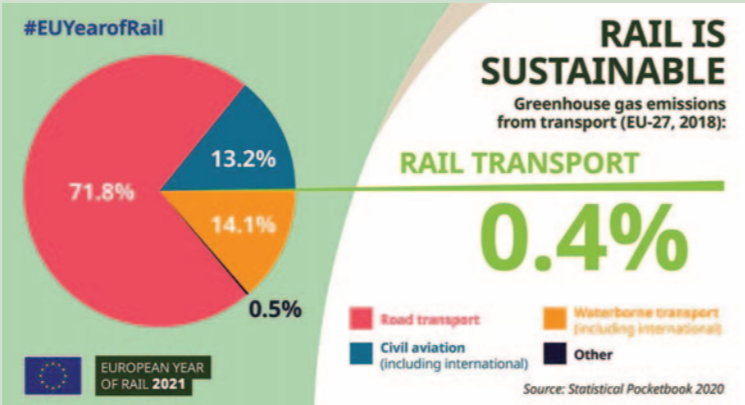
Through a variety of actions, we will use this occasion to help rail realise its full potential. I invite all of you to be part of the European Year of Rail." The key facts quoted for the EU are that, despite rail being responsible for 0.4-0.5% of transport-related greenhouse gas emissions, only a derisory 7% of passengers and 11% of freight travel by rail.

The aim is, rightly, to create momentum to increase rail's market share of passenger and freight transport. The height of the Covid-19 pandemic may not have seemed the best time to launch such an ambitious initiative, but interestingly it may well be the right time to think seriously about the ongoing future of railways. The EU has since redefined the year to include 2022. Britain actually does reasonably well on freight with a market share of around 9%. For passengers, rail

The aim is, rightly, to create momentum to increase rail's market share of passenger and freight transport. The height of the Covid-19 pandemic may not have seemed the best time to launch such an ambitious initiative, but interestingly it may well be the right time to think seriously about the ongoing future of railways. The EU has since redefined the year to include 2022. Britain actually does reasonably well on freight with a market share of around 9%. For passengers, rail

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Graphic: EUROPEAN UNION

represents 2% of trips, but 10% of passenger miles, slightly higher than the European average.

Railfuture has advocated – and will continue to advocate – the need for modal shift to rail in Britain in the context of climate change.

Rail can certainly achieve the target of being carbon neutral by 2035, and should not wait for 2050.

Other modes will struggle to do so, while rail can be a cost-effective way of achieving the overall objective if more journeys can be transferred from car and air to rail.

Railfuture's policy is to aim to double passenger numbers and freight on the UK network.

This can be accommodated sustainably with a significant and rolling programme of electrification and dealing with capacity pinchpoints on the network. Taken together, this would make rail's contribution even more effective in combating climate change.

Railfuture has made a point of stressing, with some success, the potential of HS2 to contribute to this if fully integrated into the existing rail network. The target must be to do this by 2035.

All change in USA

A look at what is happening on rail in the United States is worthy of mention. Attention is centred on three elements: main line passenger, commuter rail and light rail. Branded as Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger

Corporation was set up in May 1971.

Surprisingly Amtrak has lasted longer as a public sector corporation than British Rail. It celebrated its 50th birthday on 30 April 2021 but its history has been characterised by a lack of capital investment, service cutbacks and political interference, much like what happened here with British Rail. By contrast, BR was sharper when it came to management and cost control.

The combination of Donald Trump and Covid-19 seemed to herald Doomsday for America's national rail system.

There were 10 long distance sleeper services which ran daily up until October 2020, plus two which ran three days a week, plus a daily Auto Train.

Amtrak's Auto Train

The Auto Train carries passengers who want to travel with their cars, vans, motorcycles, small boats or jet-skis from Washington DC to Orlando, Florida. It is the only train of its kind in the US and runs daily over the 855-mile long route with the option of travelling in a sleeper carriage.

All 10 were cut back to three days per week, seemingly never to return on a viable countrywide network.

But all that changed on 20 January when President Joe Biden replaced the incumbent Donald Trump. Trump had denied climate change, deliberately pulled out of the Paris

Railfuture's international links

Railfuture has a small European Passenger Group, chaired by Ian Brown, whose aim is to promote better links to the Continent and Ireland from Britain, and importantly to keep abreast of developments overseas in order to strengthen our arguments to develop railways here.

Our EPG reports to Railfuture's Passenger Group, chaired by Railfuture's vice-chair Allison Cosgrove. Post-Brexit, Railfuture is maintaining its active involvement in the European Passenger Federation through our representative Dennis Fancett from Railfuture North East. We would welcome applications to join our discussions, particularly from younger members who have an interest in transport developments abroad and can be objective about rail's place in the transport mix.



Picture: AECOM

San Diego was the first US city to implement a second generation light rail system. Now there are 43 such systems. This is one of the original trains that started the light rail revolution in the US. The light rail revolution in the UK started in Manchester. Now there are nine systems in Britain. France has 29 second generation systems, all new. Germany has 53, many of which are modernised legacy systems

climate agreement and vigorously set about dismantling just about every protection that existed in the US to protect its people and the environment. He even removed competent scientists from government organisations.

Amtrak, a national rail network used by many people from an ethnic minority background, looked as if it had no future.

But now the US recognises the UK's three potential contributions rail can make, particularly on climate change.

It is rejoining the Paris talks and rail is seen as a key component in achieving climate objectives.

All ten of Amtrak's long distance routes are being reinstated, restoring a national network.

More significantly, Joe Biden attended Amtrak's 50th anniversary event in person and launched an investment programme far larger than at any time in Amtrak's history.

The plan includes the wholesale application of bimode trains designed to maximise the use of the limited electrified network in the US (Boston-New York-

Graphic: EUROPEAN UNION



Graphic: RAIL DELIVERY GROUP

are 43 second generation light rail systems in the US, with a further five routes under construction. Britain has nine second generation light rail systems, including the revamped and to be extended Blackpool system (plus the DLR, Newcastle Metro and Glasgow subway).

DART in Dallas has developed into a citywide transport network. In Britain, only Manchester can claim to be achieving this though Birmingham is catching up.

Covid-19 pandemic

Across the globe the pandemic has decimated rail travel, with journeys in Britain going down to 5% of pre-pandemic levels at the height of the first wave when most travel was banned or actively discouraged.

Sticking to the old remit of containing losses, no rail operation could survive, and the rail system would have had to close in Britain.

Governments throughout the world are rethinking the role of railways and increasingly recognising them as essential in delivering economic, social and environmental objectives.

The future in Britain

In Britain franchises were replaced by interim management agreements to keep the network in place and keep its people skilled.

The long-awaited Williams Report, was published in May by the Department for Transport as the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, clearing the way for the launch next year of Great British Railways. Its main recommendation is to replace franchises with contracts. An analysis of the plan can be found on the Railfuture website.

Railfuture has been active in promoting a more informed examination of what railways are there for, apart from the initial agonising about tweaking the franchise structure. It is clear that

the importance of a national network is recognised here and in the US. To be responsive to individual country, regional and local needs, franchises will have to give way to a concession model. This allows the country to specify clearly what it wants from its railways, and how the use of costly infrastructure and operational resources can be coordinated.

One area that has emerged in better shape from the pandemic in Britain from where it went in is rail freight. Rail freight, free from the effects of an overcrowded passenger network, has shown its worth as flexible and competitive to attract increased market share.

Rail freight must not be seen as a marginal rail activity. Infrastructure capacity is a valuable commodity and its use must be properly planned and investment directed at ensuring rail freight, including innovation with new freight products, is properly targeted. This includes providing more electrification on key freight routes.

The modern freight train is electric, but needs diesel capability for last mile into terminals, and also for diversions which require full power.

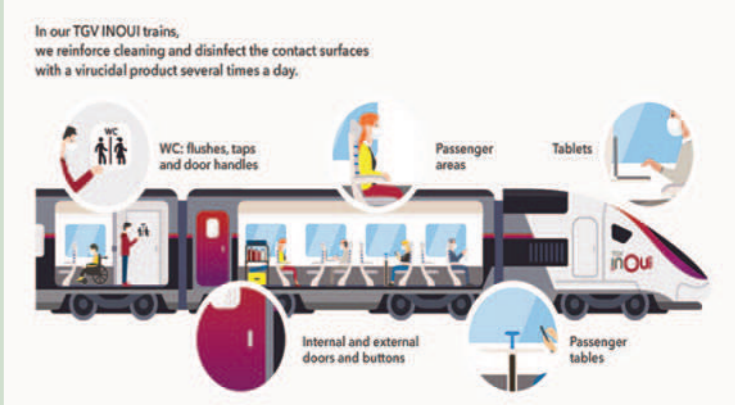
We may be in crocodile-infested waters currently, but there is a promised land beyond the pandemic and international experience suggests there are good grounds for optimism.

Railfuture is far from declaring "job done", but there are clear signs that our constructive approach of campaigning with local and national stakeholders and industry players is paying off and that it is a good basis for continued dialogue.

In future, we can exploit the genuine team effort of Railfuture's branches, an asset few other organisations have.

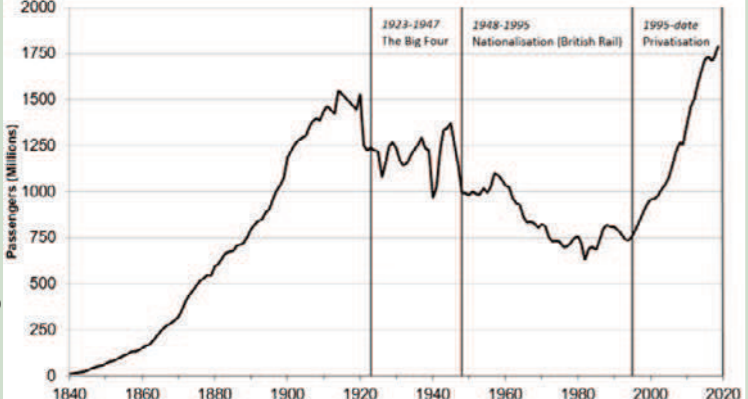
We can make a difference and there has never been a better time for effective campaigning for our railways.

■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture policy director



Graphic: SNGF

The rail industry worldwide has done a good job in restoring passenger confidence in using trains safely. Here is a French Railways example, very similar to the British approach



Year of Rail

I have been working with members of Back on Track across Europe to support their campaign for the revival of night trains, improved cross-border day services and simpler through-ticketing arrangements.

We want the UK government, which is chairing the COP 26 climate conference in Glasgow in November, to take a proactive approach in the coming months.

The UK is no longer a member of the European Union, but there is no good reason why Britain should not support the 2021 European Year of Rail.

Like the Rail to the COP campaign, we believe it is essential that the Glasgow conference organisers encourage, support and facilitate the rail option for travel to and from the conference by delegates, journalists and lobbyists from Europe.

This could be done by chartering special trains or block-booking carriages with Eurostar and Avanti West Coast. Avanti is 30% owned by the Italian state railway Trenitalia and Italy is joint host of the Glasgow conference.

Organisers of the conference should also invite specialist travel agents to offer tailor-made packages for those wishing to combine their trip to Glasgow with other activities.

It is absolutely essential that the UK government secures the survival of Eurostar with similar or better financial support than that provided to the airlines.

In view of the climate emergency, the UK government must also take action to develop better rail services between the UK and the European continent.

Rail needs to offer an attractive alternative – in terms of cost and speed – to short-haul air travel to destinations with a flight time of less than two hours.

Nigel Perkins, chair, European Rail Campaign (UK)

Editor's comment: Decades of generous government subsidies to airlines, airports and airframe builders, along with the failure to tax aviation fuel, have created a bloated industry that is a major contributor to global heating. "Building back better" should include the removal of public subsidies from the air industry, and making it pay taxes to offset the enormous environmental damage caused by air travel.

Midland blues

There were articles in *Railwatch* 167 about the Bletchley to Bedford service and future East West

services. But what about the services on the Midland main line? I live near Luton and pre-Covid frequently travelled to London, with many easy transfers.

Travelling north is different. I have travelled in the past to Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham, Derby, Chesterfield and Sheffield with very few changes and in many cases none.

Not any more. I think the only service that stops at Luton is to Corby. Anything else requires at least one change. The last time I travelled to Derby I needed to change at Luton Airport and Leicester. The Trainline website even advised going via St Pancras!

All stations south of Leicester now get a raw deal. From the local press I see that Wellingborough residents are unhappy at their future service, which will make commuting very inconvenient.

This inferior service is in spite of the fact that the third and fourth tracks have been restored between Bedford and Kettering Junction and a fourth platform restored at Wellingborough. Why spend money on these improvements and then not use them?

It is somewhat ironic that back in the 1970s or 1980s British Rail had a proposal to divert St Pancras expresses from Market Harborough to Northampton and thence to Euston, leaving the Midland main line with local services only. Now many passengers have lost their express services.

Peter Fleming, Lovers Walk, Dunstable LU5 4BG

Bedford let down

I was interested in the article in *Railwatch* 167 on the poor public transport links for my home town of Bedford. The rail situation worsened considerably from the May timetable change when Bedford lost direct inter-city links for the first time since 1857.

Much heralding of the "improvements to the Midland main line" have resulted in anything but improvements for Bedford, Luton and Wellingborough. Any daytime journey north of Bedford will require a change of train at Kettering.

Kettering is wholly unsuitable because of the high step up to trains resulting from the camber of the tracks through the station, and the tiresome hike over the footbridge from the Corby line platforms.

Having made one change of train to go north of Kettering, passengers for Derby and Sheffield have to make another change of train at Leicester. Some



Picture: RICHARD CRANE

improvement! East West Rail will, as Naomi Green suggests, improve rail connections with the town of Bedford, but beware, there is gathering momentum against EWR actually serving the town at all.

Protesters are wildly claiming lives will be blighted by heavy freight trains thundering through residential areas day and night. Considering one of the main worries for rail campaigners is the lack of provision for ANY freight services, this protest beggars belief.

The picture (above) is outside a home in Kimbolton Road, Bedford – probably over a mile from the Midland main line along which EWR trains to Cambridge are expected to pass.

Bedford suffers horrendous traffic congestion but we clearly have a battle on our hands to improve and expand rail connectivity.

*Richard Crane, Hatfield Crescent, Bedford MK41 9RA
DicklCrane@aol.com*

Rail revival test

I tested the market for the revival of railways by writing to my local newspaper to propose the

reopening of Alton-Winchester, which is now operated by the heritage Watercress Line, although without the Alesford-Winchester section which was severed by the construction of the M3 motorway.

I envisaged trains to Alton could run from London Waterloo via Southampton and Winchester.

It would also allow the recently reintroduced train service from Guildford to Farnham to be extended to Winchester and Southampton or even over a reopened branch line to Bordon.

Only one letter was published in response which stressed how difficult reopening would be.

Cyril Cowland, Lapwing Way, Four Marks, Alton, Hampshire GU34 5FD

Rail's added value

Ian Brown's interesting article, "What are railways for?" in *Railwatch* 167 stressed the benefits of railways beyond the profit-led approach. They add to the country's wider economic, social and environmental benefits.

It reminded me of an experience I had in the 1960s.

I needed to travel from Loughborough to Leek (Staffs) for a

day but was told that the Uttoxeter-Leek line had recently closed.

What to do? I was told to take the train to Stoke-on-Trent, bus 11 miles back to Leek and return by the same means. This would have meant paying for 22 miles of unwanted journey in addition to the extra train miles to and from Stoke.

I went by car which meant that the Loughborough-Uttoxeter line lost revenue, thereby reducing the ability of a profitable route to subsidise a less profitable one.

This scenario must have been repeated ad nauseam throughout the United Kingdom at that time, especially in areas of high seasonal tourism.

Some pruning to the network was inevitable but when Ernest Marples brought in Dr Beeching, the rate of closures resembled a snowball rolling down a hill getting bigger and affecting more and more ground in a short period of time. If only reopenings could be achieved as quickly.

Ted Bottle, Coalville Leicestershire LE67 4DP

Sad losses

I was saddened to learn of Alan Bevan's passing. I met Alan at the Banbury meetings in the 1950s. Making use of convenient cross-country connections, I travelled by various routes, which included a brisk walk between the two stations at Brackley, which now has none. I remember an experimental railcar service between Banbury and Buckingham. Despite its popularity, with a 450% increase in passengers, the railcar was withdrawn and diverted to the Buckingham-Bletchley service, now also without a rail service.

Martin Smith, Bath Street Abingdon OX14 1EA

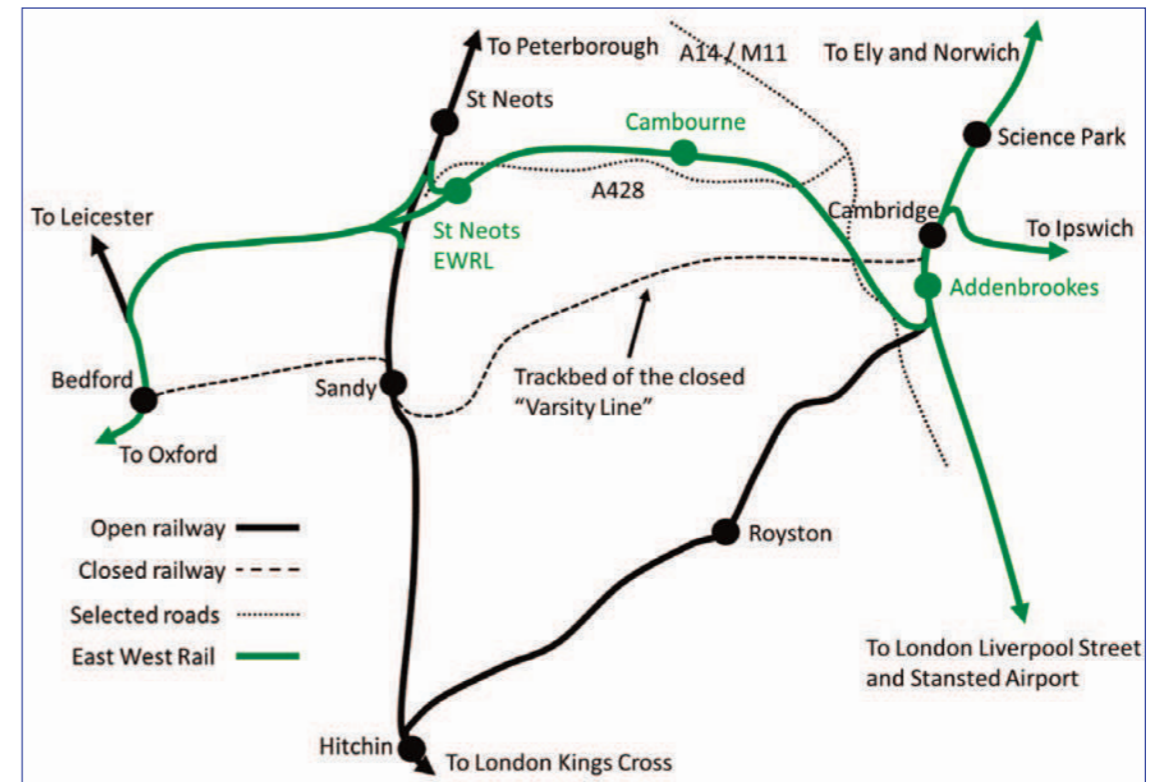
Local trains first

HS2 is badly thought out. It does not start at the HS1 terminal at St Pancras so travellers from the continent may have to use taxis to get to Euston.

At Birmingham Curzon Street, a tidal surge of road traffic will be caused by train arrivals and departures on a road system which is already overcrowded.

The Curzon Street site could be used for a new railway terminal but it needs to be fed by trains from Lichfield, Stafford, Tamworth and Wolverhampton. It is true that the 1960s/1970s one-person-one-car

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



GOOD CONNECTIONS: Railfuture's map of the proposed Bedford-Cambridge route for East West Rail. From Oxford to Bedford the route is on a former railway, but EWR planners have decided on an ambitious plan to build a new railway on a new alignment from Bedford to Cambridge. The official East West Rail consultation began in March and ended in June. Railfuture board member Roger Blake coordinated the responses on behalf of Railfuture branches. You can read Railfuture's response to the consultation on the Railfuture website.

strategy created a cocktail of problems, but HS2 is not the answer and surely 125mph is enough for a country the size of the UK. The North of England needs links to London but the slow provincial services on the Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds corridor should be upgraded.

David Peters, Sussex Drive, Shrewsbury SY3 7NG

Fast forward

After many years of championing railways for their relatively small land-take, environmental and climate advantages, it was pleasing to see the more upbeat comments on HS2 in April's *Railwatch* compared with those in December. After all, we are Railfuture.

Meanwhile, it seems a relief and a treat to look forward to a break from the mainly road-oriented governments of the past 70 years. People in this crowded country will always want to travel, and if there is no HS2 to relieve the West Coast main line and serve major new housing developments near the M40 just to the North, pressure for a duplicate M40 is likely to grow.

That would cut an intrusive wide swathe through the Chilterns greenery, with additional pollution, compared to HS2, a twin-track electric railway underneath. My only slight criticism of HS2 is the decision to build for over the "traditional" 300 kph (186 mph) speed limit, with disproportionately more energy use and greater difficulty plotting its curving way round congested areas.

John Davis, Fairmead Avenue, Harpenden AL5 5UD

Deprived England

Each edition of *Railwatch* appears to give details of developments taking place in both Scotland and Wales. Issue 167 is no exception, where we were able to read about plans for new stations in both countries.

Now it is good that the devolved nations are taking rail seriously. For once Covid has retreated into the background, climate change will once again move to the fore. And we all know that encouraging more people to travel by train instead of in their cars is vital in order to avoid future catastrophes.

Yet as a local councillor representing a deprived northern town in northern England, I know that Wales and Scotland are able to invest more in their railway

networks with extra cash they get from the Treasury. Official figures for 2019/20 show public spending per head was £9,604 in England, £10,929 in Wales and £11,566 in Scotland.

Perhaps if this spending was equalised then more schemes would get the go ahead in the parts of England that are poorly served by rail.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Beyond Okehampton

I watched TV coverage of the decision to start a regular daily train service from Exeter to Okehampton with great interest. To make the service more useful, it needs to be extended to Tavistock, although I am not sure how many practical problems there are.

To make the Exeter-Okehampton service more financially and socially useful in this area of rural Devon, stations at Bow, Sampford Courtenay and North Tawton could be reopened.

The stretch between Okehampton and Tavistock could also benefit from some stations being reopened. How many of these former stations are in private hands is a moot point.

J Everard, Goylands Close, Howey, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5RB



nigel.bray2@railfuture.org.uk

Hub cafe at Melksham

The Melksham Masterplan, developed by Great Western Railway, Knorr-Bremse, TransWilts Community Rail Partnership and Wiltshire Council, has produced improvements at Melksham station, including the Hub cafe which opened on 29 March. It will have seating by the time *Railwatch* appears and will also offer cycle hire. TransWilts CRP will be monitoring customer numbers and the level of rail passengers in order to review opening hours.

Station cafes at risk

Station catering on the GWR network has been hit by the government's refusal to underwrite it as part of the emergency measures agreement to maintain train services. On 28 April, the Upper Crust outlets at Swindon and Bristol Temple Meads remained closed, as were both buffets at the latter. The Pumpkin cafes at both Cheltenham station in Queen's Road. A Costa cafe has recently opened at the front of Gloucester station and the nearby Station Hotel was expected to reopen on 17 May.

Bus-rail interchange

A longstanding Railfuture campaign for proper bus-rail interchange at Gloucester appears to be within an ace of delivery. Stakeholders including GWR, Gloucester City Council and G-First (the Gloucestershire local enterprise partnership) have agreed to fund bus stops on the station forecourt. The improvement plans also include widening and flattening the subway connecting the forecourt with the hospital.

Restoring Bristol Road

The campaign to reopen Stonehouse Bristol Road station has moved forward with a *Restoring Your Railway* funding bid, sponsored by Stroud District Council and MP Siobhan Baillie, submitted in March. Ms Baillie is also supporting a bid to reopen the freight-only Sharpness branch to passengers.

Go-op initiative

Several years ago the travel co-operative Go-op produced a scheme

for an open access train service between Taunton and Nuneaton which many observers considered to be too ambitious. However, on 23 April, Go-op announced that Network Rail had concluded there would be capacity for a summer service linking Swindon with Bishops Lydeard on the West Somerset Railway.

Go-op's press release said WSR was sympathetic to the proposal but some issues remained to be resolved before the proposed start in 2022. Stations served would include Melksham, Westbury, Frome, Castle Cary and Taunton. Go-op believes its service would create connections for journeys such as Taunton to Yeovil which are difficult to make by rail at present. Railfuture is also hopeful that GWR's Taunton-Bishops Lydeard shuttle, which operated on eight Saturdays in 2019, will resume this summer.



Radio Railfuture

Railfuture's media spokesman Bruce Williamson was interviewed on BBC Radio Bristol in April about the engineering work expected to start in July to upgrade Bristol East Junction. He agreed that Bedminster station was far from ideal as a temporary terminus for trains from the South West during the periods when Temple Meads would be closed but said the work was essential to improve the flexibility of the station layout, reduce delays and accommodate more frequent services to be introduced with MetroWest. He pointed out that platforms at Bedminster were being resurfaced to allow their full length to be used by inter-city trains. The Railfuture response to the Bristol local plan consultation in 2019 called for improvements at Bedminster station to create a virtuous circle of better ambience and higher usage.

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The new normal?

Rail campaigners in the Wessex area have been up in arms about the continued reductions in rail services.

In normal times, CrossCountry would run three trains every two hours from the South Coast to Birmingham and the North. Its proposed timetable showed only one train per two hours which, for reasons hard to fathom, would not be stopping at either Brockenhurst or Winchester. Many trains would be terminating at Reading instead of running through to the South, and we argued that they should at least run as far as Basingstoke for better onward connections.

With the loss of flights from Southampton Airport after the collapse of Flybe, one might expect CrossCountry to corner the market for north-south travel. But it seems the operator's hands are tied and cutbacks are being ordered.

A return to a more normal level of service across the South would encourage people back on to trains and help stimulate the local economy. Instead, not only will there be far fewer trains this summer to places such as Weymouth, journey times will be longer since the remaining services will need to call at all stations. Overcrowded trains are not good for social distancing, and the need to change several times also adds to social interactions. Railfuture certainly does not want to see the current "emergency" timetables, with fewer trains and lack of late evening services, being set in stone.

Step-free future

After years of prevarication, a pedestrian access ramp is finally under construction at Dorchester West station. It will provide a step-free short cut between the northbound

platform and Dorset County Hospital.

Station improvements

The Western Gateway sub-national transport body, covering an area from Gloucestershire down to Dorset, published its first five-year strategy in February. There is little of substance under the heading of Rail, but at least we are promised improvements to stations at Weymouth, Wareham and Poole.

Reopening progress

Hampshire County Council submitted its strategic outline business case for restoring a passenger service on the Waterside line (to Fawley) to the Department for Transport in March. The announcement that Southampton, along with Portsmouth, is to be granted freeport status gave a further boost to the business case for the scheme. The council is now looking at specific issues in detail, such as the impact on local bus services.

A public consultation on the Waterside line proposal is expected soon. Railfuture will also have the chance to comment in detail on Hampshire's draft local transport plan this summer.

A class 159 passenger train was spotted on the line in May and may be an indication that progress is being made.

Restoring Your Railway

An application to reopen Wilton as a £20 million park-and-ride station, supported by Railfuture and MP John Glen, has reached the third round of the *Restoring Your Railway* procedure. Wiltshire councillor Bridget Wayman said the council also wanted to reopen Corsham. She said: "The next step will be preparing strategic outline business cases."

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

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

Rocky start to a tram-train success story

Railfuture vice-president Paul Abell explores the lessons of the tram-train pilot scheme

Spiralling costs almost defeated Britain's pilot tram-train project even before work started on it.

However, the pioneer operation between Sheffield Cathedral and Rotherham Parkgate has now completed its initial two years of operation.

The results of a thorough review are available from the South Yorkshire Tram-Train Pilot Learning Hub, maintained by Network Rail.

The railway industry is now expected to read, learn and inwardly digest the findings.

The tram-train route now combines 4.2 miles of the Stagecoach Supertram route from Sheffield Cathedral to Meadowhall South/Tinsley with 3.3 miles of Network Rail track through Rotherham Central station to Parkgate.

The challenges

Electrification of the Network Rail section extended the 750 Volt DC overhead line used by Supertram. It is a new system for Network Rail and had to be made compatible with NR signalling circuits.

Track circuits along this section were replaced with axle counters.

It was found that installing the DC overhead line did not necessitate the immunisation or replacement of DC track circuits on adjacent non-electrified lines.

However, earthing and bonding requirements had to be examined carefully.

The overhead line equipment used had to be future-proofed against eventual electrification of the route at the standard 25kVolt AC.

That meant insulation requirements for the much higher AC voltage.

An adaptation of the Network Rail series 2 design of overhead line has proved reliable, and proved the compatibility of 25kVolt masts with 750 Volt overhead electrification.

Experience has, however, suggested that it might have been more cost-effective to use a number of single rectifier substations along the length of the route.

Traction power demands for future service patterns need to be taken into account at the design stage.

The wheels of the tram-trains had to be compatible with Network Rail and Supertram's



TRAIN: On Network Rail territory, a tram-train approaches the Rotherham terminus at Parkgate. Note the white, raised check-rails on the crossover

grooved tram track. A compromise wheel profile evolved, with raised check rails used to match the thinner, shallower flanges.

Drivers use main-beam headlights in daytime on the railway, and dipped headlights on the tramway.

At night it is dipped headlights on the railway, and dipped or main beam on the tramway to suit conditions.

The tram-train platform height matches the 390mm of Supertram platforms rather than Network Rail's standard 915mm, so it was necessary to provide low platforms at Rotherham Central (by extending the Sheffield end of the existing platforms) and at Parkgate.

A physical barrier was installed between the two tracks at Rotherham Central to deter

people from crossing between the two low platforms.

The success

The tram-train service carried 1.6 million passengers during the two pilot years, despite losing 500,000 passengers in its second year because of the pandemic and serious flooding around Rotherham Central. Consumer research showed 25% of passengers were driving cars before switching to tram-train, while 14% were new journeys. A much fuller summary of the Learning Hub can be found in the May 2021 issue of *Today's Railways UK*. I am grateful to Simon Coulthard, Network Rail head of light rail knowledge & development, for giving me access to the Tram Train Pilot Learning Hub.

What next?

Despite its higher than anticipated cost, the pilot has



TRAM: The Sheffield terminus of the tram-train service at Sheffield Cathedral, which is much more convenient for the city centre than Sheffield station

proved to be a very useful exercise, according to the two-year review.

It "has avoided the reduction in system capability and capacity that exists on the Tyne & Wear Metro extension to Sunderland." There are hopes of extending the Parkgate tram-train service to Kilnhurst and Swinton, and perhaps Mexborough or Doncaster, but the next new tram-train services are planned to be the Cardiff Bay operations, connecting with the Valley Lines, and expected to start in 2022.

Cardiff will use street running off the end of Network Rail tracks.

Applications for access to the hub can be made by emailing tramtrainlearning@networkrail.co.uk. Applicants should provide their name, job title, organisation and email address.

Restoring Your Railway initiative inspires another 89 bids

By Roger Blake

Railfuture's Infrastructure & Networks group

Panel judges Restoring Your Railway bids

A total of 89 Restoring Your Railway bids were confirmed by the March closing date for the third and final round of the government's ideas fund. A Department for Transport panel, including Network Rail chairman Sir Peter Hendy, was expected to consider the bids during June. Successful bids are expected to be chosen "this summer".

Electrify now for rail decarbonisation

The government has set out a new approach to making improvements to railway infrastructure in 2019 by introducing the rail network enhancements pipeline to replace the earlier five-year funding process. Now Railfuture and 15 other rail industry organisations are urging the government to launch a rolling network electrification programme. Together, we sent an open letter "Why rail electrification?" to the transport secretary Grant Shapps in April. The initiative was led by the Railway Industry Association, which is running a RailDecarb 21 campaign. Network Rail published its interim

business case in July for a traction decarbonisation network strategy. It is hoped the government's long-promised transport decarbonisation plan will emerge before the COP26 climate emergency conference in Glasgow in November.

Railfuture pushes its campaigns forward

Railfuture has responded to 20 official transport-related consultations, thanks to a voluntary effort by Railfuture members. The consultations included creating single-tier local authorities in Cumbria and North Yorkshire, transport and local plans in Somerset, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, South Gloucestershire, Hampshire, the Midlands, Manchester, Trafford and the Isle of Wight. Full details of the Railfuture submissions can be found on the Railfuture website.

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

◆◆◆◆ Please remember Railfuture in your will: www.railfuture.org.uk/legacies

Are you sitting comfortably?

By Thomas J Wheeler
It takes three hours to travel by train from Birmingham to Aberystwyth and five hours for Birmingham-Pwllheli.

It is a wonderfully scenic journey, but questions are being asked about whether the new trains bought by Transport for Wales and expected to enter service next year are fit for purpose.

TfW claims to "have carefully chosen a layout to ensure that customers have a comfortable journey, and, where possible, this includes aligning seats with windows so that customers can enjoy a scenic journey while travelling with us."

The reality appears to be rather different. There is little correlation between windows and seats on the new class 197 trains.

The class 197s were chosen by KeolisAmey, which operated the railway in Wales until "nationalisation" by the Welsh government was completed in February.

This new fleet appears to be ideal for busy, short-distance stopping services. Unfortunately they are unsuitable for much of the Wales & Borders rail network.

Despite minor tweaks to an initial design described as "Spartan", the final train design is not one that long-distance passengers will want to use.

Toilet provision is inadequate for long journeys. Only one toilet will be available in each two-car train, compared to one in each carriage currently.

room" should not be necessary on a long-distance service and compromises the planned seating layout.

Under current plans, it is not only the Cambrian lines that would be served by unsuitable trains for many years. The only long-distance trains in KeolisAmey's fleet strategy are three sets of loco-hauled coaches, for Holyhead-Cardiff services.

One positive aspect is that the new trains will have dedicated areas for passengers with disabilities, separate from the bicycle storage facilities.

The new trains are however unlikely to attract motorists out of their cars, as the class 158s did when they were introduced in the 1990s.

The 158s had a "wow" factor which persuaded one car driver who took a round trip from Harlech to Machynlleth to say: "I like these trains. I did not realise trains were so comfortable these days. It's better than my car." The new Civity trains on the other hand are unlikely to be compared favourably with any modern car.

The new trains signal a missed opportunity to promote rail decarbonisation. Network Rail's traction decarbonisation network strategy (published last year) recommends widespread electrification and warns against buying diesel-only trains.

The Welsh government's new draft transport strategy promises public transport that "everyone can use, wants to use and does

Train Class	Operator	Number Ordered	Year Built	End-Of-Life
Class 195 'Civity'	Northern	58	2017-2020	2047-2055
Class 196 'Civity'	West Midlands Trains	26	2019-2021/22	2050-2057
Class 197 'Civity'	Transport for Wales	77	2020-2024	2050-2059
Total	United Kingdom	161	2017-2024	2059

use". It cannot deliver this if TfW retains KeolisAmey's plans for new trains.

KeolisAmey chose pure-diesel power for its class 197 Civity trains. How is this compatible with the UK government's target to remove diesel-only trains by 2040?

The new fleet - being assembled in a £22 million factory opened in 2018 by Prince Charles in Llanwern, South Wales - is likely to have a life span stretching well beyond that date.

If we are to realise the ideal of a zero-carbon railway, these trains will require complicated and expensive modifications. Why were they not designed with passive provision for electrification?

Railfuture, SARPA and Pembrokehire Friends of the Earth have repeatedly asked TfW to make modifications to the design, so far without success. Hopes that changes could be achieved without a large variation fee as part of the nationalisation process have now been dashed.

Given how crucial decarbonisation and modal shift are, even an extortionate variation fee might be worth paying. One option could be to reduce the order from 77 new Civity trains to under 30, with

the existing class 158s and 175s retained until they can be replaced by electric or bi-mode trains.

An alternative variation could be for Civity units later in the programme to be delivered as bi-modes. These could then be converted to electric operation, making them suitable for metro services.

If new metro routes can be opened in time for the older units to be retained, both options would allow these new Civity trains to be kept to shorter routes.

As shown in the table above, other UK operators have also ordered Civity diesel multiple units. None of these appear to have been designed to make the addition of a pantograph for electric operation easy.

Even if these diesel-only units are converted to hydrogen, as some suggest, they would therefore "burn" hydrogen unnecessarily while operating in electrified areas.

That undermines Network Rail's traction decarbonisation strategy which should lead to widespread electrification. To achieve full decarbonisation by 2050, this electrification programme will need to be nearing completion by then.

If trains are not equipped with pantographs (or 3rd rail shoes), that electrification is useless. Most rolling stock will therefore need to be either electric or bi-mode.

A fleet of 161 diesel trains, which will still be running in 2050, and cannot make use of electrification, is not compatible with the necessary progression of electrification.

As the proposed decarbonisation programme proceeds, there will be an increasing need for trains capable of electric operation. By the end, units without a pantograph would be acceptable only on a handful of routes. These routes would require a total of less than 30 units.

All other trains in the UK must be capable of electric operation. Otherwise the decarbonisation programme stands no chance of implementation.

Would it not, therefore, be sensible to reconsider, urgently, the 77 class 197 diesel-only trains ordered for Transport for Wales?

Western link line for Wales

Julian Langston
julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

A continuous rail route linking north and south Wales, and wholly in Wales, could be a step closer following the Senedd elections on 6 May.

Two disused lines would need to be reopened for the link to become a reality: from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth in the south and from Bangor to Afon Wen via Caernarfon in the north.

Labour, which has previously shown an interest in the scheme, remains the largest party in the Senedd with 30 of the 60 seats and has formed a minority government.

Plaid Cymru (with 13 seats) had reaffirmed its commitment to the line by including it in its election manifesto, and Railfuture hopes the party will put pressure on the new government to restore the lines.

The other major parties did not mention either reopenings, although the previous Labour / Liberal Democrat minority government carried out some work on them.

In 2018 it commissioned a feasibility study from Mott MacDonald into reopening the 90 kilometre Carmarthen-Aberystwyth line.

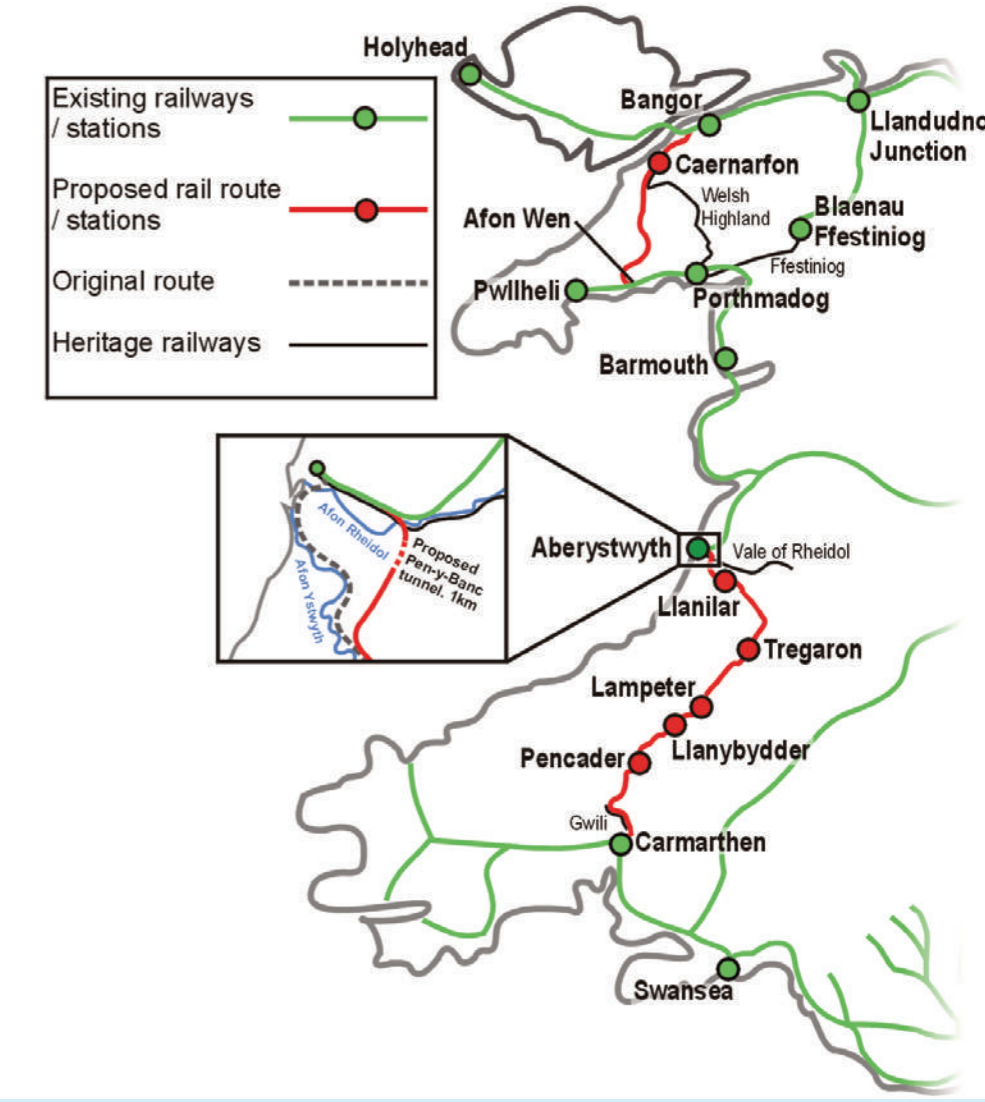
The report * concluded that rebuilding the line would be feasible, pending further studies. Five intermediate stations are suggested: Pencader, Llanybydder, Lampeter, Tregaron and Llanilar.

An hourly service is possible if passing loops at or near Pencader and Tregaron stations are provided. End-to-end journey times of about 80 minutes could be achieved with class 185 trains (timings for the class 197 trains currently being built by CAF, which would probably operate the route, are unknown).

The original alignment would be followed, except in Aberystwyth, where its use would entail excessive demolition of housing. Here, an alternative route further inland is proposed, which would require construction of a one kilometre tunnel under Pen-y-Banc.

The Welsh government also advocated reopening between Bangor and Afon Wen in September 2020 as part of a proposal to upgrade the railways in north Wales **.

More recently Railfuture member group, Traws Link Cymru, submitted a bid to the



Department for Transport's Restoring Your Railway fund through Liz Saville Roberts, MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, for a scoping study to investigate options for this part of the route.

If reopened in full, a through service from Bangor to Carmarthen and beyond via Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Aberystwyth could be run. While local journeys, such as Aberystwyth-Carmarthen, are likely to dominate, Railfuture believes it is essential to open the whole route to create the connectivity required.

Despite the difficulties that reopening both lines would involve, it is encouraging to see that the Welsh government is interested in a scheme that would help promote modal shift away from the car, bringing about environmental benefits.

Reopening the railway would also improve social mobility in remote parts of Wales that are poorly served by public transport. All these are policies of the Welsh government, and so, with this political support, we are

hopeful that, for the first time in decades, it will once again be possible to travel from north to south Wales without leaving the principality.

*<https://gov.wales/aberystwyth-carmarthen-rail-reinstatement-feasibility-study>
**<https://gov.wales/north-wales-main-line-rail-network-map>

Online campaigning

Railfuture is hosting a virtual meeting focusing on the plans to reopen lines in west Wales to create a through route from north to south. There will also be an opportunity for a wider discussion, depending on what those present want to talk about. Railfuture members and members of the public are welcome.

The meeting, which will be on Zoom, is on 11 September 2021 from 10.00 until 12.00. The meeting ID is 893 8367 4939 and the passcode is wales1109. Keep an eye on railfuturewales.org.uk for further details.

And in Ireland, strategic review examines ways to make rail more effective

Site clearance began in February for a new transport hub in Belfast to cope with the long-term growth of rail use in Northern Ireland and the Irish republic.

NI operator Translink wants to see bus and rail use become more integrated, with eight rail platforms and 26 bus stands in

the hub built on a former railway goods depot site. The hub, to be finished by 2025, will also have a network of feeder cycle routes.

Introducing high speed rail services from the Belfast hub to Dublin and Cork is also gaining support on both sides of the border. This April, an all-Ireland strategic review of inter-city

services was launched by the republic's transport minister Eamon Ryan and NI's infrastructure minister Nichola Mallon. Ms Mallon said rail had untapped potential to provide multiple benefits across Ireland.

Campaigners are also hoping that further improvements can follow on from news that the

Limerick-Galway western rail route is the fastest growing route on the Iamród Éireann network. Extensions north and south should be possible, said the West on Track campaign.

Irish Rail has agreed that 750 of its new carriages will have bike-carrying facilities, plus the option to charge electric bikes.

Train Type	Train Length	Length in Metres	Fixed Seats	Toilets	Table Bays	Seats Per Toilet	Airline Seat Pitch (cm)
Class 158	2-car	45.14	134	2	16	67	80
Class 1750	2-car	47.42	118	2	12	59	84
Class 1751	3-car	70.45	186	3	22	62	84
Class 197	2-car	48.052	116	1	10	116	82
Class 197	3-car	71.402	188	2	16	94	82

That means one toilet per 116 fixed seats. According to the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association (SARPA), this compares to around one per 70 on the existing trains.

The Rail Delivery Group's best practice is a minimum ratio of 85 seats per toilet for inter-city or inter-urban services and 125 seats per toilet for short distance and commuter services.

The wide doors, designed to reduce stopping times in stations, would be important on the Cardiff metro but are of little value in rural Wales. The additional "built-in standing



TESTING: The first of the Civity class 197 diesel trains began test running in May. They are expected to enter service next year. The bodyshells were built at CAF's Beasain plant in Spain with final assembly at the new £30 million Llanwern factory near Newport, south Wales, where 200 people now work.

Picture: TRANSPORT FOR WALES

The start of a revolution

It was 38 years ago when train driver Bill Davies worked the first driver-only passenger service from Bedford to London St Pancras, to be greeted on arrival by British Rail chairman Sir Peter Parker in recognition of what was a truly historic occasion. The agreement on the new electrified "Bed Pan" route led to many other services changing over to DOO. Here Bill Davies, now retired, describes that historic day.

I was the driver on 28 March 1983, hand-picked, set up if you like, as a union representative to show the industry that it could be done and would be done. After three years of hard bargaining, not only with the management, but also with our union Aslef, driver only operation began. It was successful on some lines but not on others where, despite expenditure on equipment, it was regrettably not introduced, thus if you observe long dwell times, chances are it will be two-person operated. Good luck to the guards who retain their position in what must be the most tedious of tasks of opening and shutting doors and giving right away. In my opinion they could have been far more gainfully employed protecting revenue.



BR chairman Sir Peter Parker, left, greets Bill Davies on the first DOO service into St Pancras in 1983

Picture: BR

I booked on at 06.57 for special workings with no idea what was involved until I was joined by loco inspector Don Metcalfe, when I realised something was afoot. Our special service with a new 317 unit left Bedford with pleasantly surprised passengers who had been awaiting the normal diesel service. We stopped only at Luton where a fair contingent joined the train with me opening and closing the doors. As we were beginning to run early, Don told me

to ease up a bit as he obviously knew that we were to be met in St Pancras by senior managers.

The rest is history – to the extent that the occasion is recorded in York at the National Railway Museum.

We had as difficult a time with our union as we did with management. The union wanted whatever monetary advance to be shared between all drivers across the UK.

We told them in no uncertain terms that only drivers performing the task would be paid the allowance. I represented Bedford at a very fractious meeting with a delegation of Aslef's executive. Our managers were

much easier to negotiate with. The NUR was conspicuous by its absence with the guards negotiating their own no redundancy agreement for those who did not want to be trained on revenue protection. Thus ended a protracted situation when new class 317 trains were stored in various sidings including Nottingham, Bedford and Cricklewood. During their long sojourn many got attacked by rodents which did considerable damage to various electrical wiring looms, thus delaying the trains' entry into service once agreement had been reached. I was seconded to create a roster for driver training. To say we were stretched was an understatement. To start with, we could only run between Bedford and Luton as the juice had not been switched on throughout. The DMUs had become so unreliable that we would see large groups of passengers on platforms. We stopped to pick them up, taking them to Luton where alternative services were available.

New rail union chief

A new general secretary of rail union RMT was elected in May. Mick Lynch, 59, replaces Mick Cash who resigned in September. Mr Lynch, who grew up in Paddington, London, won compensation after being blacklisted by building trade employers, before joining the railways in 1993. He predicts serious disputes ahead with Network Rail over already threatened cuts.

Flight shame

Intra-European flights on distances less than 620 miles are estimated to create

News in brief

28 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide every year. The Green party calculates that not having a car saves 2.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, while avoiding one long-distance flight saves 1.6 tonnes.

Grandma and Railfuture

Railfuture has a wealth of members of advanced years but we need more younger members. Many young people are now well aware of the dangers of climate change and that proper

investment in railways can provide a transport system fit for a post-car future. So if you are a grandmother or grandfather, why not talk to younger people and offer to help them, maybe financially, to become supporters and members of Railfuture?

Seat reservations

Railfuture passenger group has been investigating the issue of compulsory seat reservations, which it is feared are going to be standard practice by LNER and maybe others once the current pandemic eases.

Thames Valley

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■ ■ Railfuture proposals for Oxford

In March Railfuture Thames Valley published its proposals for an Oxford Metro, containing elements of heavy rail and light rail, which received sympathetic coverage in the local press. Building on current service requirements, Railfuture proposes a shuttle service between Hanborough and Cowley. We differ from Chiltern Railways' proposal to extend Marylebone to Oxford services through to Cowley. We support the Witney-Oxford Transport Group's campaign to restore rail services to Witney and Carterton. Councillor Yvonne Constance, the county council cabinet member for the environment and transport, has dismissed reopening the Witney branch as "unviable", but she was probably thinking of heavy rail. The Mott MacDonald 2001 report recommended that further study should be undertaken into the viability of light rail. Twenty years on, the council has never acted on that finding, as it wanted a guided busway. Railfuture's proposals include a light rail line or tramway from Oxford to Headington and the John Radcliffe Hospital. This provoked a headline from the *Oxford Mail* leader writer, "Is electric tram barmier than underground bus tunnels?" The leader column of the *Oxford Times* was headed: "Tramway plans are not as far fetched as they may first seem." They should note that the prototype Very Light Rail tramcar for Coventry is ready and its trials should be closely watched in Oxford and elsewhere.

■ ■ Official proposals for Oxford

We are never short of commissions and studies for developments in Oxfordshire. We have the Oxfordshire Growth Board and the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study has morphed into Oxfordshire Connect. The 2017 plan for Oxford station has been replaced by a hotchpotch of possibly conflicting proposals. There is to be an additional through track on the down side, platform 5, and a new western station entrance. Oxfordshire Connect backs a proposal for a new through platform on the London-bound side, replacing one of the bay platforms. South of Oxford station the line is to be four-tracked for 2.5 miles, as far as Kennington Junction (for Cowley). The most difficult section will be that between the station and Hinksey North Junction, because of the need to rebuild Botley Road bridge and widen the bridge over the river Thames at Osney. There are already four tracks for the short stretch from Hinksey North to Kennington, but only two are configured for main line running. This section will need to be remodelled and resignalled before trains can run to Cowley, where the likely opening date of 2028 is suggested. The estimated cost of quadrupling and rebuilding Oxford station itself is given as between £675 million and £900 million, which is an indication of how vague the plans are. Another study covers proposals costing £1.6 to £2.1 billion for the Great Western main line between Didcot and Swindon. This includes a grade-separated junction at Didcot East, four-tracking between Steventon and Wantage Road, and a new station for Wantage. Planning for a new Grove/Wantage station has reverted to the Wantage Road site, as no suitable site west of the A338 could be identified.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames Valley Branch
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Join Railfuture at www.railfuture.org.uk/join

THE CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL FREIGHT

100-mile magic route to switch freight to rail

By Philip Bisatt

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A reopened Woodhead route could provide a major impetus in switching European freight from road to rail. Woodhead could become the core of a 100-mile electrified route from Manchester to Immingham and Killingholme via Sheffield and Retford.

Large containers, lorry trailers and swap bodies could as a result be carried piggyback on trains. The UK route would match the 99-mile Betuweroute freight line, created between Rotterdam and the German border, which opened 14 years ago.

The recommendation comes after a three-year study of how rail can play a more significant role in the transport of freight between north-west England and the Continent.

The Liverpool-Humber optimisation of freight transport study (LHOFT) was carried out by Hull University's logistics institute and their partners.

Most of the traffic consists of unitised loads in containers and road trailers. The report sees potential to shift significant freight from road to rail, if a number of vital steps are taken.

The report identifies that the financial cost of using rail for moving containers in England, including port handling, and a road trip leg is now very close to that of using road haulage throughout.

Moreover, road haulage costs are expected to rise at 1.5-2% per annum, while rail is expected to benefit from reduced costs and the increased efficiency brought by electrification.

At present, there is no easy way to cut HGV carbon dioxide emissions, while electric rail is far superior to journeys with road trailers and ferries.

Railfuture has argued for years that the way forward is an electrified freight railway capable of handling European standard unitised loads. At the moment, this is possible on the British rail network only to a limited extent – on HS1.

Elsewhere, non-standard, low-floor wagons must be used, sometimes even for 2.9 metre shipping containers, which are smaller than European trailers and swapbodies. Such wagons are more expensive to build and operate, and reduce rail's competitiveness.

Most European road trailers are 13.65 metres long, 2.55 metres wide and 4.0 metres high. Of the import market to north-west England only 32% is accounted for by containers. The remaining 68% is in lorry semi-trailers, which cannot go by rail.

A shift from trailers to containers is unlikely because road trailers offer payload and other benefits to users, but they can already be carried on key Continental railway routes.

Indeed, road trailers can now be brought by rail to Calais, from where they are moved by ferry and lorry to destinations within Britain.

The LHOFT report predicts a growth in Humber ports use, at the expense of Dover, following Brexit. Driver shortages may also result in a move away from accompanied

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



SHEFFIELD: A new future is carved out of the former Tinsley marshalling yard

Rail yard reborn for a new era

Work was going on night and day in March to create an intermodal rail terminal out of the former 1960s Tinsley marshalling yard. By May, the first revenue-earning Maersk train from Felixstowe, Suffolk, was welcomed into the terminal.

Part of the yard will be operated by logistics company Newell & Wright, and director Stephen Newell said the aim was to cut his company's carbon footprint and increase its rail freight services.

Company founder Frank Newell said: "This is just the start of a huge investment into rail freight." DB Cargo UK is planning to run 10 trains a day from the terminal, which is well placed to serve the main British ports.

■ ■ Rail freight contributes £2.5 billion to the UK economy annually, according to a

road trailers using short sea crossings, in favour of long sea crossings with short road legs.

In 2019, 40,000 containers were imported into north-west England. The report estimates that the market now includes around 14,000 high cube containers, which cannot be handled on standard rail wagons on any TransPennine route. The report argues that there is an unmet demand for a piggyback capability, primarily from the ports of Immingham and Killingholme to north-west England.

Twelve trains a day would be needed to handle the potential traffic in road trailers and containers. From Hull, the market is based on containers and tanks, for which the report sees a potential demand for two or three trains per day.

It is hoped that the TransPennine route via Huddersfield will be cleared for the passage of high-cube containers on standard wagons, but there is currently no prospect of the route handling European-sized road trailers and swap bodies – the majority of the market.

The report acknowledges the constraints on freight traffic through central Manchester. Back in the 1980s, Railfuture expressed concern over the closure of orbital freight routes south of Manchester, and has recently

Deloitte report for the Rail Delivery Group published in April.

■ ■ Network Rail published its London rail freight strategy in May identifying pinch points which will hold back growth in the future. It has selected areas where more space to store trains for loading and unloading is required, particularly near Acton and Wembley, and has suggested infrastructure projects which could be phased in over the next 30 years.

■ ■ Freightliner carried out a jumbo train trial in March, operating a 3,840 tonne train, the heaviest load to leave Tunstead in the Peak District. It represented the equivalent of 110 lorry journeys.

■ ■ In April, Freightliner ran a 4,000 tonne train for Mendip Rail, a partnership of Hanson and Aggregate Industries.

been working with local government and the rail freight industry to promote their resurrection.

Handling European road trailers and swapbodies will require routes cleared to GB1/P400 gauge.

The LHOFT report sees the cost and disruption of creating a route over existing lines as prohibitive. It therefore favours the creation of a 100-mile route from Manchester (including a city freight bypass) to Immingham and Killingholme, primarily but not exclusively for freight, making use of the abandoned Woodhead route.

The LHOFT preference for a route to South Humber via Retford could also involve greater use of the Joint Line via Lincoln for container traffic between north-west England and Felixstowe.

Rail must adapt to meet the demands of freight shippers if Britain is to see the modal shift to rail needed to achieve decarbonisation, and secure wider economic and environmental goals.

In the North West and elsewhere, government will need to invest in rail electrification, gauge clearance and route capacity if these aims are going to be met.

■ Philip Bisatt is a member of Railfuture's infrastructure and networks group.

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More use for Swansea District line

Railfuture has responded to the Welsh government's consultation on proposals for a Swansea Bay and West Wales Metro. Of the options listed, providing direct services from west Wales to Cardiff and Bristol via the Swansea District line would have the greatest impact on rail usage. Existing service levels via Swansea station would of course have to be maintained. Another key option is implementing a 30-minute interval metro service to new and existing Swansea Bay area stations.

In addition, Railfuture is calling for:

- An extension of the hourly Manchester service to Milford Haven

- Doubling the current service to Pembroke Dock

- A two-hourly service on the Heart of Wales line (Swansea to Crewe)

- Tram and tram-train routes giving extensive coverage of the Swansea area.

Call for Swansea electrification

A key Railfuture campaign, reinstatement of electrification between Cardiff and Swansea, which was cancelled in 2017, has won backing from Mark Hopwood, managing director of Great Western Railway. Mr Hopwood also wants to see the line from the Severn Tunnel to Swansea improved for higher speed running. At present, the line is largely limited to 90mph or lower, whereas most of the Great Western line in England is cleared for 125mph. Measures needed are easing curves, removal of level crossings and more use of the relief lines between Cardiff and the Severn Tunnel for slower trains.

Railfuture has campaigned for years for the South Wales main line to be speeded up and electrified, particularly between Cardiff and Swansea where the current tortuous route means trains take up to an hour to link Wales's two principal cities, only 42 miles apart by road.

Centre for rail excellence funding

Following the approval of plans for a global centre for rail excellence near Onllwyn, north of Neath (Railwatch 165), UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced £30 million of funding for the project, followed by the Welsh government confirming £50 million. The £100 million centre, akin to those in Wildenrath (Germany) and Velim (Czech Republic), will be able to test electric trains and infrastructure at up to 110mph as well as providing facilities for research, development and training. Railfuture is delighted by the announcement, which takes the centre a step closer to reality.

New open access bid

Open access operator Grand Union Trains has submitted a new application for services from Paddington to South Wales, following the rejection of its previous application in February.

The plans have been cut back to four daily trains each way, starting in May 2022, and running from London to Cardiff with stops at Bristol Parkway, Severn

Tunnel Junction, Newport and the proposed Cardiff Parkway station. From December 2023 GUT hopes to extend to Carmarthen, with additional stops at Swansea and Llanelli. The original application was rejected by the Office of Rail and Road. The ORR argued that, although the likely level of revenue which would be lost to Great Western is at the upper limit of what has been approved for other open access approvals, with the financial strain caused by the Covid-19 crisis it would be unwise to approve the application.

Even under normal circumstances, many of the half-hourly GWR services between London and Cardiff are not heavily loaded. ORR's conclusions on the revised application remain to be seen.

Cinderella Borderlands upgrade

Transport for Wales told councillors in Flintshire in March that it plans to upgrade Wrexham-Bidston track and signalling to allow a fourfold increase in services. A new station will also be provided at Deeside industrial park on the "Cinderella" cross-border route. Vivarail's battery trains, which were finally authorised by the Office for Rail and Road in April, are expected to work the line, which already has 15 fairly basic (apart from Wrexham) stations and is currently restricted to 50 mph. Crew training on the Vivarail trains is now under way and they are expected to enter public service in the autumn. However, passengers have been protesting about being forced to use buses while crew training is under way on the trains!

Pupils make new station shine



Evie May, pictured above, was one of five pupils at Ysgol Comins Coch who designed posters of local attractions to brighten up the newly opened station at Bow Street, a mile and a half from the school. Her picture shows a murmuration of starlings at Aberystwyth pier.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk
Twitter @RailfutureWales

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



Picture: LIVERPOOL CRCA

LEA GREEN: How the rebuilt station will look

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£15m rebuilding project for Lea Green

A reopened station which cost £2.7 million 21 years ago is getting a £15 million makeover to ensure it is more attractive to cyclists and pedestrians and provides a southern gateway for St Helens. Lea Green rail station is to be given a new station building and waiting room, thanks to funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, which wants to encourage sustainable modes of transport.

The station reopened in 2000 with help from a £700,000 European Union contribution. Now the new combined authority has worked with St Helens Borough Council and Northern Trains and is investing £14.8 million from its transforming cities fund. Pedestrian and cycle routes to the station will be created with traffic lights modified to make the roads safer for vulnerable users, while car parking at the park-and-ride station is to be doubled.

Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham said: "I have made it a priority to improve our local transport network to make it easier, quicker and more affordable for local people. I am also developing wider plans for a London-style transport network, with tap-in contactless payments, fare caps and better buses and trains. We are using devolution to take greater control over local transport and run it in the interests of its users."

£66 million boost for Kirkby rail links

Work is expected to start this year on a new three-platform station which is to be opened at Headbolt Lane, Kirkby, in two years time, and which will be served by both Merseyrail and Northern. The station should help workers travel to Knowsley Business Park. A public consultation was under way in May and June and will be followed by a planning application in July. The transforming cities fund has earmarked £66 million for the station project, which could be followed by a new rail link to Skelmersdale.

Patchy return to service for Northern

Several once-busy stations, including Castleton and Smithy Bridge in the Rochdale area, are becoming ghost stations because a full service was not restored in the May Covid-19 recovery timetable. Rail user group STORM (Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines) has protested that priority has been given to West Yorkshire stations rather than those in Greater Manchester. Direct Liverpool Lime Street to Warrington Bank Quay trains were also not restored, forcing passengers to change at Earlestown or Newton-le-Willows, and other areas are also struggling with reduced services.

Working on link to the Settle-Carlisle

Extending the Manchester to Clitheroe train service to Hellifield (and possibly Garsdale) on the Settle-Carlisle line has made it through stage one of the government's Restoring Your Railway process. Work is now under way on a business case, supported by Ribbles Valley Borough Council.

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

Action at last on Access for All rail programme

Only a fifth of stations in Britain have step-free access to all platforms, an indication of the low priority the issue of accessibility has been given.

The government now admits that more needs to be done and pledged, at the launch of Great British Railways in May, that a determined effort will be made to create an accessible network.

GBR will have a statutory duty to improve accessibility and a new long-term investment programme will be "prioritised where it is most needed", based on earlier work by the Office for Rail and Road.

The first step is to carry out a full accessibility audit. Then new national and consistent standards will be set.

The government plans to consolidate existing Access funds into a single accessibility fund, which will be part of the GBR funding settlement.

At the end of May, the Department for Transport hosted an online panel with passenger and accessibility groups as well as operators to discuss how to work together to improve the experience for all passengers.

Also in May, Railfuture welcomed rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris's commitment to help partially sighted rail users. He has pledged that all new or improved stations will be provided with tactile paving.

Graham Collett, Railfuture's accessibility officer, said: "We strongly welcome this commitment, which is so important for partially sighted rail users."

A Railfuture member raised the issue with help from his MP, Layla Moran, after a passenger fatality at Eden Park station where tactile paving were not installed.

In April, the Office for Rail and Road published a review of how operators were complying with obligations to provide accessible websites.

All but three of 25 websites had accessibility errors, including missing page titles, inaccessible documents and mistakes in the use of colour. They have until December to correct the problems.

■ Ian Cook who has battled successfully for Access improvements at his local Flitwick station, has recently been presented with three awards, including a Local Hero Award.

◆◆◆◆ European Rail Timetable available at <http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu>



Picture: RUSSIAN RAILWAYS

BIG STEP: Russian Railways is planning to make it possible for disabled people to travel easily

The long march to an inclusive society

Accessible rail transport is an important step towards creating an inclusive society, insists Russian Railways passenger chief Dmitry Pegov. Disability should not be a barrier to rail travel.

Mr Pegov announced plans in May to improve the service offered to passengers with reduced mobility. He said accessible transport allows people with disabilities to lead a normal life.

The railway has set up a working group to solve the problems facing disabled people and a phone

and online contact point to encourage people and advocacy groups to help devise ways forward. More than 200,000 people already use Russian Railways' mobility assistance centre every year and there is also a mobile phone app which provides navigation help for wheelchair users at major train stations. A voice-prompt version is under development for people with visual impairment.

The railway has piloted video screens providing interactive help in sign language and now plans to extend the screens to all major stations.

Fly me to an accessible future

By Clive Durdle

To get to the moon or the space station requires making detailed plans – and the railway needs to follow a similar process to tackle the problems of accessibility.

Too often, however, the required level of attention to detail is missing. Things do not connect when we consider level boarding or communications. Getting reliable data is a minefield of its own.

The railway gave us universal time and was crucial in developing the computer, but to climb the mountain of accessibility we need to think carefully and consistently.

We need to decide what purposes the station and the railway carriage should fulfil.

Existing trains appear to be primarily designed for peak flows of lightly encumbered, adult and fit workers who travel at set times.

Level boarding may not be considered important for this breed of passenger.

But for the wider public, the rail system will not be made fit for purpose by disjointed

incrementalism. A carefully thought-out programme of incremental change is needed, taking into account station and platform design, the rail and carriage interface, carriage design, power supplies, data and communications.

The programme can then be implemented on a planned basis. Stations should be fully inclusive, 24-hour, multi-purpose logistics hubs, closely connected to e-cargo cycles for last-mile transport solutions. Many stations are already reasonably close to being able to achieve this.

Many stations already have ramps or could easily have them fitted. These could also function as tools for logistics operations.

Lifts should always be large enough to enable logistics. Some are currently too small to accommodate one bicycle.

The Harrington Hump is a well-proven, cheap way of providing a minimum of level boarding from platforms.

Train carriages should be designed to be inclusive and be fully multi-purpose. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Railfuture helps in access audit

By Graham Collett

graham.collett@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture's Yorkshire, North West, North East and Lincolnshire branches are working with train operator Northern on a major project, involving a detailed accessibility audit of 16 of their stations.

They have been chosen to represent the types of accessibility issues which need to be addressed.

Northern has asked for our help in reviewing these assessments as a guide to the work needed at all their 467 stations

The project is now being used as a template by the Department for Transport for future assessments.

There is a window of opportunity here to promote accessibility at all stations.

For information, the DfT's design standard for accessible stations is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/accessible-railway-stations-design-standards

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PLEA: Cllr Tim Steer

Reopening request

I am a newly elected Fremington parish councillor for North Devon and newly elected director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. North Devon has been fulfilling its government obligation to housing development, however the area has no relief roads or extra public transport. The volume of road traffic is tailing back for miles between Bideford and Barnstaple, yet ever more housing is approved. I am looking at the Maunsell report that was made in 1999.

My local area needs now more than ever the Barnstaple-Bideford line to be reinstated, not only for commuters but also for tourism. Every high season the area is swamped with holiday makers. I would like to talk to Railfuture and others on how to achieve reopening the line. I have local parish and district councillors who would support me. Please advise me on the best way to proceed and forward my email to persons who could aid in updating the Maunsell Report.

Councillor Tim Steer
t.steer@fremingtonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Heritage conundrum

The idea of developing the rail network by investing in heritage railways suggested in *Railwatch* 167 by Brian Jones is excellent. The Wensleydale Railway already operates from Leeming Bar to Redmire, and with a little bit of official help would be able to offer a useful east-west public transport link from Northallerton on the East Coast main line to Garsdale on the Settle-Carlisle line. Pre-Covid the railway was planning to extend from Redmire to Bolton Castle. Connecting Malton to Whitby would require the single-track North Yorkshire Moors Railway to be dualled but it would allow trains from Leeds, Manchester and beyond to provide a service to Whitby. The NYMR is very

successful in attracting visitors, but cannot run longer trains and seems reluctant to consider double tracking. I have suggested it.

We owe the NYMR and other preservation organisations an immense debt for the great job they have done.

But the NYMR is a victim of its own success. The bigger it gets, the more passengers it carries, the less it conforms to the initial aspirations of its founder members. It is a conundrum that needs to be solved.

Michael Paine, Willingham by Stow, Gainsborough, Lincs DN21 5LD

Covid exclusion

I am concerned that, during the Covid-19 crisis, three inter-city operators have imposed reservation-only services. We have always had and must always have a walk-on railway. When motorists have to book slots on the M1 and M6 motorways, it might make sense for inter-city rail operators. Not before!

Mike Crowhurst, Station Court, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ

Lead the way

I am a member of a dozen or so railway-related organisations but I have always avoided Railfuture. However, I read Christian Wolmar's article (*Railwatch* 167) pointing out that franchising has resulted in an expensive railway. Railfuture should have been using the expertise of its members to formulate its own views rather than "waiting for Williams".

Richard Bowry
rbowry@hotmail.com

Well done, Harry

How refreshing to see the article about young Harry Burr (*Railwatch* 167). He makes an important point about the farcical way to get from Banbury to Northampton, via Coventry. Another farcical journey is Banbury to Aylesbury, via Princes Risborough. Unfortunately Bucks County Council seems indifferent to rail reinstatements, including High Wycombe to Marlow.

Rod Enderby, Kings Sutton
sps9y@yahoo.co.uk

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

AGM goes physical for 2021

The Railfuture board decided to hold a physical AGM this year, in anticipation of Covid-19 restrictions ending.

The venue is The Priory Rooms, Main Meeting House, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AF.

Registration is open from 10.00 on Saturday 17 July. The AGM starts at 11.00 and includes the presentation of Railfuture Campaigner of the Year Award, followed by a break for lunch. The afternoon session is open to the public and the speakers are Malcolm Holmes, executive director of West Midlands Rail Executive, and Karen Heppenstall, head of rail Midlands Connect. The meeting will close at 15.30.



SPEAKER: Karen Heppenstall

Because of the uncertainty about Covid-19 restrictions, please make sure to check for any changes of plan: www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences

An environmental winner

By Stephen Chaytow

The Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership is campaigning to reopen the Matlock-Buxton line but as a former main line running through a national park, we have more than the usual suite of challenges to a rail reinstatement.

We believe it should qualify as a nationally strategic infrastructure project but the council leader of Derbyshire County Council has written about the economic and environmental challenges we will have to overcome.

By contrast, the Reopen Your Railways assessment panel accepted that reopening has a "strong socio-economic case".

The environmental aspects are more challenging as the line runs through the Peak District National Park. The national park is very introverted and seeks to repel anything of this sort which seeks to disturb the park's harmony and solitude.

So last year we decided that we have to muster some expertise that would match the park's specialisms around biodiversity, environment and now carbon emissions. The park is hardly an exemplar on this front because nearly everyone comes by car. We partnered with Nottingham University to devise how to achieve:

- Enhancement of biodiversity through reinstating the railway
 - Carbon modelling to show the level of emissions that must be reduced to meet #NetZero
 - Access to the environmental expertise of Network Rail and UK rail centres of excellence at various universities
- The aim is to allow us to engage

with the national park on a more equal basis and to show that the advantages outweigh the perceived levels of harm to the environment.

The first of the initiatives was the subject of the presentation which *Railwatch* readers can see at:

www.gov.uk/government/news/five-local-authorities-announce-d-to-trailblaze-englands-nature-recovery-pilots

These nature recovery pilots were announced last year and MEMRAP wanted to claim a first for rail.

The success of the presentation and associated chunky report means that we are giving the national park something serious to consider.

We aim to convince the national park and to answer the economic and environmental challenges raised by the county council.

There is no short cut to engaging fully and successfully with a hostile local body which is not looking at the benefits package dispassionately.

For various reasons, the case for rail has not previously been properly made for this reinstatement.

The issues around biodiversity enhancement and now carbon emissions are two potentially pivotal ones.

Railfuture Lottery winners

February: P Clark, R Goring, B Buttigieg, J Bisatt, R Grainger, R McLean.
March: F Goding, P Fox, J Ward, R Goring, P Wilson, D Stocks
April: G. Smith, R King, I Clatworthy, T Sheppard, M Waller, F Connolly.
Queries: lottery@railfuture.org.uk

janeann.liston@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Great British Railways

Following the UK government's Great British Railways announcement in May, it is not clear how GBR will interact with Transport Scotland, or fit with the Scottish government's intention to nationalise ScotRail next year. GBR acknowledges the benefits of electrification and the too-lengthy process for rail enhancements.

Progress and planning in Fife

A significant step forward towards reopening was taken by reclassifying the Levenmouth line as operational and removing redundant assets by Network Rail. Sonic drilling has taken place and 16,000 new sleepers have been delivered at Thornton. Network Rail is installing bat boxes along the line to accommodate displaced common pipistrelle, brown long-eared and Natterer's bats. Once the line is open, passengers will enjoy a twice-hourly service to Edinburgh. Reopening Alloa-Longannet could be a step closer with the submission of a planning application. Network Rail asked for an environmental impact assessment for a proposed railway station near Kincardine. This could mean accelerated plans for a long-awaited service between Dunfermline and Alloa. Transport Scotland is also considering a new station at Halbeath, east of Dunfermline, as part of its plans for the next 20 years.

STAG – Scottish Transport Appraisal Guide

Progress is being made on two rail projects subjected to the STAG process. The initial appraisal of the St Andrews evaluation is under way, as is the third and final part of the Newburgh study. The appraisal will assess the potential interventions against the STAG criteria of environment, economy, safety and integration, plus accessibility and social inclusion.

Border growth deal and new campaign

Ratification of the Borderlands inclusive growth deal in March by the UK and Scottish governments is a positive step on the way to extending the railway from Tweedbank to Hawick and Carlisle, said Simon Walton of the

Campaign for Borders Rail. He is hoping for an early start on a full and fit-for-purpose feasibility study. More info: <http://bit.ly/3pJRIST>.

A new campaign is suggesting tram-trains could provide a public transport link to the Borders General Hospital at Melrose, using parts of the former rail line through Duns.

RAGES election action

In the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections in May, Rail Action Group East of Scotland (RAGES) wrote to election candidates and received several positive responses, including from Neil Findlay MSP who brandished a copy of *Railwatch* in the Parliament as he called for more rail investment. Construction continues at Reston station, with the platform foundations now in place, and with East Linton to follow in due course. Campaigners are turning attention to a new line to Haddington, the former county town.

Aberdeen reopenings campaign

Train driver Jordan Jack has launched his own campaign to get rail lines reopened from Aberdeen north to Peterhead as well as west to Banchory. He says the public appetite for rail is "extremely high". His plans would require a bridge over Aberdeen's western peripheral road to reconnect with Banchory, and reconstruction of the Cruden Bay viaduct for the route to Peterhead.

Government transport review

Railfuture Scotland submitted a substantial response to stage 2 of the Scottish government's strategic transport projects review (STPR2) which includes rail, cycling and walking. Publication of this review, which is intended to give ministers a programme of potential investment opportunities, is expected later this year.



LEVENMOUTH: Sonic drilling under way before reopening

Contacts:

- Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES): www.rages.org.uk/
- Beattock Station Action Group: www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/
- St Andrews Rail Link campaign (StARLink): www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/
[facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/StARLinkCampaign)
- Levenmouth Rail Campaign: www.levenmouth.co.uk/
[facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/](https://www.facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/)
- Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG): www.capitalrail.org.uk/
- Newburgh Train Station campaign: <http://newburghtrainstation.org.uk/>
- Thornhill Station Action Group: [facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/](https://www.facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/)
- Bonnybridge Railway Campaign: <http://bonnybridgerailway.scot>
www.facebook.com/bonnybridgerailway
- Friends of the West Highland Lines: www.westhighlandline.org.uk
- Friends of the Far North Line: <http://www.fofnl.org.uk>
[facebook.com/fofnl](https://www.facebook.com/fofnl)

The most complex rail network in Britain

BOOK REVIEW by Richard Lysons

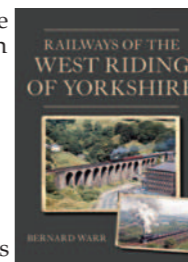
This new study of the history of railways in part of "God's Own Country" has filled several gaps in my knowledge of the region. Author Bernard Warr himself admits that the West Riding is "the most complex railway network in Britain!"

After an excellent, readable introduction, Warr spends nine chapters looking at the railways of the major cities and towns – Leeds, York, Doncaster, Barnsley and Huddersfield – and the valleys – Airedale and Wharfedale, Aire and Calder and Calder Valley. These were all areas of heavy industry based around coal, textiles and manufacturing.

The book has a good balance of text, photographs and maps so that the reader – whether general or specialist – knows exactly the

whereabouts of each line and station. No less than seven major railway companies operated in the West Riding, which led to much inefficiency and unnecessary duplication. Unlike so many railway history books, with their endless

pages of evocative photographs, Warr's book is clearly written and uses sidebars in grey to give background information. The sketch maps in each chapter help, too. Chapter 9 on the Calder Valley is especially interesting to me. Having lived close to the line for over 20 years and being involved in the Electric Railway Charter campaign to electrify the line from Manchester Victoria to Leeds and Bradford, I was fascinated to learn about the history of the Calder Valley



route, not least its industrial past. The section on Wakefield Kirkgate station is a little confusing; a sidebar entitled "Decline Of Kirkgate Station" mentions the poor physical state and dangerous atmosphere of the station with that much-repeated damning quote from Lord Adonis who described it as "probably the worst 'medium-large' station I have seen in Britain". In fact the main text describes the recent improvements, so perhaps an up-to-date photograph of Kirkgate could have been included to support the optimism of the main text? Sadly, Bernard Warr passed away shortly before he finished writing this book, but John Hunt and Saskia van Schip are

credited with assisting the publishers in bringing the book to publication. Hunt was also responsible for many of the excellent photographs within. The book is a useful addition to a modest railway library.

Successful campaigners need to be – among other things – informed historians. We need to understand the past in order to plan the future. If the railways of the north are to have a long-term future, then both passenger and freight traffic needs to be brought off the roads and back on to (electrified) rails. *Railways of the West Riding of Yorkshire* by Bernard Warr Crowood Press 2021 £14. ISBN 9781785008467
Richard Lysons is co-organiser of the Electric Railway Charter and chair of the Friends of Littleborough Stations.

peter.walker@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Railfuture challenge to train operators

Railfuture and rail user groups deplore moves by LNER and CrossCountry to make life more difficult for passengers by insisting on seat reservations. Short-distance passengers who want to make the best use of a quick succession of First TransPennine, CrossCountry and LNER services at Newcastle, for instance, cannot be expected to book ahead.

Railfuture challenges the operators to come to Newcastle and see the consequences of their actions for passengers during the mid-afternoon peak period.

We were also shocked to learn that, even after recent improvements, King's Cross station is unable to accommodate a 14-coach train (a combined five-car and nine-car Azuma).

■ ■ Mixed news for Morpeth

Railfuture is pleased to report improvements at Morpeth station – more car parking space, a refurbished platform canopy and strengthening of the embankment. However, First TransPennine has not yet introduced its fast Liverpool-Newcastle-Edinburgh service. FirstGroup's open access operator East Coast Trains plans to introduce a five trains a day Edinburgh-Morpeth-Newcastle-King's Cross service in October, but the four-and-a-half-hour journey time is distinctly leisurely.

■ ■ Ashington, Blyth and Tyne progress – or not?

Rumours that Northumberland County Council had been asked to drop Bebside from the intended list of stations have been formally denied. The £34 million budget, reported in *Railwatch* 167, will pay for acquiring land and minor works, not for further studies.

■ ■ New signals on the Ferryhill-Norton line

Railfuture is delighted that providing an extra signal between Ferryhill and Norton West has effectively doubled the capacity of this freight line. It is some compensation for the loss of the heritage signal boxes in the Stockton area.

It should also allow passenger services to be accommodated on this, the shortest and quickest route between the North-East's two conurbations. User group Coastliners is calling for the introduction of direct Northern Connect services from Middlesbrough and Stockton.

■ ■ Restoring our railway(s) - who's in and who's out?

In the North East, only the Consett-Newcastle line and Ferryhill station have been accepted so far for the government's Restoring Your Railway scheme. Still waiting for approval are Bensham Curve, the Leamside line, a North Shields Metro link to Cobalt, and Gilsland station (west of Haltwhistle on the Carlisle line).

New applications are also being made for Bishop Auckland-Stanhope, Newcastle to Berwick-upon-Tweed local services and the long-awaited reopening of Belford station on the East Coast main line. Approval of Leamside is long overdue and the rejection of the Bensham Curve, permitting in effect a four-track approach to Newcastle from the south, is puzzling.

■ ■ Railfuture and allies target inter-city improvements

Railfuture and the Coastliners rail user group are hoping to enlist support from First Transpennine staff, Rail North, the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Transport for the North for improvements in next year's timetable, to ensure that there are long-distance services via Stillington and the Coast line through Hartlepool and Sunderland as well as along the traditional ECML route through Darlington.

Railfuture supports changes advocated by the combined authority for hourly inter-city services for main towns on the Coast line. In some cases this would save passengers up to an hour, by avoiding train changes as well as zig-zagging via Darlington and Thornaby.

The political upheaval in Hartlepool following the May elections is not expected to affect the railways. Railfuture is hoping that Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen will support rail improvements with as much enthusiasm as he has supported Teesside airport.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North_East_Branch
Twitter: @RailfutureNEast



Picture: FoSCLA

Picture: ROBIN PATRICK

Railways can count on Joanne

Accountant Joanne Crompton is the new treasurer of one of Britain's most influential rail user groups, the Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line.

Joanne, who is passionate about "railways and numbers", is also a wife, a mother and a volunteer steam locomotive fireman.

She fell in love with the world-famous line on her first trip on it in 2015, on the footplate of a steam loco. She immediately recognised the importance of the route as a

main line railway, as a benefit to the area and for its heritage. She said the job as treasurer ticked all the boxes for her and was an exciting opportunity not to be missed. Joanne, who is also treasurer of the Bury Standard 4 Group, said: "I can use my skills as an accountant to help the Friends and the Settle-Carlisle line into the future."

Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove is vice chair of FoSCLA.

Devon and Cornwall



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

Picture: GERARD DUDDRIDGE

Gerard.Duddridge@railfuture.org.uk

Work on upgrading 11 miles of track on the Okehampton line was well under way in May, including at North Tawton, pictured right, thanks to a £40 million Restoring Your Railway government grant.

North Tawton lost its station in 1972 but once the line to Okehampton regains its passenger service from Exeter later this year, the town wants its station reopened to enable it to grow in a sustainable way. Devon County Council is also working on a business case to support a new parkway station east of Okehampton, on the A30 road, as part of its plans for Devon Metro. Occasionally stopping the new Great Western train service at Sampford Courtenay should be made an option

because a useable platform survives there. The new rail service will help Okehampton to provide an environment-friendly gateway to the Dartmoor national park

It also opens up the possibility that freight traffic could resume from Meldon Quarry, which is owned by Aggregate Industries.

Okehampton will be the first project to see services restored under the government's Restoring Your Railway fund, which was launched in January 2020. Railfuture wants to see the Okehampton line extended to Plymouth. This would provide an Exeter-Plymouth alternative to the coastal route via Dawlish, as well as more options for gaining access to Dartmoor.



A diesel freight train carrying biomass from Tyne freight terminal to Drax power station approaching Colton South Junction in February, photographed next to masts being erected in preparation for the future TransPennine route electrification. Drax signed a £226 million deal in February to take over a Canadian biomass producer

■ ■ Speedy upgrade needed

Railfuture Yorkshire, together with the Stalybridge to Huddersfield and Halifax and District rail user groups, have called for speedy electrification and upgrading of the Diggle TransPennine route from Manchester. One benefit would be to create more capacity on the route, which is already overcrowded with sardine-like conditions for passengers. Electrification work is already under way north of Church Fenton, which sees over 100 trains a day, in preparation for the full TransPennine upgrade.

■ ■ Bradford Central

Railfuture Yorkshire is calling for a new Bradford Central station to be built in the city centre instead of Bradford Council's proposal to site it on the wrong side of the inner ring road. Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith said: "We advocate the existing Calder Valley and Airedale/Wharfedale routes being joined together underneath Bradford city centre, connecting with the proposed new northern powerhouse rail line from Manchester."

■ ■ Northern hub

A northern hub is to be created in Leeds for Department for Transport staff as part of the government's levelling-up programme and to provide a fresh perspective.

■ ■ Local rail appeal

Sheffield City Region is backing plans to reinstate a local passenger service on the Sheffield-Chesterfield via Barrow Hill line. The scheme was shortlisted in the government's Restoring Your Railway programme and a business proposal was presented to the Department for Transport in February. A decision is expected

soon. North East Derbyshire MP Lee Rowley said: "The reopening of the line has captured the imagination of residents." New stations could be built at Beighton, Killamarsh, Eckington and Renishaw. The Spanish rail company Talgo has its UK head office at Barrow Hill.

■ ■ Access survey

Northern Rail is continuing to work with Railfuture Yorkshire and other branches to see how accessibility can be improved at 160 of its busiest stations.

■ ■ Zooming ahead

Despite Covid-19 restrictions, the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line have made "enormous" progress in the past year using Zoom and doing more things online.

■ ■ A good Track Record

Railfuture Yorkshire congratulated the Huddersfield, Penistone and Sheffield rail users association on its 40th anniversary this year, and praised it for its newsletter *Track Record* and its history of holding rail companies to account. It is currently campaigning for a half-hourly service.

■ ■ TransPennine contract

A few days before the release of the government's Great British Railways announcement, FirstGroup signed a two-year concession contract to continue operating the TransPennine Express former franchise. The government will retain all revenue risk and most of the costs risk, while FirstGroup will be given £2.3 million (with an extra £5.2 million on offer) to run the trains. The contract replaced the Covid emergency agreement which ended on 30 May.

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

◆◆◆◆ Recruit a new member for Railfuture



Picture: WMCA

COMMONWEALTH GAMES: An image of how Perry Barr station will look as part of West Midlands Combined Authority's plans for better access to Alexandra stadium

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Commonwealth Games

Railfuture is being consulted by Commonwealth Games officials about how the expected 1.7 million spectators can be encouraged to use rail and tram services to get to the Birmingham-based games next year. Competitors will have priority buses, but it is crucial that normal rail services in the West Midlands are excellent for the games workers, volunteers, residents, workers, shoppers and leisure travellers. Provision of services will be constrained by the availability of train crews and rolling stock. It is hoped that new electric and diesel trains will be introduced in time and will provide increased capacity.

An interesting aspect of the games planning is that each station serving as a games venue will be treated as a transport hub. Analysis of potential hourly passenger flows through these hubs is already being undertaken, to identify which services need to be lengthened or if additional early or late services are needed.

The closing ceremony ends after 22.00, and spectators will need to catch trains to New Street from Perry Barr and then onwards to outer suburbs and elsewhere.

Railfuture has suggested that people with tickets to the games should be offered discounted add-on for travel on buses and trams.

Work is under way to rebuild University station, which will be a key hub for the Commonwealth Games as it hosts the competitors' accommodation and a venue for four events including hockey, which start each day at 09.00 and end at 22.30. Similarly, work has started on a £30 million rebuild of Perry Barr station, as this is the rail access for the opening and closing ceremonies as well as for the athletics events at Alexandra stadium.

■ ■ Highways England

Railfuture is delighted that Herefordshire Council has denied

Highways England planning permission for infilling two bridges spanning the old trackbed of the Hereford to Ross-on-Wye railway, which is the proposed route of a 20-mile greenway. Highways England had claimed that urgent action was needed "to prevent an emergency arising" as the bridges would not carry 44 tonne lorries, despite the roads being too narrow for such vehicles and despite both bridges being in fair condition and showing no signs of being overloaded. Officers made it clear that the infillings were incompatible with the council's policies on heritage, ecology and sustainable transport. Railfuture hopes other local authorities will follow suit.

■ ■ Branch AGM

Railfuture West Midlands AGM was held online in April, with Linda McCord of Transport Focus hosting a discussion on *Getting Passengers Back to Rail*. Members then considered the branch campaigns, including electrifying the reopened Camphill line in addition to the Snow Hill services; enhanced Lichfield-Burton services onwards to Derby; integrated tickets for use on all TfWM services (train, tram and bus); reopening the Coleshill-Brownhills route with services to Burntwood; enhancement of Marches line services; reopening Ironbridge as well as Oswestry-Welshpool and Baschurch; reopening Stourbridge Junction to Brierley Hill.

■ ■ Marches line

Railfuture will join allies to call for an hourly service for all the stations between Shrewsbury and Hereford; faster Cardiff-Manchester/Liverpool services with limited stops; reducing long-distance train stops at local stations; improved facilities at stations; bus-train integration; improved access facilities at stations for walkers, cyclists, car parking and electric vehicle charging.

www.railfuture.org.uk/West_Midlands_Branch



Picture: BARNET COUNCIL

BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: The new station at Brent Cross West will enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Midland main line

London & South East

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Brent Cross West

A new £40 million station, which will open next year as part of a £419 million development project was beginning to take shape over the May Day bank holiday.

A giant crane was lifting into place concrete sections of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge at Brent Cross West station to span the Midland main line near London's North Circular Road, between Cricklewood and Hendon.

Thameslink and East Midlands services were severely disrupted as Network Rail also carried out extensive track work in the area.

The new four-platform Thameslink station will be able to accommodate 12-car trains and will serve Brent Cross shopping centre and a new "town centre" with 7,500 new homes.

The track layout has been radically redesigned to provide sidings for 24 trains and a waste transfer terminal near the station.

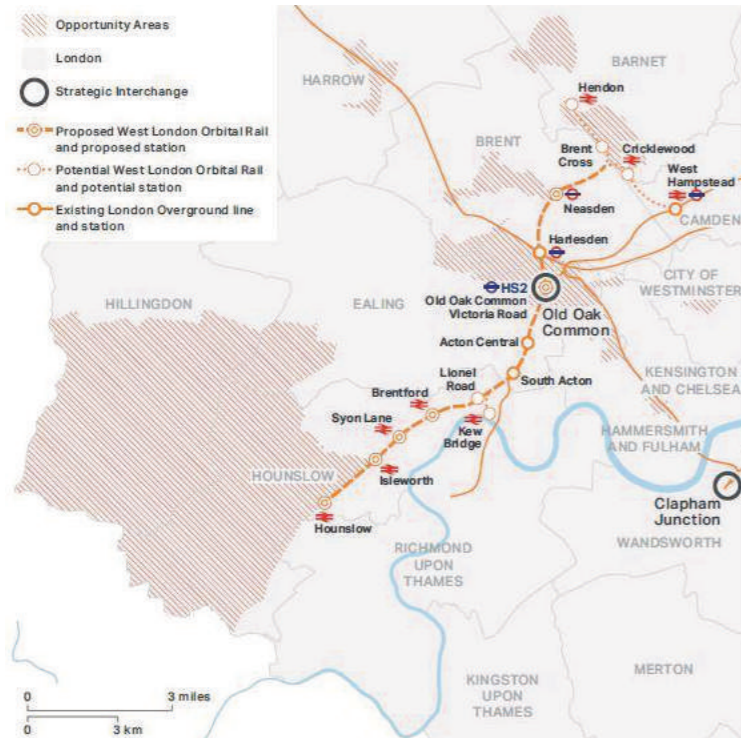
The scheme has been designed to allow Brent Cross West to be served in future by an Overground West London orbital service from Hounslow via Old Oak Common (for HS2 and Crossrail), making use of existing lines, some of which are freight-only at present.

However, the proposed orbital service is likely to be delayed for years because of Transport for London's financial problems.

■ ■ Better journeys campaign

The campaign theme of Railfuture London and South East is: Better lives through better journeys. The branch uses the area study forums run by Transport for the South East to ensure rail is represented properly in TfSE's draft 30-year strategic investment plan.

We supported Network Rail's proposals for improved services between Ashford and Hastings and creating a short new link line to allow trains between Lewes and



WESTERN PROMISE: The West London Orbital proposals



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

EASTERN GATEWAY: Entrance to Brent West station

Hastings to avoid Eastbourne. We also supported proposals for a new chord at Higham on the Hoo peninsula, a new chord at Cuxton to link the Medway Valley line to the main line which would allow direct trains between the Medway

towns and Gatwick Airport, and a package of improvements at Dorking.

■ ■ Volunteer view

Responding to consultations remains a core part of Railfuture's

approach to campaigning. We responded to Greater Anglia's timetable changes, step-free access proposals at South Kensington station, Hampshire County Council's new local transport plan, Hastings Borough Council, and Medway Council. More details of national and regional consultation responses on the Railfuture website.

■ ■ Inter-city Bedford

As a result of lobbying by the Bedford Commuters Association, a limited number of inter-city services are now stopping at Bedford (Monday to Friday) for commuters wishing to travel north from Bedford to the East Midlands. At other times customers for north of Kettering will have to change at Kettering. The BCA is having regular meetings with Thameslink and EMR to discuss future timetable upgrades. BCA was also told by Network Rail that the overhead power supply between Bedford and London is being upgraded and insulated, especially in leaky Victorian tunnels.

■ ■ A bigger better railway

Seventy years after Railfuture's roots were planted, we can celebrate the anniversaries of new and reopened stations in the London and South East area, including Heathrow Terminal 4, Mitcham Eastfields, Meridian Water, Stevenage, Southend Airport, London Fields and Welham Green.

■ ■ Step-free access

Planning permission is being sought for a £2.3 million scheme to provide step-free access by next year at a new rail-bus interchange at Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. Work is expected to start next month on step-free facilities at Flitwick station, Bedfordshire.

■ ■ Railfuture updates

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

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

Chair's column by Chris Page

Light at end of the tunnel

The government published its plans for Great British Railways in May, giving Railfuture confidence that our campaigning is paying dividends. One of the pledges at the launch of the GBR white paper was for new flexi-season tickets. We expect more positive moves as the GBR process continues.

In April Railfuture was one of 17 rail industry co-signatories of an open letter to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps urging the government to begin an immediate programme

of electrification, to meet net-zero legal commitments. This circulated widely with the hashtag #RailDecarb21. The Rail Industry Association report *Why Rail Electrification?* published simultaneously shows that 500 miles of electrification, including small but key infill schemes, would enable 70% of rail freight to be electrically hauled. The carbon saving of a 2,000 tonne electric freight train is much greater than for a two-car passenger train. Shortly afterwards prime minister Boris Johnson said on Radio Derby that Midland main line electrification, and how it integrates with HS2 Eastern leg, is high on Grant Shapps' agenda.

Network Rail is making plans for more electrification, including for example the application for a Transport and Works Act Order covering four-tracking and electrification of the TransPennine route between Huddersfield and Dewsbury, and (at the other extreme) preparing a business case for electrification of the Uckfield branch.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris stated at a recent briefing session that the rail decarbonisation plan would be published soon, no doubt in time for the COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow in November. We also await the

government's integrated rail plan for the North and Midlands. At the NR conference Chris Heaton-Harris, Network Rail chair Sir Peter Hendy and chief executive Andrew Haines all said the railway must reduce costs – and public expenditure. They have the task of persuading rail unions that working efficiently and effectively makes jobs more secure. Mr Haines has also said that the prime minister really wants to invest and believes in Beeching line reopenings.

Work on the

Northumberland line and Okehampton is under way, while funding for Golborne station and the next phase of East West Rail has been approved. However, solutions must be affordable and viable. The government wants to invest, not subsidise a failing system. We know that stories are often leaked to the press to see what reaction there is. The *Financial Times* reported this summer that private companies are to be invited to fund, finance and build a southern rail route into Heathrow airport. Good news if it happens.

The railway will not be bankrolled by commuters in a post-Covid world. Railfuture wants a welcoming and reliable railway that minimises disruption and encourages travel. On the plus side, there may be less overcrowding during peak periods and running fewer services will make it easier to achieve reliability and good performance.

The rail companies must be ready for a strong marketing campaign as lockdown restrictions are eased. However, Railfuture is resisting plans by some operators for compulsory seat reservations, which will discourage some travellers and so reduce revenue.

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



Old railway infrastructure must be protected

The Transport and Health Science Group, Railfuture and Sustrans responded to a campaign by Historical Railways Estate Group to protect 134 old railway bridges and tunnels for use by heritage railways, railway reopening and as footpaths. HREG claims the policies of Highways England, now responsible for them, threaten extensive demolition and infilling. Sustrans has contacted Highways England and will consult with THSG and Railfuture. Railfuture director Allison Cosgrove commented: "Railfuture

would not be supportive of the removal of bridges and structures which might be brought back into use at some time in the future.

"Rail has proven to be far more effective than air and car use because of its lower emissions, and the move towards electrification from diesel is rapidly increasing this difference. Rail should therefore be seen as the preferred method of transport where possible. In addition, the overnment's own Reversing Beeching policy has encouraged local areas to consider the restoration of long-closed

railways. It makes no sense to remove or infill structures that could be useful in the future, and Railfuture would support THSG moves to preserve these."

Herefordshire council has refused planning permission to Highways England to infill two bridges on a disused line between Hereford and Hay-on-Wye. At least 15 other authorities have told Highways England it will need permission to infill bridges and tunnels. The Highways Agency controls 3,200 legacy bridges, viaducts and tunnels.

railwatch

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railfuture

campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Dawn of Great British Railways

Britain's railways are to be brought back under government control but with continuing and significant private sector involvement – “the best elements”.

The white paper Great British Railways was launched in May with a positive message from Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

He said: “I am a great believer in rail, but for too long passengers have not had the level of service they deserve.”

The government will also produce a comprehensive environment plan by next year that will establish rail as the backbone of a cleaner future transport system.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: “Our railways were born and built to serve this country, to forge stronger connections between our communities and provide people with an affordable, reliable and rapid service. Years of fragmentation, confusion and over-complication saw that vision fade.”

But Cat Hobbs of anti-privatisation campaign group We Own It, said: “Great British Railways sounds like a shiny new way of running the railway, but it is really the same old privatisation, tweaked and rebranded.”

“In the new model, rail franchises are being replaced with passenger service contracts. Franchises are a type of contract, so this is not a big change.”

Indeed the government says: “Operators will compete for the contracts, and we expect competition to be far greater than for the old franchises.”

“The new contracts will aim to reduce barriers to entry for bidders.”

“Perhaps the first change that passengers will notice is the flexi-season tickets which Railfuture has campaigned for strongly,” said Railfuture chairman Chris Page.

Railfuture needs to know what will be done to encourage passengers back on to trains after Covid-19, and what will be the effect on fares, replacement bus services and weekend closures.

We also need to know what effect the new sub-national transport bodies will have on GBR.

What began as a review of the railway in 2018 by Keith Williams continued as a “collaborative process” and was publicly launched as the Williams-Shapps plan for rail. GBR will incorporate Network



NEW ERA: Early morning sun over the tracks in south London

Rail, set timetables and prices, sell tickets in England and manage rail infrastructure. Five regions will be created but their boundaries may change “over time”.

“It is good to see the Williams Review published, giving some certainty to the government’s plans for the railways as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic,” said Darren Caplan, chief executive of the Railway Industry Association.

The GBR document says: “The government will not cut off emergency funding overnight.”

“But it is not possible to continue paying revenue support indefinitely on the present scale, around four times the amount provided before the pandemic.”

“Privatisation has given the railways much more certain and stable medium-term public funding, with successive five-year control period settlements from the government for Network Rail.

“The government will at least maintain the current infrastructure settlement, which

runs until 2024, and will provide subsequent five-year infrastructure funding deals from 2024 onwards.”

The government is already working on a 30-year strategy for GBR to provide clear, long-term plans for transforming the railways, and a GBR chairman will be appointed before next year.

Maria Machancoses, chief executive of Midlands Connect, said: “This raft of changes is what the rail industry and its passengers have been waiting for, and if implemented correctly could have huge benefits for travellers.”

Labour’s Jim McMahon said: “When long-term sustainable funding is promised, it must be delivered on. Labour has long argued that public ownership of the rail network will provide better value for the taxpayer and for passengers.”

The Williams-Shapps plan promises to provide more space for bikes on new trains, but it says nothing about modifying the existing fleet for them. Transport Focus will take over responsibility from the Office for

Rail and Road for monitoring passenger complaint volumes and will continue as the passenger champion. The ORR will continue to hold GBR to account and scrutinise its performance.

GBR will invest in expanding London-style pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing on urban and commuter networks beyond the capital. It will aim to provide through tickets from any bus stop to any station.

Advance purchase tickets have been a great innovation and will continue. GBR will bring forward the normal replacement process on existing trains equipped with “ironing-board” seats to make the seats significantly more comfortable, or to replace and eventually remove them altogether.

GBR will have a statutory duty to improve Access for All and there will be a long-term investment programme.

It will have a statutory duty to promote rail freight, and must set a rail freight growth target.

The document hints at action on the long-delayed remodelling of Ely North junction to improve freight journeys across East Anglia and from the Port of Felixstowe to the Midlands and northern England.

The government promised to announce further electrification projects in England “shortly” as part of its overall transport decarbonisation plan.

Short infill electrification projects that benefit freight, between places such as Felixstowe and Ipswich and in west London, will also be accelerated.

■ A detailed analysis of the GBR proposals by Railfuture’s policy director Ian Brown can be found on the Railfuture website.

■ See also Railfuture in the news on the website.

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