

# railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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Picture: HS2 Ltd



High speed future: See Page 2

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# Lifting the lid on HS2

## PAGE ONE PICTURE

The original 2015 design for the southern terminus of HS2 at London Euston has been updated.

Building the station will start next year although the line is not now expected to open until 2029, three years later than planned.

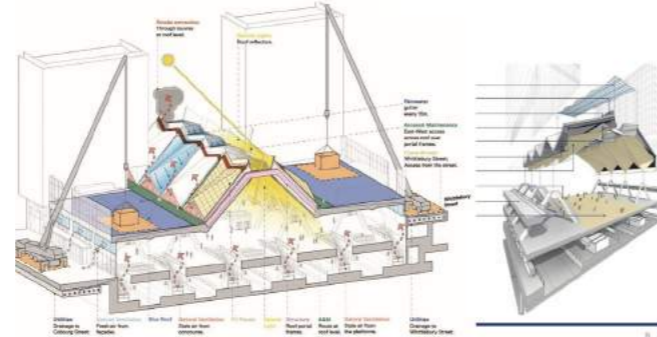
Euston's new geometric roof will allow natural light into the concourse and the HS2 station will be on three levels, with ten sub-surface platforms, west of the existing Euston station.

Retail and station facilities will be on the ground and first floor.

The design is intended to encourage walking and cycling and there will be new public east-west walking routes through the HS2 station roof once the regeneration of the existing Network Rail station alongside is complete.

There will be step-free access from the HS2 station to a new Euston Square underground station with the aim of integrating all the rail and Tube stations at Euston.

Birmingham's new HS2 station is expected to open in



How the redesigned Euston roof will let the light in

eight years time. Mark Thurston, chief executive officer of HS2, said the essence of the new railway could be summed up by the three Cs: capacity, carbon and connectivity.

He told the Accelerate conference in March that transport is now recognised as the biggest generator of carbon but he predicted that HS2 will enable modal shift.

In Britain, 25 stations are being built or upgraded for HS2, which should provide the connectivity to encourage modal switch.

HS2's new Hitachi trains will be built at Newton Aycliffe, Derby and Crewe.

There will be a delta junction near Birmingham to enable

onward connections to Crewe. However, there was a warning at the Accelerate conference that rail's potential is not always taken advantage of. Richard Thorp of HS1 (London-Ashford-Folkestone) said HS1 is only 50% full.

Railfuture campaigned for years to have HS1 built, partly with the aim of transferring large number of continent-bound lorries passing through Kent on to rail. The government has failed to create the incentives to make this happen.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham says Manchester is not getting the triple-level HS2 station it needs and deserves.

**Invest in the North: Back page**

Picture: HS2 Ltd



RETURN TO RESTON: Border Piper Sandy Mutch welcomes one of the first trains, a TransPennine Express bimode, on 23 May

## Historic day for rail in Berwickshire

By Allison Cosgrove

It was an exciting day for Berwickshire when the railway returned to reopened Reston station on Monday 23 May.

The first passenger train for 58 years stopped at the Scottish village, bringing Edinburgh and Newcastle within easy reach of the 450 residents, as well as many others in its hinterland.

TransPennine Express did a great job, and the announcement "The next stop will be Reston" was greeted with cheers from those who boarded at Dunbar at 0601.

An extended stop at Reston allowed for commemorative photographs, while the train was greeted by locals and members of the BAM Nuttall team who had carried out the construction.

Barrie Forrest, chairman of Rail Action Group East of Scotland (RAGES), said: "I would like to pay tribute to all those people, including many Railfuture and RAGES members, local residents, and elected politicians, who have supported the campaign for the reopening over many years.

"This will open up Berwickshire and allow residents, especially our young people, to access



CELEBRATION: left to right, RAGES president Tom Thorburn, TPE's Matthew Golton, John Lamont (MP for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) and RAGES chairman Barrie Forrest BEM

further education and jobs in Edinburgh and contribute to the regeneration of the area."

The culmination of the 22-year RAGES campaign was when Border Piper Sandy Mutch, played *Scotland the Brave* as the service arrived at the £20 million station.

To mark the historic occasion, the first train to call at the new station, a TPE Nova 1, was named St Abb's Head after the

Scottish National nature reserve five miles from Reston. Matthew Golton, TPE managing director, who was on the first train, said: "This is a landmark day for Reston – and for TPE – and we are delighted we have been able to work with our partners to help connect communities in the Scottish Borders."

Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth, who travelled on one of the first TransPennine Express

services from Edinburgh, said: "It is thanks to the Scottish government's investment of £20 million that rail services are returning to Reston.

"This investment will change the lives of the people of Reston for the better."

Children from Reston Primary School were treated to a free day trip to Edinburgh.

Eileen Anderson, 84, who worked in the ticket office of Reston Station in the 1960s, witnessed the first services arriving at the station.

Special introductory fares are available on the TPE website until 22 August.

The new Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed service also stops at Dunbar, Alnmouth, and Morpeth and now Reston, with some calls at Cramlington.

Reston is also served by cross-border operator LNER, and RAGES is already working on securing a more frequent service at Reston, which is 20 miles south of Dunbar.

Work started in February on the next new station – £15 million East Linton – which is six miles on the Edinburgh side of Dunbar. It will open next year.

## The powerful shadow behind Beeching

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

A look at the career of controversial transport minister Ernest Marples is a reminder of how some things change – and some do not.

A new and thorough biography of Ernest Marples, *The Shadow behind Beeching*, has just been published by Pen & Sword.

The book reminds us that the postwar pro-car mood enabled Beeching to cut a swathe through the railway which was seen as an outmoded form of transport, with some locomotives built in the 19th century still clanking round the network.

What a contrast with sleek automobiles able to take people from door to door with a minimum of effort. Towns and cities were adapted to suit the car while railways were seen as a messy inconvenience.

But this disdain for the railways and the public belief that the car was king did not happen by accident. It was the result of heavy lobbying by vested interests such as the Road

Haulage Association. Marples himself, when appointed as minister of transport, had a large shareholding in the roadbuilding company Marples Ridgway which he passed on to his wife. The Beeching axe fell as motorways and ring roads were being built around the country. Later it became obvious that however many roads were built, they could not solve the nation's transport problems, and a new approach to railways and public transport emerged in the 1970s. The turning point was the decision to scrap the ringways in London that would have wrecked the capital, destroyed 40,000 homes and turned it into a car-dominated dystopia.

Yet there had been support for what were called the motorway boxes from all the major political parties for more than a decade

before the idea was killed off by the Greater London Council in 1973.

In a rational world, the focus should then have been on creating a nationwide, effective transport system and an acceptance that relying solely on motor transport was clearly misplaced.

Instead we have had what I term a "more of everything" policy.

These mutually exclusive alternatives were doomed to failure given that transport budgets are always limited, but successive governments tried to prove how inclusive they were by trying to provide more roads, more trains, more planes and sometimes some cycle lanes. Hard decisions were avoided and this is still true of the present administration, which has a £27 billion roads programme along with promising record rail investment. At least today it is



Christian Wolmar

By David Pennie

Timetable changes at Northern

Northern's new timetable as from 15 May brings both good and bad for Yorkshire. In the Hull area the reinstatement of the hourly Hull-Bridlington service (these trains start at York), along with the existing hourly Sheffield-Hull-Scarborough service, restores the pattern of two trains per hour between Hull and Bridlington.

However, on the Middlesbrough-Whitby Esk Valley route, the early service from Whitby is withdrawn, and an evening return working between Middlesbrough and Whitby is replaced by a much slower bus service. In an area with poor public transport, this is causing anger. The evening trains were becoming popular with people travelling from Middlesbrough and intervening rural stations into Whitby for a trip along the scenic route. Northern says that the reason for these cuts is issues with staff absence and driver training. Local campaigners are questioning why some other Northern lines are unaffected by this and are seeing services maintained, and in some cases improved.

Rail users in Harrogate are equally unhappy with Northern's new timetable. Two key early morning trains to Leeds are withdrawn, losing connections to London, Manchester Airport and other longer distance destinations used by business travellers. Also, there will now be a two-hour gap in evening services from Leeds, giving worse connections for long-distance travellers. It is hoped that these cuts – said to be because the commuter market is still suppressed – will be restored. But as the Harrogate Line Supporters Group points out, it is a chicken and egg situation: lack of trains at the right time will slow down the return of commuters, as will a return to overcrowding on the surviving services.

Six-car trains for Hope Valley

On Saturday 23 April, Northern Trains began to operate the Sheffield-Manchester Hope Valley stopping service using three trainsets formed of two three-car class 195 units, the first time such six-car formations have been used for local services on the line. Post-lockdown, the Hope Valley line has seen a substantial increase in leisure traffic, particularly at weekends. This, coupled with the cancellation of many TransPennine Express services between Sheffield and Manchester, has led to gross overcrowding and meant that some intending passengers have been unable to board already crush-loaded trains at local stations. The Hope Valley Railway Users Group has been lobbying Northern to increase provision on the route for some time, and very much welcomes this initiative.

Hull Trains – happy anniversary

Hull Trains has been celebrating its 21st anniversary. For many years there was only one through train per day each

way between Hull and London King's Cross, but the open-access operator changed that in September 2000 with three additional return services from Hull to London using three-car class 170s. Since then, Hull Trains has graduated through various types of train unit to its class 802 fleet (branded as Paragon, from the name of Hull's station), providing seven return services per day, with some working beyond Hull to Beverley. The Paragon fleet was inaugurated in December 2019. This was unfortunate timing as the company's revenue was soon to be badly hit by the pandemic. As an open-access operator there was no government support, and services were suspended or reduced during lockdowns. Happily, the full service is now back in operation.

Food and ale trail

The Friends of Hunmanby Station have produced a Good Food and Real Ale Trail starting at the station and going through the village. With growing concerns over climate change, the leaflet promotes a more sustainable alternative. The message is: Come by train, enjoy the scenery on a 2.5 mile lovely village walk, and take your time with "slow tourism". The leaflet is a community project, thanking local traders who supported the village through the pandemic and are now giving a new welcome to visitors.

Blow to Upper Wensleydale

The prospect of reinstating the Upper Wensleydale Railway line from Garsdale on the Settle and Carlisle line to Hawes has suffered a setback. Although the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has long supported the possibility of rail reinstatement, it has recently approved in principle a multi-user family-friendly bridleway. A feasibility study has concluded that the trackbed has room for one or other of these, but not both, and favours the multi-user option. The outcome of a public consultation will be known in the summer.

Transpennine upgrade

Huddersfield's historic station was closed for two separate periods between March and May to allow for remodelling of eight miles of line between Huddersfield and Dewsbury. Passengers were taken by bus (five an hour at peak times) to a temporary platform a mile from the station at Hillhouse. The temporary platform was in a 12-acre rail yard which will be a Network Rail construction compound for five years for the Transpennine Route Upgrade which involves replacing or improving eight bridges as well as widening and electrifying the line.

Network Rail has to secure a Transport and Works Act Order for the project, which includes remodelling Mirfield and Ravensthorpe stations.

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



**TEAM ON TRACK: Front row: Heritage volunteer Karen Harely, Devon councillor Linda Hellyer, Bideford mayor David Ratcliff, Devon County Council transport lead Andrea Davis, Torrridge councillor Doug Busby. Back row from left: Steven Trowbridge, Clive Fairchild, Railfuture's Roger Blake, Tim Steer and John Skidmore**

What a difference a year makes!

By Tim Steer

When I contacted Railfuture in 2021, I was concerned about our ever-expanding local population. Greater Bideford is 31,000, Barnstaple 33,000 while Fremington parish (between the two towns) has over 13,000 parishioners.

The Beeching era faster bus service is stuck in daily traffic congestion. A 30-minute journey can last three hours.

"One person one car" has produced this problem, but the railway does not get stuck in traffic.

Bideford now suffers extreme transport injustice, with the town's economy at risk, while our neighbour Barnstaple still has its Tarka line passenger service to Exeter.

Our campaign to restore the railway to Bideford involved bringing Bideford town councillors into contact with OkeRail which is celebrating the return of a regular passenger service to Okehampton.

We agreed we needed some levelling-up help because Bideford (part of Torrridge District) has among the lowest GDP per capita in the UK.

After several Restoring Your Railway presentations to councillors, our ACE Rail project (Atlantic Coast to Exeter Railway) is being supported by several local authorities – North Devon District Council, Bideford Town Council, Tawstock parish council with more to follow.

Tarka Rail Association also supports us. It sees extending

❖❖❖❖ Hourly trains started running in May on the Exeter-Okehampton "Dartmoor" line following the reopening of the line in November – the first line to reopen under the government's Restoring Your Railway programme. Since 1997, the Dartmoor line had been open only on some summer Sundays after BR's official closure in 1972.

the Tarka line to Bideford as a fantastic proposal. What about the former track bed, the active travel Tarka trail? No one wants to take this away, if anything, we are researching how we can follow the same example as the Exmouth-Exeter Avocet line and the Exe trail. With a raised-profile new trackbed, we may even be able to save the Tarka trail from coastal erosion.

I invited Railfuture director Roger Blake to join VIPs, including Bideford town mayor, the chair of Torrridge District Council and the local county councillor in our historic meeting at Bideford Railway Heritage Centre station with Andrea Davis, the Devon County Council cabinet lead for climate, environment and transport. She is also chair of the sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport.

Later the mayors of Bideford and Barnstaple made a symbolic joint inspection of the renovated Bideford-bound platform at Barnstaple station.

Sir Geoffrey Cox, MP for Torrridge, has been in contact to pass on advice he received from the Transport Secretary Grant Shapps. North Devon MP Selaine Saxby is also welcoming the proposal.

ACE Rail is now affiliated to Railfuture. Keep up to date with developments on the Devon and Cornwall reopenings page or on the Ace Rail Facebook page.

Tim Steer is director and station manager for Bideford Railway Heritage Centre

Electrification keeps on rolling along

By Julian Langston

Work continues apace on electrification of the Cardiff core valleys lines.

Installation started on the Aberdare line towards the end of last year and since then masts have appeared in a number of places and piling work has reached Cardiff.

Electrification of the core valley lines, which are owned by Transport for Wales, not Network Rail, is discontinuous, unlike anywhere else in the UK. This means there are sections without electrification, such as at Pontypridd, where the station canopy overlapping the track and the nearby junction and viaducts would make wiring this area very expensive.

Complex junctions, track under some low bridges and the 2,000-yard tunnel under Caerphilly Mountain will not be wired.

Rolling stock is split. Tram trains will have batteries and electric motors. "Flirt" units will have electric motors, plus diesel engines to carry them over the Cardiff-Bridgend line. There are currently no plans to electrify this Network Rail line.

Some commentators have argued that discontinuous electrification brings additional costs, not least by adding complexity to the trains plying these routes.

TfW says it is the only affordable way to electrify the core valley lines.

Elsewhere, TfW hopes that electrification along the south Wales main line will be extended to Swansea within 10 years, with other schemes following.

Only the Cardiff core valley lines are owned by TfW, so how much influence TfW will have on electrification on the Network Rail lines is a matter for conjecture.

Mid Wales link line

The Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury line is a crucial link for the Transport for Wales Cambrian coast services to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli.

Upgrading the line is the subject of a cost-benefit study which should be complete this summer.

Electrifying this English line could transform Mid Wales rail services while boosting rail commuting around Birmingham. Birmingham-Pwllheli by rail at present takes five hours and Birmingham-Aberystwyth three hours plus.

Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski is keen to see the back of diesel trains.



**Two machines for driving piles into the ground working at Waun-Gron Park station on the Cardiff City line in April, part of the work to electrify the core valleys lines**

Model trains show way to the future

By Julian Langston

Railfuture members were guests of Transport for Wales in a warehouse in Taffs Well to view mock-ups of new trains soon to ply Welsh railways.

The class 197, set to operate long distance routes within Wales and from Wales to Birmingham and Manchester, attracted the most attention.

The old chestnut of insufficient toilets (one per two car unit, two per three car unit) was raised. TfW argued that this is a trade-off between number of toilets and number of seats.

Doors at one third and two thirds of the saloon caused comment: some people felt this to be inappropriate for long distance trains as draughts could be caused when the doors are open. TfW responded that many people make shorter journeys, and the wider doors reduce station dwell times.

The seats seemed reasonably comfortable, although a test of a couple of minutes is no substitute for a journey of several hours. The windows were large and aligned well with the seats. Railfuture is

surprised that new diesel trains are being built. TfW agreed they would be difficult and expensive to convert to any form of electric traction but argued that the trains were ordered before decarbonisation was a major issue. They are leased only until 2033, so TfW hopes they can be redeployed. Introduction of these units could start by autumn if sufficient drivers have been trained, so their service life on these routes may be little more than a decade.

The class 398 bimode tram trains were spacious and will operate on some of the core valley lines north of Cardiff. They draw power from overhead line and batteries. Level boarding was a feature of this class, which could enter service late next year.

A depot for the new trains and a control centre need to be built at Taffs Well.

The most contentious issue is that they have no toilets for journeys of up to an hour. TfW argued that there is not room for a Persons of Reduced Mobility-compliant toilet without greatly reducing the number of seats. Instead, more



**Railfuture members and class 398 model**

Power boost for Nottingham and Sheffield

There are hopes that work on the Midland main line electrification to Sheffield and Nottingham will soon be under way.

Network Rail is planning a June online and physical meeting in Derby with contractors expecting to bid for the work, which is split into at least seven different contracts.

Overhead power equipment will be needed from South Wigston (near Leicester) to both Sheffield and Nottingham.

Power supplies will have to be resilient enough for fast inter-city trains and more commuter trains.

Electrification from Kettering to South Wigston is already under way now.

The Midland main line has been electrified in stages from London so commuter electric trains now serve Bedford, and since last year, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.

While the electrification work is under way, new bimode trains will be able to use what overhead electric power is available and then switch to diesel mode for non-electrified sections.

The contracts are for Wigston South to Syston 19.5km, Syston to Trent Junction 28.7km, Trent Junction to Derby 15.7km, Trent Junction to Nottingham 13.1km, Derby to Toadmoor Tunnel 16.7km, Toadmoor Tunnel to Sheffield London Road 43.3km, and Sheffield 2.5km.

£78m plan for Wigan-Bolton

Network Rail's contractor Buckingham is in the first stages of the £78 million electrification of the 6.5 mile Wigan-Lostock (Bolton) route.

Lengthening platforms at Ince, Hindley and Westhoughton stations is part of the scheme, so trains can be lengthened to six rather than four coaches.

Electric Anglo-Scottish trains on the West Coast main line will be able to use the route as a diversion, once it is finished in three years time.

The project could make way for new Southport-Wigan and Wigan-Stalybridge services in future, once the TransPennine route upgrade is also complete.

# The ticket that revolutionised Euro rail travel



By Ian Brown

Interrail is a ticket giving Europe-wide travel on trains run by 33 operators and it is still available to UK residents despite Brexit.

## How did it start?

The Interrail Pass celebrates 50 years in 2022. It was originally available for young people aged under 21 wanting to explore Europe flexibly by train in 21 participating countries at a budget price.

Interrail became very popular with students but did not achieve the cult status which the Greyhound \$99 bus pass did in 1960s and 1970s US. But Interrail's time may yet come.

A similar pass, called Eurail, is marketed for people living outside Europe, largely aimed at US, Canadian, Indian and Australian tourists.

## What is it now?

The target market was and still is students, although mainly those over 21.

As in my case, having acquired the taste for international travel as a student, many continue to enjoy it for the rest of their lives.

Interrail management woke up to this and the passes are now available for all ages.

Students up to 28 pay a lower price, as do senior citizens. Like students they have time to enjoy travel.

Children under 12 travel free with an adult pass holder, but can also travel independently with an under 12 Interrail pass. There is also a first class option for all Interrail passes.

There are two types of Interrail passes. One is for a set number of days over a period of one or two months. There are passes for four, five or seven days in a month and 10 or 15 days in two months.

The other is for travel every day for 15 days, 22 days, one, two or three months. A matrix showing Interrail prices is available on the Interrail website and also on the Man in Seat 61 website.

## Points to watch

You need to buy €10 reservation supplements on some trains, which can significantly affect the total price. Many slower trains are available without a supplement. Interrail is also good value for people who want



AMAZING OPPORTUNITIES: The map showing where you can go with an Interrail ticket



**Italo, the Italian open access high speed operator, is well worth checking out as an option for travel around Italy. Interrail passes are not valid on Italo but are valid on the state Trenitalia network**

to visit multiple destinations (a sort of latter day Grand Tour). However, out and back journeys can be significantly cheaper by air.

A growing number of private rail operators, particularly in Italy, France and Spain, now offer advance airline-style cheap fares using high speed trains. A recent trip on Italo suggests that these operators are well worth checking out.

The biggest French budget operator also using high speed trains is Ouigo (owned by SNCF but marketed separately). For budget air travellers there is still a huge range of country or within-country regional and city passes allowing travel around the country once you are there.

## How to use Interrail

The Man in Seat 61's website *Guide to using an Interrail pass* is invaluable. This also includes advice on how to buy advance Eurostar tickets from Interrail or from Eurostar.

Using the pass is simple if you make the necessary reservations – or travel on slower trains which offer comfortable travel and great views.

You can use Interrail on Europe's

network of sleeper trains but you have to pay a fee for your bed. There is a growing network of Nightjet trains.

## Railfuture's role

Railfuture is not a marketing arm for any railway operator but we encourage international and domestic rail travel.

We have restructured our European passenger group to examine best practice abroad to bolster our campaigning in Britain.

Before the pandemic, two EPG members, Jerry Alderson and myself, visited Interrail at its base in Utrecht to discuss better promotion of rail travel from and to the UK.

Unfortunately there is minimal interest shown by British train operators who do, to be fair, still participate in Interrail, as does Eurostar in its unique way.

The fragmented British rail structure is not conducive to promoting Interrail, whose benefits are general and wider, but cannot be seen immediately in the operators' bottom-line accounts.

Eurostar's add-on fares are good value. For three years after Eurostar was set up in 1994, the unified British Railways did, sort of, actively promote Eurostar.

By 1997, the entire British rail



**SNCF-owned Ouigo is a low cost operator offering high-volume no-frills service in France and Spain. Do not expect a buffet car! But the modern Duplex TGVs go just as fast as SNCF's other TGVs**



**Sleeper trains in Europe are seeing a rebirth led by OBB (Austrian Railways) Nightjet services – an option to get between countries overnight saving the hotel cost**

network was privatised. Now, 25 years later, the key has to be direct marketing and selling by Interrail itself.

We discussed how Railfuture and Interrail can cooperate in drawing people's attention to such travel opportunities.

Interrail emerges from Covid in 2022 to celebrate its 50 year birthday. It has launched an intensive direct sales campaign including in the UK.

The relaunch was accompanied by a 50% discount in April and May on the price of an Interrail pass. The timing fits well with what appears to be a stampede for international travel, coinciding with increasing levels of Eurostar service.

With post-Covid rules making travel easier, queues around Eurostar's St Pancras terminus are now being seen again.

## Rail versus air

Eurostar has dominated the London to Paris and Brussels market since 1994. Many Railfuture members feel Eurostar has not really tried to develop longer distance routes, with the notable exceptions of

ski trains to Switzerland and direct trains to Marseilles.

London to Amsterdam is by far the largest air market in Europe, following Eurostar's domination of the London-Paris route.

Direct London-Amsterdam trains introduced pre-Covid showed that people will use trains for longer distances.

To visit Interrail in Utrecht, Jerry Alderson and I used the then-new, London-Amsterdam train. Jerry returned by train breaking his journey at Brussels and I flew back to London City by plane. Our *Go and Compare* train v air article is available on the Railfuture website.

Since then, you can travel back from Amsterdam without changing trains and there are up to three Eurostars direct to and from Amsterdam and Rotterdam per day. They are incredibly busy so we can expect to see more.

## Eurostar network

The EU Competition Commission has approved the merger of Eurostar with Thalys, which operates from Paris to Brussels, Amsterdam and Cologne. The rebranded operation is now to be Eurostar (mercifully not Thalys).

This opens up the opportunity for direct Eurostar trains to Germany. Serving Cologne and the Ruhr region will surely follow Amsterdam as a commercial success.

Eurostar does not yet seem to have plans to target Spain and Italy, where my kids and their friends go at the drop of a hat.

We can however safely say that international rail travel is back and that longer trips are increasingly a viable option, in the satisfying knowledge they are environmentally sustainable.

It is worth checking out Interrail.

■ Ian Brown is chair of Railfuture's European passenger group



Eurostar network following the Thalys merger

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



CLOUDY PAST: Abbey Wood station on day one of its brighter future with the Elizabeth line

# Fast forward for Crossrail

By Roger Blake

London Mayor Sadiq Khan said opening the central section of London's east-west Elizabeth line was a "roaring success". The million people who travelled on it in the first five days would probably agree. The line, which began

life as Crossrail, now connects Abbey Wood (south-east London) with Paddington. Come the autumn, there will be through running from Reading (in the west) and Heathrow airport via Paddington and Liverpool Street to Abbey Wood and Shenfield, on the eastern edge of London. It is London's first fast Metro line and provides an interchange at Farringdon with the north-south Thameslink network, including Bedford and Brighton. Its opening may have been delayed for four years but London is at last catching up with the RER lines which Paris has enjoyed for years. It required sustained perseverance and patience by Railfuture and many other campaigners since the idea was first proposed by railwayman George Dow in *The Star* newspaper in 1941.

BR's 1980 *A Cross-London Rail Link* was followed by the government's 1989 *Central London Rail Study*, with the 1991 Crossrail Bill being rejected by a 1994 parliamentary committee. The 2008 Crossrail Act led to construction starting the next year, with tunnelling beginning in 2012. At last, it is time to celebrate.

BR's 1980 *A Cross-London Rail Link* was followed by the government's 1989 *Central London Rail Study*, with the 1991 Crossrail Bill being rejected by a 1994 parliamentary committee. The 2008 Crossrail Act led to construction starting the next year, with tunnelling beginning in 2012. At last, it is time to celebrate.

## Restoring Your Railway

There have been 38 winners in the first three rounds of the government's Restoring Your Railway contest. Some communities isolated by rail closures can look forward to a brighter future, and gain from the socio-economic benefits of rail connectivity. Others are still waiting for the magic of line or station reopenings. Railfuture, as a respected independent organisation

which operates nationally, regionally through our branches, and locally through affiliated and other rail user groups and campaigns, is well placed to develop practical examples to expand the market for rail travel.

## New homes and the need for rail transport

Horden station, 15 miles south of Sunderland, reopened in 2020. The original station closed in 1964, 16 years after the government designated nearby Peterlee as a new town which was going to expand with thousands of new homes to be built. The population in 2020 was estimated at 26,000.

Bideford station closed to regular passenger services in 1965, although there were occasional specials until 1982. At the time, Bideford's population, now over 31,000, was larger than Barnstaple, which kept its 40-mile rail link to Exeter. Now the Railfuture-affiliated ACE Rail campaign is on the case.

## What a difference a year makes: Page 4

The Railfuture-affiliated Witney Oxford Transport Group's campaign for a new Windrush Line is gaining momentum, with financial support from the county council and public support voiced at the May Day Fair in Carterton by RAF Brize Norton.

The Oxford-Eynsham-Witney line closed to regular passenger services in 1962 and closed completely in 1970. Over a half-century later the A40 is a legend in its own time for slow and unreliable journeys and a poor safety record, and the area has an existing population of over 50,000. That is expected to grow by another 8,000 with Salt Cross garden village and other developments near Eynsham.

Railfuture is hoping that Washington station (closed in 1963) can be reopened to serve Washington New Town, eight miles west of Sunderland and designated a new town in 1964. It now has a population of around 67,000.

Railfuture is also hoping for rail reopening progress at Skelmersdale (nine miles from Wigan) where the station closed to passengers in 1965, only to be followed five years later by Skelmersdale becoming a new town. Its population is now around 35,000. The Skelmersdale-Rainford line closed in 1961 while Skelmersdale-Ormskirk closed in 1963.

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

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight Groups via the Railfuture website

## Peak park link

*Railwatch* 171 has a well-written article on leisure use of rail including our national parks. Unfortunately, it rather undersells rail's ability to serve the Peak District. The campaigning group MEMRAP (Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership) has detailed and well-researched proposals for restoring the Chinley/Buxton to Matlock line which would provide a more comprehensive service to the national park, both for passengers and freight.

The proposals can be seen in detail on the website (end of letter) but briefly, for passengers there would be a local service bringing tourists into the heart of the park, but also through links from the North-West to the East Midlands. This would be a more direct link than current services via Sheffield and would relieve the Hope Valley route which Transport for the North wants to develop for trans-Pennine expansion.

The jewel in the crown for MEMRAP is the freight potential. Millions of tonnes of Peak District stone currently heading south by rail have to make a long detour north via Sheffield or Manchester, before finally turning south. This clogs up the Hope Valley line and adds to cost, which means large quantities also move by road. A restored Peaks and Dales Railway would ease congestion in the Hope Valley and remove many loads through the park currently carried in heavy goods vehicles.

[www.peaksanddalesrailway.com/reinstatement](http://www.peaksanddalesrailway.com/reinstatement)

George Boyle, Furness Vale, High Peak SK23 7PU

## Green travel

I have been reading my wife's diary from 1978, the year in which we moved to London for my work. Anne is a country girl and really disliked living in the big city. So we tried to get out of London at least every other weekend. We had no car and did so on our tandem tricycle.

Reading now 44 years later I am amazed at the journeys we made on the weekends. Canterbury, Gloucester, the New Forest, regularly back to Cambridge and several other distant places. We planned very little. We would set out in the direction the wind was blowing, go as far as we felt like and then find a b&b. Sunday we would carry on in the same direction for as far as we wanted. If it was raining hard or snowing we would just look for the nearest station and wait for a train, confident that most would have a guard's van and would take us to

## Revolution waiting in the wings

Words and pictures by Steve Jones

Members of Railfuture East Midlands visited the Revolution VLR (Very Light Rail) demonstration site at Ironbridge in March.

The visit was organised by East Midlands committee member Stephen Chaytow, who is also a director of MEMRAP, the Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership.

MEMRAP is pursuing the reopening of the former Midland route between Matlock and Chinley, now called the Peaks and Dales Line, with a branch connection into nearby Buxton over existing freight-only tracks.

Though the Chinley route would effectively be a main line, the passenger link into Buxton lends itself to a more lightweight solution.

Hence the interest in assessing Revolution VLR for use in and around Buxton, together with participation in the visit by representatives of the Buxton Town Team and other related organisations and Derbyshire County Council.

London. We were very rarely disappointed. Most trains had a guard's van and the majority were big. The tandem trike was big but I can recall one occasion when it was in a van with nearly 50 bicycles.

My work as a barrister practising in the criminal courts took me all over much of England and Wales. I would do the same thing. Cycle to the appropriate station, put my solo trike in the guard's van and cycle from the arrival station to the court.

This worked perfectly well until privatisation. I didn't need to book because nearly every train had a guard's van with enough space for all cycles.

Reading this I realised that this is the answer to inter city travel. Any fit person can cycle 5 or 10 miles to their destination from the station, but it must be as it was then. A van with enough space to accommodate as many cycles, prams or wheelchairs as turn up. There must be one on every train and there should be no need to pre-book or pay.

I regularly visit friends in California. I usually take or borrow a cycle. The Amtrak trains I have used are



Representatives of Railfuture, MEMRAP and Derbyshire County Council with the prototype Revolution VLR vehicle inside the maintenance building at Ironbridge on 22 March. The modular construction of the vehicle, using many standard off-the-shelf components, means that maintenance facilities do not need specialist 'heavy rail' tools and equipment, contributing to the cost savings envisaged

Revolution VLR is an innovative project to develop a lightweight, low-cost but high-quality passenger rail vehicle. It has been developed by VLR Technologies Ltd, a consortium of several rail and automotive sector organisations including TDI (Transport Design International), Eversholt Rail, WMG (University of Warwick), and the Rail Safety and Standards Board on

behalf of the Department for Transport. The consortium's stated aim is "to provide a high-quality, affordable solution to facilitate growth of the UK railway, including line extensions and reopenings".

This aligns it closely with Railfuture's own aims. Along with Revolution VLR, which is a railway vehicle, is the tramway version being developed for the

double deckers. They have a cycle carriage every third or fourth coach on the lower deck. My cycle has often seemed very lonely with only 2 or 3 other cycles in enough space for 100. But if the motor-loving Californians can do it we should be able to do it here.

If people have the confidence to know that there will be carriage for their cycles on almost any train, they will be much happier to set off without their cars. Surely if we are sincere about fighting global warming this would be a great step in that direction.

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## Hawick and Kelso

There is passionate support for the Borders Railway campaign but the cost of the Carlisle-Hawick section is enormous.

I suggest a staged restoration is the way to make headway, with Tweedbank-Hawick as the next stage, including the branch to Kelso, now a significant regional economic centre.

Trains from Edinburgh could divide at St Boswells to serve both Hawick

and Kelso. It is more straightforward to justify this stage, leaving the leg to Carlisle to be addressed once the success of Kelso and Hawick had been demonstrated.

Stuart Nicholls, West Chiltington, West Sussex [stuartnicholls1014@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:stuartnicholls1014@hotmail.co.uk)

## Blyth line

We were delighted to see the Northumberland line featured on the front page of *Railwatch*.

Two points to note: The Northumberland line does not really go to Blyth. The two stations to serve Blyth will be Bebside and Newsham, both very much on the outskirts.

The county council is calling Bebside station Blyth Bebside. Blyth and Bebside are not separate stations. The South East Northumberland Rail User Group would like to see an extension from Newsham to Blyth town centre on the former alignment, which is still intact. That would give Blyth a station of its own.

SENrug's initial campaign proposed that the Blyth Bebside station simply be called Bebside, to avoid confusion in the long term



Interior of the prototype Revolution VLR vehicle at Ironbridge. Interior fit-out is configurable to various requirements and can include toilets. As fitted out, seats face towards a single table-bay on each side in the middle of the vehicle. All the forward-facing seats are in the rear half of the car in either direction of travel. We wonder whether this will result in unbalanced loadings, as most passengers prefer to face forwards!

lightweight tramway system planned for Coventry and, we hope, elsewhere.

One prototype vehicle has been built. It is a double-ended single car, 18.5 metres long, with 56 seats plus wheelchair space. The lightweight construction (the vehicle weighs 24.8 tonnes, compared with 41.2 tonnes for a

class 153 single-car Sprinter), uses modular components, many of which are sourced from the automotive sector. This facilitates ease of maintenance, with quick component-swaps reducing down-time.

There are two single-leaf sliding plug doors on each side, at opposite ends of the vehicle, giving the passenger saloon the ambience of a normal train while remaining compliant with "persons with reduced mobility" rules. Power is hybrid diesel plus battery electric, the two 2.8 litre Euro-6 compliant engines charging battery packs supplying the electric final drive. Each of the four axles is motored, and the batteries are charged by regenerative braking. Maximum speed is 65mph, with rapid acceleration and braking, making it ideal for local branch line use, though the Ironbridge demonstration line does not allow speeds higher than 25mph.

It was planned to test the vehicle at speed on the Great Central Railway in June. The vehicle is carried on two bogies, developed from Wabtec LN25 freight wagon bogies. Though a single vehicle, it is designed to be able to operate in multiple. However, this is not expected to be the normal mode of operation. If passenger loads require routine multiple operation, a heavier solution than Revolution VLR is really needed. The interior

fit-out can be configured according to customer requirements, including a possible freight option. It is also rather stylish.

Unfortunately, at the time of our visit, the vehicle was undergoing testing and a temporary software problem prevented it from running on the short demonstration line.

However, we were given full access to it during our visit, and our hosts were only too happy to answer questions about the vehicle and its potential applications.

The 700m demonstration line is part of the former freight-only branch serving the now-demolished Ironbridge power station. It was brought into use in only seven months from first track inspection to running the vehicle, including a simple modular station platform with step-free access, which cost only £40,000.

We came away very impressed. Thanks go to our hosts, especially Tim Burleigh, Wendy Allington and Tony Kirk of Eversholt Rail, and Sam Sharp and Paul Salkeld of TDI. However, this was no mere sightseeing tour.

The visit is being followed up by MEMRAP and partner organisations with a view to a possible pilot VLR operation. There are many significant obstacles to overcome before that can become a reality, but the will and a potential means to do it are there.

between stations in different places with similar names. The stretch of track in the *Railwatch* picture is not actually part of the Northumberland line which is to be reopened to passengers. It is at Hepscoth, on the Morpeth-Bedlington link, the subject of a further SENRUG reopening proposal.

Recent special trains have been obliged to use this link rather than serve the Bedlington-Ashington section as there is no longer a turnaround facility at Ashington, Network Rail having removed it as soon as the campaign got serious. Only SENRUG's charter train in 2008 actually went to Ashington, the crossover there being removed shortly after that event.

Dennis Fancett, chair, South East Northumberland Rail User Group [chair@senrug.co.uk](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk)

## Humber losses

Railfuture Yorkshire vice-chair Mike Rose writes in *Railwatch* 171 of how

he thinks that the Integrated Rail Plan "seemed to be a government attempt to get out of promises of rail improvements it previously made to the North of England". Certainly as a former Hebden Bridge resident I agree with the measures he suggests to encourage rail travel.

Yet has he stopped to think what it is like for those of us living south of the Humber? Places like Grimsby now have half as many services that go to Manchester, connecting us with the East Coast main line at Doncaster on the way, which means a train every two hours. How is this going to get people out of their cars and on to the tracks?

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP [timmickleburgh9@gmail.com](mailto:timmickleburgh9@gmail.com)

## Station parking

Having re-read Peter Solomon's letter (*Railwatch* 169) quoted by David Bailey in *Railwatch* 171, I would like to put the record straight. Mr Solomon does not

describe active travel as pious waffle, but he does consider the dismissive approach to the need for adequate parking as such.

We rail campaigners have to acknowledge the fact that comparatively few car users will give up their car in exchange for two long cycle rides per journey, often in bad weather, possibly in the dark and probably up hills.

Even fit people with nothing much to carry will balk at the idea. However, if you provide a great train service from a station with guaranteed parking space, there is far more chance that they might be tempted.

Ian Budd, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow Convener, Friends of the Far North Line [ian.budd@fofnl.org.uk](mailto:ian.budd@fofnl.org.uk)

## Keep on rolling

I would add to Julian Langston's useful article on the downside of hydrogen fuel (*Railwatch* 170), by emphasising that its use should not be allowed to divert attention from the need for a proper rolling programme of electrification. Time has been lost between each project during the start/stop of

recent years, with Scotland the worthy exception. It is sad to see an experienced team being disbanded at the end of one project with a new team needing to be assembled for the next. How much is this approach to blame for the protracted project to electrify the Great Western to Bristol and South Wales?

It was disappointing to see Ian Brown's reference to Keswick being regularly "crammed with cars" (*Railwatch* 171) as it reminded me of our unsuccessful battle in the 1960s to retain the Penrith-Keswick line for its easy northern access to the Lake District.

John Davis, Harpenden, Hertfordshire [davis.john@mypostoffice.co.uk](mailto:davis.john@mypostoffice.co.uk)

Editor's note: The Cedric Martindale and CKP Railways' 27-year campaign to reopen the line from Penrith to Keswick continues. In 2020, four local Conservative MPs were reportedly backing the reopening. In 2021 Network Rail confirmed there were aspirations to reopen the line under the Restoring Your Railway initiative.

## Think small

*Railwatch* 171 mentioned reopening the railway to Bideford, but what about the cycle path? The Transport and Health Science Group advocates rail/greenways – high speed miniature railways parallel to cycle paths. Running a 15 inch gauge train at 40-50mph is feasible and no more problematical than 160-200 mph at standard gauge.

Railfuture groups should consider opportunities for this, but a potential scheme serving Bideford is Taunton to Padstow via Norton Fitzwarren, Barnstaple, Bideford, Great Torrington, Halwill Junction, Launceston and Wadebridge, with branches to Bude, Westward Ho, and Okehampton, and links to Okehampton and Tavistock.

Stephen J Watkins, co-chair, Transport and Health Science Group

## Timetable blues

It seems unlikely that train companies will be re-issuing timetable booklets for the foreseeable future which, for those of us without smart phones or internet, is difficult. It acts as a disincentive to travel very far – even for a Freedom Pass and Senior Railcard holder who belongs to Rail Riders Club, RCTS and the Bluebell Railway.

SP Vince, Sutton



FIT FOR FREIGHT: The Hamworthy branch gets new sleepers in April

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

### ■ ■ Electrification options open up

There has long been a presumption against any expansion of DC third-rail electrification after the Office for Road and Rail raised the bar for meeting safety requirements in its policy document of 2015. Therefore we welcome the news that the ORR and Network Rail are working on possible solutions for further third-rail electrification, which could fill in some missing gaps in the network and reduce the need for diesel trains in southern England.

In the Railfuture Wessex area, we would like to see the West of England line electrified, especially as the class 159 diesel units used between Waterloo and Exeter are becoming increasingly unreliable. At first glance it would seem sensible to extend third-rail electrification west from Basingstoke, but there is an argument for using 25kV overhead electrification beyond Yeovil Junction since the south-western end of the line is often used as a diversionary route for Great Western services.

There is a need to electrify the diesel "island" between Basingstoke and Reading, but the line carries heavy freight trains from Southampton and DC third rail would struggle to supply the power required. The "electric spine" proposal of 2012 would have seen an extension of 25kV overhead electrification all the way from Reading to Southampton to enable freight trains to be hauled by electric locomotives. Some freights are routed from Basingstoke to Southampton via Salisbury, and this factor may tip the balance towards overhead electrification for the whole of the West of England line.

We recognise that the choice of electrification system in our area is not clear cut, but decisions will have to be made soon if diesel power is to be eliminated by 2040. There needs to be a detailed analysis of the whole-life

cost of both types of system, together with pros and cons. Furthermore, solutions must be found to improve safety on the third-rail network. It seems perverse that the only signs warning of an electrification hazard are to be found at platform ends – those parts of the station least visited by passengers!

### ■ ■ Deaf to crowding complaints

While it is good news that something approaching a full passenger service is to be restored on the main line to Weymouth, we wonder why passengers on the Waterloo-Portsmouth and Waterloo-Exeter lines will continue to experience a reduced service with certain trains terminated short of their normal destinations. Further overcrowding on the remaining through services is inevitable. There is still nothing like a full service on CrossCountry routes to the south, and the company seems unwilling to respond to reports of overcrowding and a continuous stream of complaints.

The new timetable for the Island line leaves much to be desired, but at least local managers appear to be open to suggestions from rail users. Railfuture Wessex has argued for two trains an hour to run through to Ryde Pier Head, at least on summer Saturdays, otherwise many of the passengers arriving on the half-hourly foot ferry will be left stranded.

### ■ ■ Hamworthy freight resurgence

It is several years since minerals were last offloaded on to railway wagons at Hamworthy Quay on Poole Harbour, since when the branch line has remained dormant. However, vegetation clearance and track renewals have been observed just recently along the two-mile Hamworthy goods branch in preparation for a resumption of rail traffic.

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

## Portishead delay debacle

By Dave Chillistone

In 2019 Portishead rail campaigners asked *Railwatch* readers: Why are we still waiting for the Portishead railway reopening?

The short answer was that a £32 million shortfall in the funding jigsaw could only be filled by central government.

Shortly after the appearance of the *Railwatch* article, the government agreed to provide the missing £31.9 million. This allowed North Somerset Council to submit an application for a development consent order to the Planning Inspectorate.

The order would have allowed the reinstatement of the rail link between Portishead, Pill and Bristol, using the existing freight line through the Avon gorge, and the derelict section from Portbury Junction to Portishead. It is widely accepted to be a no-brainer reopening.

The derelict section of the line was bought from Network Rail by North Somerset Council in 2005, to preserve the rail corridor for reopening.

Shadow transport minister Chris Grayling stated in 2006: "If we were in government the railway would be built".

Seventeen years later, it will still be at least a further year before work can start. The Planning Inspectorate's examination was followed by an extension of the examination period. Eventually, the Planning Inspectorate provided a *Recommendation to Approve*.

You might think this should have signalled the go-ahead. Not so. A three-month consideration period within the Department for Transport was required before the order could be signed. On the last day of this three-month period, the DfT announced an

extension to the time-period to 19 April this year. The DfT published a "Minded to Approve" letter but then announced a further 10-month delay to February 2023, to resolve a funding shortfall.

Let us be clear about how the funding shortfall has arisen. When the development consent order application was submitted, all the required £116 million funding had been committed, including central government's share.

Successive delays within the development consent order process, and government deliberations have cost the project dearly.

Not only has there been the on-going cost of maintaining the project team to respond to every query raised, but world events have also pushed up the costs considerably.

Yet a request to the government for additional funding required to close the gap has been refused.

Portishead Railway Group, which has been campaigning for 21 years, is adamant that it is government delays which have led to the cost increase.

We hope a solution to the problem can be rapidly found, and the go-ahead can be given well before February 2023.

There are obvious lessons to be learnt from this debacle, which might benefit other railway reopening campaigns. Up-front funding commitments should be made and stuck to. And those who delay projects should bear responsibility for any cost increases.

■ **Dave Chillistone is a committee member of the Portishead Railway Group**

[www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org](http://www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org)

## Sevenside

### ■ ■ Stonehouse Bristol Road

Work to establish a strategic outline business case for reopening Stonehouse Bristol Road station has begun and will be completed in September by Stantec Consultancy. This is the result of a campaign launched in 2019 by Railfuture's Nigel Bray (who died in December) and Robert Crockford. Robert is keeping the flag flying and represents Railfuture on the steering group of stakeholders, which includes Stroud District Council. He said: "I will always be grateful

for the constructive help given by Nigel to get things moving in the right direction."

### ■ ■ Landslip line repair

The Gloucester-Lydney line which runs beside the river Severn will be closed from July to September for vital repairs. The line has suffered landslips caused by extreme weather damage to the cliff face from Purton to Awre.

**Sevenside branch contact:**  
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Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide



SUPER ACTIVE: Mike Breslin

## Railwatch pioneer Mike dies

Mike Breslin, who died in April, was the man who had a brainwave when rail campaigners were looking for a more inspiring name for the *Railway Development News* to match a more forward-looking image.

Responding to Mike's suggestion to replace the Railway Development Society magazine's "cumbersome name", the then editor John Barfield published the March 1985 issue with the name *Railwatch* which it still carries today.

*Railwatch* also carried a new Railway Development Society logo (below) designed by Lyndon Elias.



It was another 16 years – 2001 – before the Railway Development Society took on the new name of Railfuture, thanks to inspired work by Alix Stredwick and Kate Tudor-Pole, and a new logo designed by Phill Ruffell.

Railfuture North West reported the sad passing of Mike, its long-standing secretary and committee member. Mike died on 7 April after a short illness and after 10 years as branch secretary. He was an active member of the branch committee well before then.

The branch committee valued his methodical approach to organising meetings and correspondence with other organisations and he took on the role of freight officer to bring reports from the industry and give feedback. He was also liaison with the Merseyside local transport authorities, acting as Railfuture representative at many meetings as well as pursuing local issues in his home area. We will miss his input.

◆◆◆◆ Please remember Railfuture in your will: [www.railfuture.org.uk/legacies](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/legacies)

## Alloa pays tribute to reopening hero

The Scottish town of Alloa paid tribute in March to rail campaigner Martin Cook who played a key role in Clackmannanshire – relinking his community with the railway network 14 years ago. Martin died aged 69 in February.

Fellow Alloa community councillor Cameron Little said: "Martin was a true campaigner who made a big difference.

"We have lost a committed, enthusiastic and much valued community councillor. He played an important part in the successful public campaign to have Alloa reconnected to the national rail network in 2008."

Alloa was without passenger trains for 44 years and many people

campaigned to have it reinstated, but the political will was lacking. Cameron Little responded when Clackmannanshire Council began to show interest.

He said: "I did not know what to do to organise a campaign but help was at hand. Martin was elected vice-chair and I became secretary of the Campaign for Passenger Trains to Alloa.

"Local newspaper, the *Wee County News*, used 'Back on Track' as its strapline for promoting the rail scheme and competition between the local papers ensured that the Alloa Advertiser gave us additional publicity."

Cameron added: "We were inspired by the successful campaign to save



TEAM ALLOA: Martin Cook, left, and Cameron Little on reopening day in May 2008

the Settle and Carlisle Railway. It took longer than we thought and cost much more than we hoped. However, from now and for years to come, its true value will be realised by the communities of Alloa and the surrounding area. It is rewarding to see so many people actually using the service."

## Farewell to Halton Curve campaigner Cedric

Cedric Green, who was a crucial campaigner in reopening the Chester-Liverpool via Halton Curve route for regular passenger services, has died aged 88.

Cedric, 88, from the North Cheshire Rail User Group died on 19 March peacefully after a short illness.

North Cheshire Rail Users Group said they were deeply saddened to announce that their secretary and member for many years, had died.

Cedric devoted many years of his retirement to supporting the work of NCRUG and was hugely instrumental in the campaign for the reopening of the Halton Curve.

This stretch of railway provides invaluable links for the residents of Helsby and Frodsham between North Wales, Chester and Liverpool. Many of the new journey opportunities were previously impossible.

Cedric successfully ensured that there was parliamentary lobbying, funding and support from the train operating companies and Network



Cedric Green and Helsby Junction signalbox

## Railcard and fares reform are now urgent

By Neil Middleton  
[neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk)

I took advantage of the *Great British Rail Sale* in April and May. I bought five tickets in the sale, for journeys I probably would not have made normally.

But, as is too often the case, the longer distance ones were complicated to purchase. I was able to use my knowledge of the rail network and the fares system to identify opportunities to split my tickets, as most, but not all of the sale tickets seemed to be single operator offers.

I am also left wondering how many people did not realise there was a bargain there for their journey – a great shame as many more people could have tried the railway. It is most important that fares are simple, understandable and convenient,

which they are not with the current structure.

Will we ever actually see some meaningful simplification? One April newspaper headline read: "Airport passengers bamboozled by Thameslink ticket machines".

The rail fares system is a complex beast and that is being generous to it.

Products such as the Travelcard are still needed for now until more people are prepared to set up their phones, for instance, for pay-as-you-go systems – and the railway provides that option.

Some of the worst examples of split fares can be found on the routes CrossCountry Trains inherited. It is also urgent that the new national ticket website needs to be working as quickly as possible. We know it is

something Great British Railways wants.

The website needs to sell every ticket type, problems converting the currently paper-only tickets to onlineneed to be overcome.

The debate about single-leg pricing needs to involve larger sectors of the public. Railfuture has provided lots of ideas with our discussion paper, available at [www.railfuture.org.uk/article1884](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1884).

One of the most effective ways to encourage rail use of course is to introduce a national railcard for all, similar to Germany's BahnCard and as set out in the conclusions to Railfuture's 2003 national railcard research, produced by The Railway Consultancy Ltd.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/National+Rail+Card](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/National+Rail+Card)

# A bright new future for the railways – or a false dawn?

By IAN BROWN

At its worst point, Covid resulted in a 95% drop in rail passenger numbers.

Any business making a comeback from that disaster will try to look to a bright future and there are promising signs. For instance, freight on rail improved its lot.

There is, however, quite a difference between a new dawn and a false dawn. Railfuture must therefore ensure that hesitant steps forward do not turn out to be a false dawn.

There are major reasons to be positive, although in many areas the key will be to judge how delivery matches the many promises that have been made.

One thing we now know is that the expression “Northern Powerhouse Rail” has turned out to be stupid spin.

But the big question is whether passengers will come back to rail to ensure its future success.

In early May passenger levels had climbed back to 70% of pre-Covid levels. The government must be given credit for providing the funds to prop up quite a reasonable level of service during Covid.

It has also quietly abolished the former franchise system, replacing it with direct contracts for service, so removing revenue risk from the equation for train operators.

This of course was the principal reason for privatisation in the first place.

Passengers were switching to rail in ever growing numbers before the pandemic.

The ones returning now see rail as competitive and relevant to the journeys they want to make. Where the price and the service are relevant to their needs, this trend is likely to continue.

## Fares

All Railfuture members would agree that the national fares structure is a mess, as it was before Covid. It probably suited franchised train operators, and the system may well have played some part in increasing the number of rail passengers by making some rail journeys more attractive than the competition. But the pattern of demand is changing, with potential passengers having more options – including staying at home for at least some of the working week.

The rail fare system must respond to the trends of this changing world, although while the hybrid work option is possible for office workers, it is not so easy for those in the service, hospitality, maintenance or manufacturing industries. These essential journeys



**BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD?** The view from Thurston, Suffolk, on a line already well used by both passenger and freight trains but with the potential for much more traffic if the route was upgraded

are often made by road, with rail concentrating on office commuting to towns and cities.

There is an opportunity if rail can be seen as part of a properly integrated transport product, not just a commute to a city centre point.

The London Overground is a good example of this, with trains generally now full all day.

A major reason is that people can make contactless journeys by all modes with a capped fare.

This will be a problem for other cities without radial rail routes unless mitigated by a proper fares and service integration. Rail needs to integrate with light rail and the currently unregulated buses.

So we need a transport, rather than simply a rail solution in our big cities, including an end to deregulation of the buses.

It works perfectly well in London, which has excellent bus services. The cry that deregulation brings a better, more competitive service, does not pass the reality test.

Even the move to meeting at an office two or three days a week is producing an opportunity for rail.

People are more aware of the opportunities to live better or cheaper, even if it means travelling further, but less often.

A recent journey from Manchester to London on a very busy early morning revealed a train full of people on laptops making a work journey, probably on a two or three-day week basis.

The fares structure must be able to attract people to do this rather than the old regime of exploiting the business traveller market where people could rely on travelling expenses.

This was the argument for very high peak fares and it has gone, possibly for ever.

## The service

An attractive train service has to be there too. Peak frequencies on commuter routes will find their own level to meet demand. However, in some areas the operator is failing to create the conditions for a comeback because it is not providing a credible peak hour service. In some cases people are deterred from returning because of an inadequate service or overcrowded trains. Northern's

Manchester-Buxton service provides only a single evening peak all-stations train, even in its May 2022 timetable.

Across Britain, importantly in Scotland and Wales, service levels have been restored to an acceptable level in the May timetable.

Northern, however, continues to make Covid-attributed reductions in May, at a time when other operators are improving services. This does not say much for the decision-making regime responsible for rail services in northern England.

Another annoying little trend is that there are still operators who are prepared to take short-term decisions under the cover of Covid.

One example is withdrawing through leisure services that are costly to operate.

South Western Railway has withdrawn its London to Salisbury and Bristol service.

Great Western has done likewise with Bristol to Brighton.

Both are important leisure routes. I cannot say I am impressed by such behaviour.

## Big projects

Getting fares and service levels right is a big step towards making the transition to the post-Covid world. If however, we are to see our railways play their part in the wider economic, social inclusion and environmental objectives of the country, we need to see massive growth, hence Railfuture's campaign for a further doubling of passenger and freight business over the next few years. The capacity slack has been taken up, so it is essential we see big

**We Mean Green.**  
A single train  
removes up  
to 500 cars  
off our roads.  
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**500  
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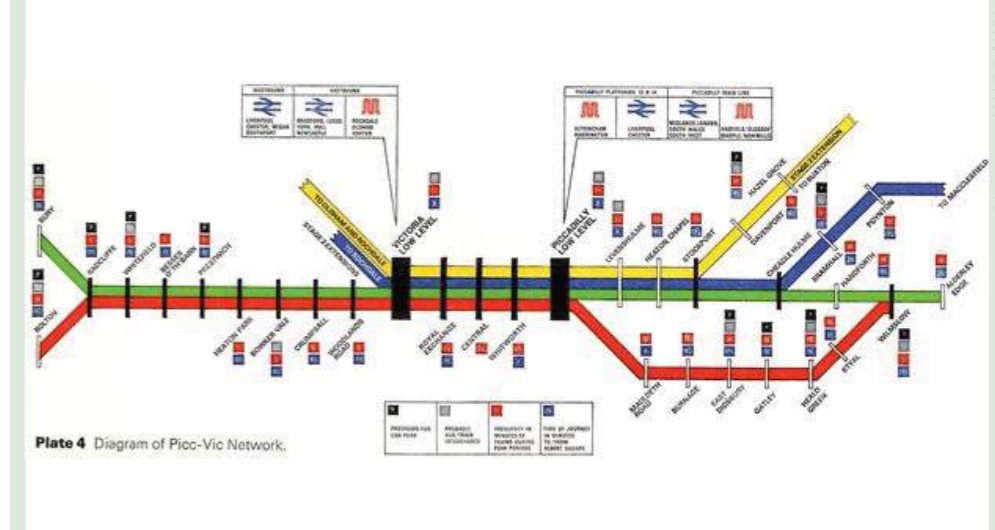
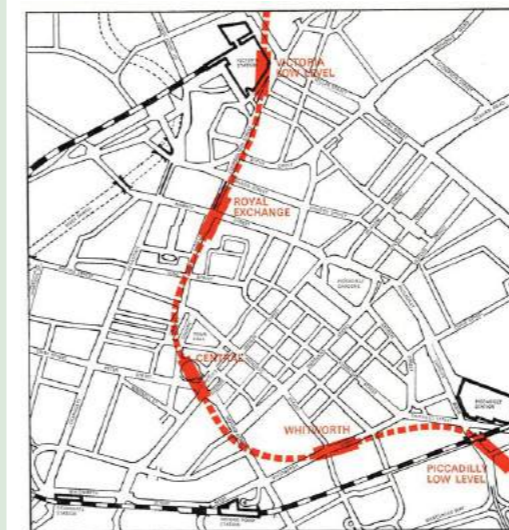


Plate 4 Diagram of Picc-Vic Network.

**A CHANCE TO ADVANCE:** An earlier plan for a Crossrail-style project in Manchester that received parliamentary approval in 1972, only for the Westminster government to refuse the required funding. The plan would have involved a tunnel from Manchester Piccadilly to Manchester Victoria. Sadly the saga of the Picc-Vic tunnel seems to follow the pattern with other Mancunian infrastructure projects. An ambitious vision is proposed for the North and much-needed investment is promised, only for funding to be pulled away by Whitehall which cannot see the long-term value but can expertly add up the cost of the initial investment

projects, including a continuous supply chain capable of delivering them. A railway that is 70% of its former self does not stack up economically.

Railfuture must continue to campaign for sustained delivery of the Integrated Transport Plan which was announced in November last year

We need to see speedy delivery of the revised HS2 eastern leg to Sheffield and Leeds via East Midlands Parkway station.

Also crucial is the upgrade of the route from Manchester to Standedge tunnel near Marsden, West Yorkshire. That important cross-Pennine line must also be properly integrated at both Manchester Piccadilly and at Leeds. Railfuture has shown it has the credibility to make a difference. But the job is far from done, with the possibility of more delays if politicians see too many opportunities for “reviews”.

Of course our long-standing campaign for a continuous programme of electrification will not only improve rail's credentials, it would also unlock the key to growth and future economic operation of passenger and freight trains.

We now have 6,045 kilometres of electrified railway, which is 37.9% of the country's railways.

It is a lot but cannot challenge France which has 15,687 kilometres – 55% of its network. Germany has even more – 20,000 kilometres, 61% of its network.

We already have examples to show the benefits of big rail projects. With all big infrastructure projects, all we seem to see and hear about is the effect on stately homes,



**FUTURE PROOFING:** The new Stadler heavy freight electric locomotive for GB Railfreight – with a backup diesel engine

construction disruption and cost escalation.

These are gleefully amplified in the media which show less interest in concentrating on the positive.

Job creation and longer term benefits including to the environment do not seem to get fair coverage.

The result is that many projects are watered down, usually at the point when they are getting into their stride.

Only when the project is completed is there a realisation of the enormous benefits.

It happened with the late over-budget delivery of the Jubilee line in London, which is accepted and hailed as a fantastic commercial success. It is even a victim of its success, becoming seriously overcrowded, even post-Covid.

Opening the central section of Crossrail from Abbey Wood through Canary Wharf, the City, Central London and Paddington on 24 May is one of those exemplars, after all this time. It is a true game changer. A genuine new dawn for

advocates of investment in rail projects in our cities.

We need bold Crossrail type thinking for all our cities, not just London.

The recent announcement by GB Railfreight to acquire 30 heavy freight bimode locomotives is a serious demonstration that a new dawn, certainly with freight, might indeed happen.

## Leisure potential

My article in *Railwatch* 171 looked at whether our railways are responding to a renewed emphasis on leisure, for instance access to our national parks. The article contrasted the situation in Toronto, Canada, where a similar trend has occurred.

The operator there, GO has introduced leisure trains using commuter rolling stock to Niagara Falls, a complete contrast to the dismal access to our most visited (by road) Peak District National Park. If rail is to be relevant in the future we must see good rail service and fares to our leisure

destinations including holiday resorts and national parks. This suggests a need for flexible service levels timed to meet potential demand with an emphasis on weekends.

## Great British Railways

Will Great British Railways help? It could, provided the new structure is actively managed in a way to create a new dawn, not spin.

The rail industry is too expensive and the trade unions seem to be bent on ensuring it remains so. Conversely the Treasury must not be allowed to see Great British Railways as solely designed to reduce costs by cutbacks as apart from efficiency.

The new dawn would be a railway that is responsive to customers and stakeholders, providing an integrated transport product that people want to use.

Freight operators have proved, during Covid, that they are up for this. Now is the time for leadership right across the rail industry.

## Railfuture's role

We have repositioned Railfuture as a source of informed dialogue and campaigning at branch and group level. Our views are being heard and even sought after by industry players and stakeholders, who welcome independent but constructive, if critical at times, input.

There has never been a better time to join in this dialogue with a view to ensuring that the New Dawn for our railways is not a False Dawn. Let's go for it.

■ Ian Brown CBE is Railfuture's policy director

# Turning point for the railway

By Ann Hindley

Railfuture's annual conference will take place on Thursday 15 September 2022 at St George's Centre, Leeds.

The venue is within walking distance of Leeds Station and the conference is aimed not just at members but also at the general public who may be concerned about the future of the railways.

The programme aims to combine updating comment on the Integrated Rail Plan and development of Great British Railways, with an underlying theme of inclusion and diversity, recognising that it is only by widening the customer base of the railways that they will develop and thrive.

Speakers include Phil Smart, representing the Rail Freight Group.

Invitations have been sent to Susan Hinchcliffe of Transport for the North and Bradford City Council, to speak about the Integrated Rail Plan.

Suzanne Donnelly of Great British Railways is invited to end the day as keynote listener, so that she can take feedback to those working to shape the new structure. Earlier in the day, we

have presentations and video from Karen Bennett, community rail education officer for Community Rail Lancashire, on engaging young people in railways from a number of perspectives.

This is followed after lunch by a presentation of workshops given by Nick Flynn and Abby Taylor of the Campaign for Family Friendly Trains, an organisation addressing the current difficulties of using the railways when accompanied by babies and small children, another market the railways are in danger of losing if their needs are not addressed.

To bring all this together, Dr Manuel Ofeda Cabrel, senior research fellow in Transport, Economics and Appraisal at the University of Leeds, has agreed to speak on the value of new railway lines and stations.

The conference planning group is working to get all this confirmed, and would urge members to book early as space will be limited and the conference is being advertised to a wider audience:

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

The cost will be £50 per person, including lunch. Enquiries about the conference: email [conferences@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:conferences@railfuture.org.uk)

## Railfuture AGM Bristol 16 July

By Neil Middleton

[neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk)

Railfuture's AGM is on Saturday 16 July with doors opening at 1030 for an 1100 start. It is planned to finish by 1530. The venue at St Michael's Church Centre is five minutes walk from Bristol Parkway station, the first park and ride station in the UK, which opened in 1972. The AGM will give us a chance to celebrate successes as we

have our 8th Awards for Rail User Groups, to recognise and reward local volunteers who come together and work tirelessly to improve their local railway. A grand total of 36 nominations were made by the closing date, across all six categories, and received from 15 groups plus seven for individual campaigners, across 11 of Railfuture's 14 branches.

That is a great response and has built on those already received in 2020 before pandemic restrictions forced a suspension of activities. Those nominations were carried forward into 2022. The judging panel of Railfuture vice-presidents has been out

Can you help Railfuture Severnside survive?

**Railfuture's Severnside branch is holding its AGM at the same venue and on the same date. Existing and prospective Severnside members are welcome to join from 1000. Members will need to stand for committee roles to ensure the branch can continue.**

and about meeting as many groups and individuals as possible.

Presentations will be made to award winners by Railfuture president Christian Wolmar. Some of the winners will be making short presentations about the activities behind their awards.

We will also have the usual governance updates in the morning, and presentations from RUG winners in the afternoon.

More information about proxy voting and attendance arrangements at: [www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences)

### Railfuture Lottery winners

**February** C Martindale, G Smith, J Barfield, S Boulding, C Wright, G Wood

**March** R Peters, M Yates, T Davies, G Smith, W Thorne, J Ward

**April** A McFie, B Buttigieg, A Colquhoun, M Kneen, T Sherwood, R White.

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

## Railfuture Campaigner of the Year 2022 award

Nominations for Railfuture Campaigner of the Year 2022 are being welcomed, but the deadline is very close – Friday 17 June 2022. The award will be presented at the Railfuture AGM in Bristol on Saturday 16 July 2022.

Do you know someone who has contributed to the success of Railfuture or someone who has raised the profile of Railfuture? Perhaps they work behind the scenes, helping their local branch? If you think they deserve recognition we want to hear about them.

Send a written statement of up to 500 words, identifying how the nominee has contributed to Railfuture's mission to be number one advocate for rail users and the rail industry, and

how they have enhanced Railfuture's campaigning for a bigger, better railway.

■ Nominations may be made by any Railfuture member

■ All Railfuture members are eligible to be nominated

■ You may nominate yourself

■ The nominee must be a member of Railfuture

■ The deadline for nominations to be received is Friday 17 June 2022

For further details or to submit a nomination email Membership Director Wendy Thorne.

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

## Thames Valley

[martin.smith@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:martin.smith@railfuture.org.uk)

### ■ ■ Government-inflicted misery

Required by the Department for Transport to cut costs, CrossCountry has not restored the pre-pandemic service levels. Instead of a basic half-hourly service between Birmingham and Reading, with alternate trains extended to Bournemouth, we now have only the basic hourly service to Bournemouth, with some trains cut short at Southampton. Even in this basic service there are two-hour gaps, and one three-hour gap on Saturdays, when there would usually be a lot of holiday and sports traffic. At some times it would be quicker to go from Wolverhampton to Oxford, for example, via Galton Bridge, Snow Hill and Banbury. This level of service is totally unacceptable. We appreciate that the Government has spent billions on subsidising the railways through the pandemic, but the objective should be to increase revenue from more traffic, not simply by cutting costs.

### ■ ■ Electric boost for Greenford line

The Chiltern Railways "parliamentary" service to West Ealing has been reduced to once a week. However, Railfuture welcomes the proposal to use the West Ealing-Greenford line for an experimental battery-electric service with a unit from Vivarail. Rapid re-charging equipment will be installed at West Ealing station. In the current timetable trains have a turnaround time of three minutes at each end, but with the better performance of electric trains, it may be possible to shave a few seconds from station times. If the experiment is successful, battery-electric trains or railcars would be ideal for short branch lines such as the Thames Valley lines, where there is insufficient traffic to justify overhead line electrification. Some battery-power enthusiasts imagine that batteries could be used for high-speed passenger trains and freight trains, and even for jumbo jets, but the tonnage of heavy batteries to be carted around would make battery power uneconomic.

### ■ ■ Ready for new station at Green Park

Work is well in hand for opening Reading Green Park station in the summer. Extra minutes have already been inserted in the timing of Reading-Basingstoke trains in the summer timetable to allow for the additional stop at Green Park. It has been suggested that for publicity purposes, the Reading-Basingstoke service should be given a distinctive name. The "Loddon Line" has been proposed, but if anyone has a better idea, Great Western would probably be glad to consider it.

### ■ ■ Bus connection needed for Chippy

Railfuture has always campaigned for integrated rail-bus services, but Great Western says that it has no money to support a connecting bus service between Chipping Norton, Kingham and Charlbury. Over the years, connecting services have come and gone. To be successful it is necessary for buses to connect with every train, to be shown in the rail timetable, and to have a guarantee of permanence.

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## FREIGHT BELONGS ON RAIL

# Solution to missing electric links

A breakthrough solution to the problem of electrifying rail freight depots was unveiled in March.

Retractable overhead gantries have been developed to allow electric locos to operate in depots where cranes are used to load trains from above.

It avoids the danger of cranes coming into contact with the 25kv power lines.

Engineers from Furrer + Frey GB designed a "moveable overhead conductor" system which allows the power lines to move away once the train is in place – and to swing back when the train needs to move again.

The system is being trialled at a Tarmac aggregate depot next to the Midland main line at Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, in partnership with GB Railfreight.

It clears the way for all-electric freight trips, which reduce delays to passenger trains because electric freight trains are faster and more efficient than diesels.

The project is funded by the Department for Transport and Innovate UK to tackle the problem of diesel locos being needed in freight depots. In theory it could be used at other freight terminals in Britain.

It could become a key component in decarbonising the railway.

Rail Minister Wendy Morton, who attended the launch, said: "Making rail freight even more environmentally friendly helps us leap forward in our plans to build back greener and make the whole UK network carbon zero by 2050."

Noel Dolphin of Furrer+Frey GB said: "The electrification of freight terminals is the biggest technological hurdle to net zero rail freight and we have just overcome it."

"We can plug freight yards into electrified rail lines and operate them safely and efficiently with the locomotives we already have."

Tarmac's Chris Swan said: "Decarbonising transport has been highlighted as one of the key areas in which we can help achieve net zero across the construction industry."

John Smith of GB Railfreight said: "Rail freight is already a greener alternative to moving goods by road, but innovations like the moveable overhead conductor system, and electrification more broadly, will allow us to go even further."

Rail freight is already much greener than moving goods by road. Lorries emit nine times the emissions of rail freight per tonne kilometre. Shifting goods from roads to the railways is an important pillar of the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan.

Seamless electrification for freight could begin to see slower, more polluting diesel trains being phased out. In 2018 the Government challenged the rail industry to remove all diesel-only trains from the network by 2040 as part of a drive to achieving the UK's ambitious net zero goals, as well as to help improve air quality and reduce noise pollution.

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



**MOVEABLE:** The 25kv power supply is retracted to allow cranes space to load trains

## The best place for cars: On trains!

An international freight service using the Channel Tunnel was launched in February taking Toyota cars from Britain to France, after four years of work and a £2.6 million investment.

DB Cargo UK and Groupe CAT are using a new railhead at Toton to transport cars to distributors in Valenciennes, northern France.

Each train carries 260 hybrid Corolla cars twice a week, exported from Toyota UK's factory at Burnaston, and on the return journey Toyota imports Aygo cars made in the Czech Republic and Yaris cars made in France. The transfer used to take five days by road, but takes 24 hours by train and reduces carbon emissions by 2,300 tonnes every year.

## Mae trenau nwyddau'n creu Cymru wyrddach \*

Regular freight trains carrying Welsh timber could be set to return after a successful trial run in May.

Ten wagons of unfinished timber left Aberystwyth, pulled by a pair of class 37 locomotives owned by Network Rail, on route to Chirk's Kronospan factory.

The trial opens up the possibility of removing hundreds of large lorries from the rural roads of central Wales.

Replacing multiple heavy lorry movements with a single heavy train makes sense in any language and in Aberystwyth many people speak Welsh.

Jess Lippett of Network Rail said: "We provide a fast, green, safe and efficient way of transporting goods."

Simon Metcalf of Colas Rail said: "This venture combines minimal road transport to the strategic railfreight hub in Aberystwyth.

"These new services are the first commercial freight trains to operate over the Cambrian rail route for more than 25 years – aside from one journey in the early 2000s – and combine route specific traction with state-of-the-art European Rail Traffic Management Signalling. Both Colas Rail and Kronospan



**INTEGRATED?** Cars on trains

At Toton, the £2.6 million investment created a new vehicle storage compound, along with loading and unloading facilities and 800 metres of new track.

The cars are taken from the Toyota factory at Burnaston 15 miles by road to Toton.



**Timber from the forests of Ceredigion and Powys was loaded at Aberystwyth for the Kronospan plant in Chirk, north Wales**

continue to strive to reduce carbon dioxide emissions across their business portfolio."

■ In another trial, Network Rail and Colas Rail ran a 320-tonne timber train from Hackney Yard near Newton Abbot to Pontrilas Timber in Abergavenny. Network Rail strengthened a bridge at Hackney Yard to allow 44 tonne lorries to gain access.

\* Freight trains make Wales look greener







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■ ■ Sunderland £16.3m revamp

This May sees the much-needed start of the reconstruction of Sunderland's station, first mentioned in *Railwatch* in the autumn of last year. Its first stage is the construction of a new glass wrap-round southern entrance, to be completed by 2024. It will enclose a new ticket office, public toilets (non-existent in the present building for many years), retail space, cafés, and comfortable waiting areas. This project is the first part of a six-year plan to provide more platforms and tracks so that Nexus and Metro services are separate from main-line services, as well as to revamp the station's northern entrance leading to Sunderland's Central Business District on High Street West. Finance has come from the government's "transforming cities" fund, as well as Nexus, Northern and Grand Central, plus Sunderland city council itself.

Yes, there will be considerable disruption for some time, but the end result should be a vast improvement on the present inadequacies of the rather gloomy two-platform set-up that has had to serve Sunderland city's 200,000+ inhabitants for so long.

■ ■ Hartlepool progress

2023 will see Hartlepool hosting the Tall Ships races once again, this time between 6 and 9 July. Work continues on restoring the presently disused second platform to cater for extra rail traffic that this should attract. A footbridge will be installed, and lift facilities provided for the first time in the station's history. Welcome though these additions are in most circumstances, Coastliners members hope that, wherever possible, the single-platform approach to running trains will prevail, as (despite apparent operational limitation) this saves most passengers, coming through the station's only entrances from having to climb up and down from one side to the other.

■ ■ Expansion at Eaglescliffe

Enhancement of this station is now, thanks to a recent £8.5million grant, going ahead. It will provide a larger car park, better access – including lifts for the first time – and an additional entrance, from Durham Lane Industrial Park, on the west side of the station.

■ ■ Trial for dual-fuel trains

One of Grand Central's class 180 trains is being prepared for a six-month trial, running on a combination of liquid natural gas and conventional diesel fuel. More of the fleet will be converted if the trial goes well. There are no signs of any fresh rolling-stock yet. Given the vast mileage that it runs under

the wires, even a token supply of bi-modal units would further improve the good service provided on its Sunderland and Bradford routes.

■ ■ Teesside Airport contraction

Bad weather during the winter has caused so much damage to its platforms that, at least for now, the station is too dangerous to accommodate its one passenger service each week, so is in effect closed.

■ ■ Unexpected changes

Grand Central has introduced a sixth weekday Sunderland-London service (and a fifth on Sundays). However, the rebuilding programme at Sunderland is going to throw up occasional anomalies, when Metro services between Pelaw, Sunderland and South Hylton are suspended, usually at weekends. This happened three times during May and is booked to occur again in mid-October. The anomalies arise because Northern Rail trains terminate at Hartlepool, with buses going on, "all-stations", northwards to Sunderland taking 50 minutes compared to 29 minutes by train. Grand Central's services from London, however, run on from Hartlepool as empty stock as far as Seaham. Here they wait for a short time before returning, equally empty, to Hartlepool and their next load. Grand Central also provides replacement buses, this time non-stop to Sunderland and back. But at Sunderland it has not always been easy for southbound passengers to find which bus – Grand Central or Northern – they should join.

As the Sunderland rebuilding programme is expected to last, on and off, for four years or more, Railfuture members are asking both operators whether a more passenger-friendly course would be to extend every train seven miles to Horden with passengers aboard, linked by one set of replacement buses for all users. The interchange facilities at the recently opened Horden station are more convenient than Hartlepool.

■ ■ Middlesbrough upgrade

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen welcomed the completed extension of Middlesbrough's platform 2. LNER is expected to increase the number of London-Middlesbrough trains to six each way daily, although not before the December timetable changes. As some of these trains are expected to be nine or ten car formations, the platforms and headshunts at Middlesbrough are already prepared for them.

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■ ■ Thanks to leader Ariadne

At the Railfuture East Midlands AGM on 2 April in Derby, Ariadne Tampion stood down after five years as chair. She was thanked for her hard work and active leadership, which has given new vigour to branch activities. She remains on the branch committee, with responsibility for outreach initiatives and contact with the media. Phil Thomas was elected new chair. Another long-standing committee member, Graham Nalty, also stood down but intends to remain active in rail campaigning.

The AGM was followed by an open meeting at which Network Rail's Gavin Crook explained Midland main line electrification. He began by talking about the work currently in progress: first, the power supply upgrade south of Bedford to allow six trains per hour at speeds up to 125mph, and second, the electrification between Kettering and Market Harborough and the new power supply sub-station at Braybrooke, which is expected to be finished by September this year. He then spoke about future electrification up to Nottingham and Sheffield (but not the Erewash Valley line, which may become more important after H52 is built to East Midlands Parkway). After discussing the strategic policy context for the project, in particular decarbonisation, he detailed the many structural interventions that would be needed along the line. He also talked about recent changes in processes and culture at Network Rail, which would ensure that this and other projects would be delivered on time and at affordable cost, as had been the case for the electrification to Corby.

■ ■ Rail freight campaign  
For years, much of the public has professed a desire to reduce the number of heavy lorries on our roads. Rail freight offers the simplest and most cost-effective method of reducing carbon output and diesel particulates, particularly as more freight routes are electrified. It is our intention to campaign vigorously for freight route improvements. Planners need to provide for rail freight links to warehouses and factories.

■ ■ Historic station restoration  
Network Rail has started the long-promised work to restore the leaking Victorian glass canopies and roof at historic Great Malvern station (pictured below).

Hopefully no longer will rain drip down one's neck while at the ticket office. The wrought-iron columns and floral capitals will also be restored.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/West Midlands Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/West Midlands Branch)

■ ■ Midlands strategy  
Midlands Connect launched its strategic transport plan *Greener, Fairer, Stronger* at its annual conference on 28 March. Among projects listed as priorities for investment in the next 10-15 years, those of particular interest to Railfuture in the East Midlands are providing direct services between Coventry and Leicester, and journey time improvements on the Birmingham-Nottingham, Birmingham-Leicester and Nottingham-Lincoln routes.

■ ■ Derwent Valley line

Railfuture East Midlands is concerned about the termination of Nottingham to Matlock services at Derby, where onward connections are often poor. This has caused considerable disquiet in the Derwent Valley: two public meetings have been held in Belper, hosted by mayor John Porter, where several people have explained the difficulties that the service cuts have caused them.



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

New Commonwealth Games signs at Birmingham New Street

colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ New stations for Camp Hill

Contracts have been placed with construction firm VolkerFitzpatrick to build three new railway stations this year on the Camp Hill line in south Birmingham. It is part of the £61 million scheme to reintroduce passenger services to Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell for the first time in 80 years.

■ ■ Network Rail plays the game

Railfuture West Midlands has been involved in talks about the detailed planning for the Commonwealth Games, which has involved each venue programme being examined to quantify the expected number of spectators for each event by arrival and departure times.

An additional million passengers are anticipated as the event tickets include access to public transport in the area on the day.

Perry Barr station is adjacent to the athletics stadium and is where the opening and closing ceremonies will take place. It is almost finished. University station's new booking hall will not be completed until the autumn, but platforms have been enhanced and the pedestrian bridge is in place over the canal links to Birmingham University campus, another games venue.

While stations serving Villa Park are used to handling large crowds, stations serving other games venues are not, so integrated transport hub plans have been developed for Sutton Coldfield, Rugeley Town, Smethwick Galton Bridge and Langley Green to cope with any surges in numbers.

■ ■ Fingers crossed

The Metro tram service has for the third time in the last half of 2021 been closed because of problems with the CAF-built trams, whose door frames have now cracked. New units from the factory are

arriving but not in sufficient numbers to run even a minimal service. CAF is under great pressure to resolve the issue, not only in time for the Commonwealth Games but because the same problem has occurred in Australia and other countries. Meanwhile the extension of the line to Edgbaston is under test and the transport interchange at Dudley Town is being constructed.

■ ■ Delays to new trains

Despite being ordered from the CAF train factory in Spain in 2017, there are still challenges to put the class 196 Civity diesel trains into service even though they have been delivered to Britain. Originally it was expected by the Department for Transport that passenger doors would be controlled by the train driver. Now the trains are having to be modified to allow guard-operated panels to be installed.

The CAF trains will replace Derby-built class 170 Turbostars on Birmingham-Hereford and Birmingham-Shrewsbury trains. The displaced 170 trains will transfer to East Midlands Railway.

The Derby-built Alstom class 730 Aventra electric trains are also delayed with software issues, so existing 30-year-old class 323s remain in service on the Cross-City line from Redditch and Bromsgrove to Lichfield.

■ ■ Midlands connectivity

Railfuture West and East Midlands have begun a process to ensure inter-regional liaison and joint campaigning on issues of common interest, including joint discussions with Midlands Connect transport planning organisation. An initial meeting was held on 18 January to agree scope for common campaigns, and a number of route-specific working groups are being set up to plan and implement appropriate campaigns. As a



◆◆◆ Recruit for Railfuture

There have also been 9,000 signatures on a petition. The change to the timetable is blamed on staffing and rolling-stock problems, although it appears that even if EMR wanted to restart the through service it might be prevented by the Department for Transport, which has doubts about the financial viability of a fourth hourly Nottingham-Derby service. Railfuture's Ian Clark and Steve Jones joined a meeting with EMR, organised by Friends of the Derwent Valley Line, to discuss the problems, and Ian has put forward a proposal for a revised timetable which would ensure good connections at Derby if the through service is not restored.

■ ■ Ivanhoe reopening bid

Prompted by Bruce Wakley of Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line, MP Andrew Bridgen (NW Leics) asked in parliament about progress on CRIL's Restoring Your Railway bid. Transport minister Wendy Morton said that a decision on the next tranche is anticipated later this year.

■ ■ Rail stations needed

Railfuture East Midlands has responded to North West Leicestershire Council's draft local plan. There are currently no railway

stations within the district, so Railfuture urged the council to support reopening the Ivanhoe line with stations at Coalville and Ashby de la Zouch, and also the line through Castle Donington, which has seen major housing expansion in recent years. This freight line could help to provide fast Birmingham-Nottingham services. Railfuture also questioned the sustainability of a proposed housing development south of East Midlands Airport, remote from any public transport corridor (bus or train).

■ ■ Bridge replacement

The heritage Great Central Railway has agreed a £1 million deal to replace its bridge over the A60 road at Loughborough in the autumn. This will be important for the GCR's reunification project, but also because British Gypsum may be able to resume using rail for deliveries from its Rushcliffe plasterboard factory, using the Loughborough spur to the Midland main line. The new bridge will also give more headroom for the road, which should reduce the number of lorries striking it.

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# INVEST IN RAIL campaign launched in the North

You cannot level up the north of England without investing in rail. That was the clear message from Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, when a new *Invest in Rail* campaign was launched in Manchester in May.

Train driver Julie Clegg chaired the launch meeting and introduced a video message from Louise Haigh, shadow transport secretary, who said there was a clear need for faster and cheaper public transport.

But the government is currently demanding 10% cuts in rail spending which “will take us back to the days of managed decline and an unreliable service”.

The economic benefits of investing in rail are obvious, she said. Labour says that for every £1 invested in rail, there is an £8.50 benefit to the economy, while the government works on a benefit figure of £2.50 for every £1.

Train drivers’ union ASLEF, which is also the driving force in the campaign, plans to contact every MP asking them what their constituents want and need to create a safe, green, affordable railway.

General secretary Mick Whelan said the government could follow the example of Ireland, which is cutting fares by 20% to attract people back to rail.

He said Great British Railways is predicted to be unresponsive to passengers or the community.

The *Invest* campaign is backed by Steve Rotheram, metro mayor of the Liverpool city region.

“Investing in rail is very important for the Liverpool city region so we can connect people with the opportunities for jobs that exist”, he said.

“We are buying our own trains, which are the most accessible in the country, but we want more transport integration. Liverpool cannot accept a second-class transport system. Our people are not second-class citizens.”

Liverpool has a net zero target of 2040, 10 years earlier than the government’s, and to achieve that the city wants the same levels of subsidy that the south of England already gets.

Mr Burnham joined in: “Invest in rail? Yes, yes, yes, a million times over. The first option for people cannot be the car. Good public transport is the basis for a successful economy.”

He added: “Currently the rail industry is letting down the city of Manchester. It is not the workers who are to blame. It is the decision makers at the Department for Transport and the rail companies. In 2018, we



Pictures: RAILWATCH

**HEROES ON THE FRONT LINE:** The two Ahmeds who staff the gateline at Salford Central station. They have to deal with angry passengers who blame them when things go wrong. Ahmed (left) is from Somalia, while Ahmed (right) remembers travelling by train with his Ethiopian grandfather, who worked on the old metre-gauge Djibouti to Addis Ababa line. A new 470-mile-long Chinese-built standard gauge railway has been built roughly parallel to the original line and since 2018 has provided landlocked Ethiopia with access to the sea. It carries passengers and six million tonnes of freight annually, but has the capacity to handle 24 million tonnes

were promised more frequent trains. Where are they? Instead they have whittled down the timetable without coming up with a real answer to the congestion in Manchester especially along the Castlefield corridor. But they have come up with every excuse you can imagine.”

It is a particular challenge getting around Manchester by rail at the weekend.

“I paid £8.50 to get from Newton-le-Willows on the train today for a 20-minute journey,” he said “That’s far more than people in London pay.”

He said people did not believe him when he said the price of a walk-up anytime return to London is £369.

He added: “People just do not believe it but it is true. Can anyone justify that fare for a 400-mile



journey? Train tickets now cost more than air tickets, and the rail industry is not seen to be serving the public properly.” Mr Burnham drew

attention to the fact that many parts of the railway are not accessible to everyone and highlighted Salford Central station where passengers have to “leap” off the train.

There is now a plan for improving access at Salford Central “after five years of talking to Network Rail”.

Network Rail may own the stations but the DfT controls the money to make them accessible.

“This city is growing with bright new buildings going up all

around, especially near Salford Central, but the rail industry’s offering is embarrassing,” he said. He also drew attention to the “poor” state of Oxford Road

station. He said there are 98 rail stations in Manchester and half of them are not fully accessible. The existing railway is “open for some people but not for everyone”.

“It is not acceptable. I speak for the people with mobility challenges and for young people who want to travel to get a job.

“We need to take control of our stations so we can make them look decent and accessible to our residents.”

Investment is crucial. Mr Burnham added: “Manchester Piccadilly station could be the beating heart of a resurgent north of England with a high-level platform for Northern, HS2 on the next level, with the Metro below that.

“But the government wants to build the wrong station on one level and with inevitable train reversals – merely to save money.

“The current service is not good enough in any way. In Manchester, the tram is the best part of our transport network because we have control of it.”

Mr Burnham added: “The mantra that privatisation will solve our transport problems has been disproved totally.

“The government’s railway bill is an opportunity for us to argue for nationalisation.”

Answering a question about privatisation, Mr Rotheram said: “Most sensible people see the sense of rail nationalisation. Until it comes nationally, we want to renationalise locally.

“If the government will not invest to improve our stations, we can and will do it.

“Our new trains cost £0.5 billion so I do not want to see people with their feet on the seats. I want to change the culture and make people understand they are part owners of the trains.

“If we were landlords of the stations, we would be able to borrow money to improve them and build new ones.”

## Pass it on

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11 May 2022  
Departure  
“information”



**MANCHESTER OXFORD ROAD:**  
11 May 2022  
Two of four