

railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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HS2 Ltd

Birmingham's high speed rail future is taking shape See page 2

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Birmingham builds back

PAGE ONE PICTURE

Birmingham is at the centre of Britain's high speed rail revolution, with work on two major new stations under way.

The Birmingham terminus for HS2 trains is being built just a short distance away from where the Conservative party is holding its party conference in October.

Railfuture West Midlands has organised an official fringe meeting for the conference, to discuss the future arrangements of Great British Railways and the issues it will need to address from its outset, especially its relationship with sub-national and English regional transport bodies.

The Railfuture meeting will be held on Monday 3 October starting at 18.00 (doors open 17.45) in Birmingham Council House in Victoria Square.

Participants include Andy Bagnall (chief executive Rail Partners and former director general of Rail Delivery Group), Malcolm Holmes (chief executive West Midlands Rail Executive and director of rail for Transport for West Midlands) and Denise Wetton (central route director, Network Rail).

The new transport secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, or her rail minister, and Huw Merriman, chair of the Commons transport committee, have also been invited.

Railfuture members and associates are welcome. The event is free but tickets (limited number) must be obtained through EventBrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/great-british-rail-future-tickets-416102101587>

The party conference takes place from 2 to 5 October at the International Conference

Centre, within walking distance of New Street and Moor Street stations. At Curzon Street, HS2 work is well under way with plans for the original 1838 Robert Stephenson station building to be renovated and included in the overall design for the new HS2 station.

Curzon Street station will be net zero carbon in operation, and will include rainwater capture and more than 2,800 square metres of solar panels in its platform canopies.

In a 30-year project, Birmingham City Council will spend £724 million to regenerate the area around the station, which will eventually have 18 trains per hour.

A tram line will run alongside and underneath the station and there will be space for 250 bicycles, with the option to add a further 300.

The station has the potential to add £14 billion to the regional economy.

The £370 million contract has also been signed to build HS2's second station in the Birmingham area, the Interchange near the existing International station.

The Interchange station will be linked to International station and Birmingham Airport via an automated people mover, but will be served by HS2 trains heading north to serve Stoke, Crewe, Liverpool, Carlisle, Manchester, Motherwell and Glasgow.

Hitachi and Alstom are building the eight-car HS2 trains at Newton Aycliffe, Derby and Crewe, as part of a £2 billion build-and-maintain contract. The eight-car trains will operate between London and Birmingham and elsewhere on the rail network, enhancing connectivity and capacity.

London-Birmingham journey time will be cut to 52 minutes from the current 81 minutes.

better to be UK high speed rail centre



BIRMINGHAM INTERCHANGE STATION: Construction work has begun on the new £370 million HS2 station. It will open in 2026. The station will serve the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham Airport and Solihull

Manchester rejects cut-price HS2 Piccadilly

HS2 is preparing to start work on the next leg of the high speed route from Crewe to Manchester, with an opening date of 2036.

But its plans for a "cut-price" HS2 station at Manchester are seriously flawed and not logical, according to Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester for the past five years, who wants a three-level interchange station.

The overground turnback design proposed by HS2 will severely limit the number of trains. Instead HS2 should have an underground through station allowing for widescale regeneration on the surface.

HS2's current plans are for a new six-platform overground terminus next to the existing Manchester Piccadilly station.

Critics say a one-mile-long concrete viaduct taking northern powerhouse trains into the overground station (from Ardwick), would create blight and sever Metrolink connections. Manchester City Council leader Bev Craig said: "It is true that an underground station would cost more initially. But over the years it would deliver enormously more economic and social benefits, not just for Manchester but Greater Manchester and the north of England as a whole.

"If HS2 is not done properly, we will be counting the costs for many decades to come. No other European city would start by building rail infrastructure on concrete stilts. It is an outdated



OVERGROUND: HS2 plans to build the high speed station next to existing Piccadilly



UNDERGROUND: A station on the same alignment leaves the surface for regeneration

notion of urban planning, more reminiscent of the 1970s than what we want to see in 2040.

"You would not see a scheme like this proposed in London, or another city in the south east. So why should Manchester have to deal with something that is substandard from day one and that does not deliver on the rail opportunities that HS2 gives?"

Andy Burnham said: "The current HS2 proposals provide the wrong solution for Manchester Piccadilly. It takes away Manchester City Council's aspirations to have economic growth around the station."

Modelling commissioned by the council and Transport for Greater Manchester (the Bechtel report) has shown that an overground station would immediately be at full capacity.

The parliamentary bill to authorise HS2 from Crewe to Manchester had its second reading in June and is now at the

committee stage in the House of Commons. It may take years before it becomes law. Building an underground station was dismissed by former rail minister Wendy Morton because it would cost a "crazy amount of money" – £5 billion – and would delay HS2 by more than seven years.

However, AREP director Alistair Lenczner said: "The Manchester underground HS2 station solution is similar to the proposed HS2 station at Old Oak Common, which has a budget of around £1 billion. The underground station at Manchester Piccadilly is therefore likely to cost around £1 billion, rather than £5 billion."

A turn-back terminus station would allow only 40% to 50% trains per hour, compared to a through station. The *Manchester Evening News* launched a campaign calling on the government not to botch one of the most important transport

projects ever to be built in the north of England by doing it on the cheap, but HS2 Ltd says an underground station could take 13 years longer to build.

One critic said: "Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds will be royally screwed if an above-ground shed is built in Manchester. A simple look at the figures shows the madness of not building underground."

Analysis suggests that by 2050 the economic benefits to the city and wider region of the underground option would be £333 million a year greater than the overground plan.

Journeys between Manchester Piccadilly and London Euston will take one hour 11 minutes on HS2, 54 minutes quicker than today's fastest time by rail.

HS2 plans to build a high speed station for Manchester Airport have been ridiculed because passengers will need to switch to a shuttle bus for the airport.

Truss pledge on northern powerhouse rail

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

There is now a new transport secretary – Anne-Marie Trevelyan – under the leadership of Liz Truss.

Transport, let alone the railways, hardly figured in the fierce Conservative hustings, which focussed on what seemed like rather unrealistic promises of tax cuts combined with extra spending.

At one hustings, Ms Truss did commit to reinstating the commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail linking Hull with Liverpool which was scaled back earlier this year by Grant Shapps, Ms Trevelyan's predecessor at Great Minster House.

Ms Truss did not explain how she would pay for the extra £30 billion this would cost, merely suggesting that the formula for allocating central government money needed to be changed to support the North. It was, too, rather revealing that the particular hustings was held in Leeds. She might well have said something different in Tunbridge Wells. Of

course, it will be difficult to hold Ms Truss to account for everything she said during the hustings.

At one point at another event, for example, she was asked about abolishing the national speed limit and she replied that this was something that she would consider. I am convinced this will not happen. Nor will the weird suggestion from Shapps, who seemed to be pitching to keep his job, that bicycles should be registered and carry a number plate. The *Daily Mail* even splashed on this, but it must be remembered that the suggestion – and indeed the whole Tory hustings debate – took place in August when real news stories are scarce.

Nevertheless, Ms Truss's commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail should not be forgotten. This is an opportunity

for campaigners to press their case even though the time scale is rather lengthy, stretching to 2040.

The lack of any other statement of intent from the new prime minister can also be viewed as an opportunity to lobby for our cause.

The new transport secretary may well not know an enormous amount about transport or, specifically, the railways. There is much uncertainty about the immediate future. We do not even know whether the legislation for Great British Railways will be introduced in Parliament in the coming session. Moreover, it is unclear whether anyone will

want to take over the new contracts for operating what were once franchises. The hasty departure of Abellio from the fray, leaving their routes in the hands of a management buy-out team

which seemed to have been asked to take on the role in a sort of "offer you can't refuse" situation, suggests that there may be other departures of the large players.

The terrible state of the Avanti West Coast operation is another area of concern. It is 70% owned by FirstGroup, whose future is also uncertain given it was the subject of a £1.2 billion offer from a private equity group in June.

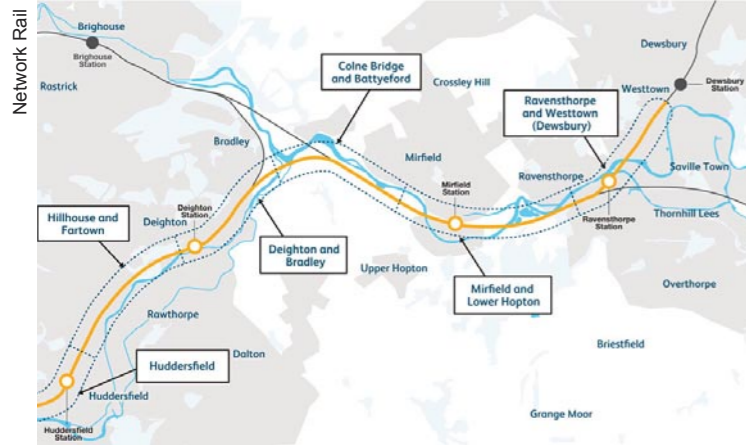
Add to this all the unanswered questions about how the new system under Great British Railways will operate (perhaps dropping the Great would be a start!) and the incoming transport secretary will have a lot on her plate.

As I suggested, however, this is also an opportunity. Well-informed comment and advice from the likes of Railfuture may well be welcomed, especially if it is, as much as possible, couched in non-political terms.

We are living in uncertain times and a transport secretary may well clutch at any straws offered to them in order to wade through the complex world of tracks and trains.



Christian Wolmar



Huddersfield to Dewsbury breakthrough

Rail campaigners welcomed the approval in July of a major rail upgrade in West Yorkshire as a “massive step forward towards delivering a railway fit for the 21st century across the north of England”.

The government approved a Transport and Works Act Order that will enable Network Rail to improve rail services between Huddersfield and Westtown (Dewsbury) as part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade.

The number of tracks will be doubled from two to four and there will be upgraded stations at Huddersfield, Deighton and Mirfield and a new station at Ravensthorpe. A flyover near Ravensthorpe will separate the lines running to and from Wakefield from those to and from Leeds.

Chris Nutton, major projects director for TransPennine Express, said: “The upgrade will not only improve connectivity for the communities that we serve, but also boost the economies of the towns and cities along the Transpennine route, providing greener, faster and more reliable services across the Pennines.”

Tony Baxter of Northern Trains, said: “This is a significant milestone and a huge vote of confidence for the ambitious plans which will benefit Northern customers.”

Rethink urged on Integrated Rail Plan

A thorough reassessment of the government’s Integrated Rail Plan is essential to ensure this once-in-a-generation investment in rail is not a missed opportunity to address regional imbalances, said the Commons transport committee in July. Railfuture is urging the government to accept the committee’s findings.

The committee calls for a full analysis of the wider economic impacts, and a full benefit-cost ratio for the different Northern Powerhouse Rail options. If other options offer better value, the government must grasp the nettle and make the necessary changes. It wants an updated benefit-cost ratio for the entire HS2 project, including a direct comparison between the original plan and the revised eastern leg, which cuts HS2 short at East Midlands Parkway. Otherwise, the original purpose of Northern Powerhouse Rail to connect the great cities of the north is at risk. Chair Huw Merriman said: “Many towns and cities are already disappointed by the proposals which have been set out. The business case of HS2 was based on it going east to Leeds. Now, it stops in the East Midlands without any understanding of how much money is saved.” *The Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands* says that alternative options, which could transform stations and city centres, have not been properly tested.

Sheffield-Chesterfield ‘old route’ reopening wins backing

Network Rail and local councils are pushing ahead with talks to reopen the Barrow Hill line between Sheffield and Chesterfield (the original North Midland Railway route), following the outline business case being approved for the next stage of the Department for Transport’s Reopening Your Railway process. The outline plan sees passenger trains returning to the freight line and four new stations at Whittington, Staveley/Barrow Hill, Eckington/Renishaw, and Killamarsh.

Former transport chief Kim welcomed to Railfuture

Kim Groves, until recently chair of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Transport Committee, joined Railfuture earlier this year, and has been co-opted on to the Railfuture Yorkshire branch committee. Railfuture Yorkshire chair Nina Smith said: “Kim will be a great asset to Railfuture in Yorkshire and beyond.”

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

Can Eurostar soar or will it shrink into a red dwarf?

By IAN BROWN

Could we be forgiven for believing the publicity from Eurostar advocating the benefits of its March merger with Thalys?

In May, service expansion was promised serving four countries from Britain with a map clearly showing routes to Germany, as well as Disneyland Paris, Ebbsfleet and Ashford.

Has Eurostar changed its mind or was this just public relations hype for the merger, to be forgotten about within three months?

Recent developments may suggest the latter is closer to reality with cutbacks seemingly the order of the day.

By August, it was announced that the direct service to Disneyland Paris, which had run for 27 years, will be axed next year.

Eurostar also said it would not be serving Ebbsfleet and Ashford International stations in Kent for the next “two to three years”.

It is easy to write off Eurostar’s new management team as dullards, not aware of the opportunities surrounding them. Most, if not all, business strategies are based on longer term growth, preferably in a growing market.

Short-term cutbacks are common, but only as a prelude to putting a business in shape for the longer term future.

From Eurostar’s perspective and its new governance (merged with Thalys but still majority owned by SNCF), its approach may seem perfectly rational.

Eurostar nearly closed down during Covid and Britain’s Department for Transport showed nil interest in the implications. Presumably there



Ready for a Euro rail future: St Pancras to Frankfurt signs were on the DB ICE train

are financial consequences, resulting in an imperative for the management team to concentrate on the core, restrict capacity, increase revenue and close down all frills, including service promises.

In the short term, this is logical, but as a medium-term strategy in a growing market it is not sustainable.

Eurostar has not helped matters by making what should be a valid argument of getting operational quality right as a reason for closing down the Eurostar service to Disneyland Paris in May next year.

Additionally, to blame lack of prospects on the new European Union electronic entry system (which comes in later in 2023) is downright daft.

There is no evidence that the US electronic “visa” system for travel authorisation is dampening post-Covid demand for Disneyland USA. This is



2010: It was a nice, sustainable idea for a while but it never happened. DB brought its ICE high speed train to St Pancras, complete with Union Jack logo and to rapturous interest, confidently predicting regular services between London, Köln and Frankfurt would be operating by 2013

nothing to do with Brexit or its consequences. The other issue is closing down service from Kent which has a population of 1.6 million. Publicly funded Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International will stay closed to international traffic for the foreseeable future.

These stops were part of the service plan for Channel Tunnel rail services when the legislation was being taken through Parliament.

So too were direct trains to the continent from north and west of London, both day and night. All now conveniently forgotten.

The financing to build the Channel Tunnel was designed so that all Britain, including Kent, should benefit.

Both politically and economically, the situation is now completely different. Eurostar is run by a French-based commercial company with no accountability to the British government.

It appears to have little interest in serving anywhere in Britain other than London. No amount of bleating from Kent is likely to get anywhere, unless money can be found to persuade Eurostar to serve commercially marginal stops.

So what of the future?

We can safely predict that Eurostar will continue to develop London to Paris and Amsterdam routes, resources permitting, and no doubt it will market “connections” at Lille and Brussels.

My view is that these connections are all but useless except for the resolute traveller. More specifically the market will not develop to destinations other



2012: SNCF brought its high speed postal TGV to St Pancras, with the expectation that postal trains would be running between Lyon and London by 2017. Again, it never happened

than Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris. This would probably not matter to a commercial company with the two largest travel markets in Europe (London-Paris and London-Amsterdam).

However, it does matter to Railfuture as our brief is to see rail develop its wider economic, social and environmental potential. Sadly it looks as if Railfuture’s objectives will not be delivered by Eurostar.

Eurostar can be expected to improve its financial performance on the two key routes even if it faces increasing competition from airlines.

But Eurostar Group is not subject to the normal world of market forces, because it is majority owned by SNCF, the French state railway.

Ironically SNCF is subject to both market forces in France and to significant government direction. In France SNCF has introduced competitive services

such as Ouigo, owned by the same company. This strategy develops the market while keeping out other operators – a bit like Stagecoach and Magic Bus competing on the Oxford Road in Manchester.

This is a perfectly viable strategy, but Eurostar is very unlikely to use it on cross-channel routes where exploiting a monopoly looks like the preferred choice.

Railfuture’s campaign strategy

All this suggests that Railfuture needs to rethink its previous strategy of encouraging Eurostar to develop and broaden its services.

We should think of Eurostar as a two-line operator providing services to Paris and Amsterdam from London only. This is a valuable service, if incomplete. Let them get on with it. We must continue to argue for credible connections and fares from the rest of Britain which can only help Eurostar in the market



Map of the new Eurostar network issued in May showing the supposed benefits of the merger with Thalys

Perfect platform for a rail education

By William Whiting

Community rail is a growing grassroots movement made up of 72 community rail partnerships across Britain. The community rail network is sponsored by the Department for Transport and helps people get the most from their railways by promoting social inclusion and sustainable travel. The aim of community rail partnerships is to look beyond the station as a way of engaging communities.

In 2021, an opportunity arose for funding to be provided by both Great Western Railway and CrossCountry Trains to four CRPs working in partnership to develop their education provision. The CRPs are Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Severnside and TransWilts, so covering a large area stretching from north Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and to Westbury. As chair of Worcestershire CRP, I was involved in the initial consultations and discussions.

The key pillars of the DfT's community rail strategy are:

- Providing a voice for the community
- Promoting healthy and sustainable travel
- Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion
- Supporting social and economic development

Community rail education has already been delivered in several CRPs so when a feasibility study was carried out by an external body, an understanding was gained as to what this might look like in practice. In particular, East Lancashire has been providing this for eight years and the CRP's community rail education officer was able to give valuable insight.

The recruitment process to appoint two education officers and a part-time administrative assistant was completed in October 2021. They started work in January 2022 and a substantial part of the first three months was spent on familiarity with the areas, mentoring by two other CRPs and developing a website of resources for schools to access.

The delivery of this scheme could not have come at a better time for schools as most outdoor activities were severely curtailed during the pandemic with online learning being delivered to pupils. Furthermore, many children have no experience of travelling on a train. GWR, West Midlands Trains and Transport for Wales are offering free travel for school trips under this



Children from Gloucester on their awayday trip to Worcester which was a lesson in sustainability, linked to their normal curriculum work. Parents' permission was obtained for photography



Railway safety information was suitable for a train journey

scheme as we do not want schools to pay for this or the delivery of curriculum activities.

I was given the opportunity to accompany a group of Year 3 children from a primary school in Gloucester to Worcester Foregate Street station and then to undertake some activities in the Worcester Civic Society hub which has been provided free of charge. I met the platform team and the pupils outside Gloucester station. Before the trip, pupils had attended a workshop about railway safety and consideration of passengers on the train. So before boarding the train, children were asked to recap what they had learnt the previous day. We then boarded

the train for a 40-minute journey to Worcester Foregate Street and walked through the city centre to the civic society hub to start some activities in groups, starting with the theme of "sustainability". As an example, the children were given an activity, asking them to name the good and bad things about various modes of transport and to explain why. Importantly, all the activities were linked to the curriculum.

After lunch, the children travelled back on the train to Gloucester and were each given a railway safety book.

The scheme is also intended to provide information to schools about careers in the railway industry for secondary school students. We are also working with special schools to help pupils become confident about using the train when they attend college. We want to make young people confident about rail travel.

Our work does not stop in the school holidays. The government is providing funding to local authorities in respect of its holiday activities and food

programme which supports socially disadvantaged children during the school holidays. One of the aims of the programme is to enable children to be active during the school holidays and this is an area where our scheme could meet a need.

The joint education scheme is hosted by Severnside CRP and it is the employer. A joint steering group comprising representatives from the four CRPs oversees the project and meets once a month. I believe a key to the success of the project has been the collaboration between the four CRPs and the diversity of experience that can bring.

In conclusion, I have seen for myself how a group of children experienced being out of the classroom and how they were learning about sustainability. One of the key aims of the scheme is to enable young people to make better choices about sustainable travel and hopefully become future rail passengers.

■ William Whiting is chair of Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership and a Railfuture member

£200,000 space on station for schools

An unused space in Sleaford station, Lincolnshire, has been revamped to create a community room which can be used by local schools and groups. The £200,000 project was funded by East Midlands Railway, the Rail Heritage Trust, CrossCountry Trains and the Poacher Line Community Rail Partnership.

London loves its new east west railway

By Roger Blake

London's equivalent of East West Rail is proving popular with rail travellers in south-east England.

Twenty years after tunnelling started on Crossrail – now known as the Elizabeth line – trains are running but with the promise of much better things to come.

Central London's much-delayed Bond Street station opens this month, and in November trains from Abbey Wood (in the east) will start running beyond Paddington to Heathrow airport and Reading (in the west).

Trains from Paddington will also start running to Shenfield, just beyond the eastern boundary of the London travelcard zone.

Frequencies between Paddington and Liverpool Street will rise to 22 trains per hour in the weekday peaks. It will be 24 by next May, with through running from Shenfield extended beyond Paddington to Heathrow and Reading.

Railfuture has learnt many lessons from its long campaign for Crossrail – a name which emerged in the 1974 London Rail Study report. That's nearly 50 years ago!

Railfuture's current struggle is to ensure that East West Rail is built in its entirety from Oxford to

Cambridge and beyond. (See separate article on back page). Crossrail took years to create a new railway and the government's Restoring Your Railway scheme is also an exceptionally slow process.

An update on the programme was issued in June. Nine of the original 38 "ideas fund" winners were awarded a further £15 million for scheme development.

The update identified 23 "ideas fund" winners of Department for Transport funding which allows them to produce their strategic outline business cases.

A further 13 schemes that already have business cases are receiving further support.

Following the Dartmoor line, the Northumberland line will be the next well-publicised scheme in England, being chased hard in Scotland by Levenmouth. There are six schemes "in delivery", dependent on the new stations



Elizabeth line Liverpool Street station

fund. On the negative side, eight "ideas fund" winners that produced their business cases have been terminated short of their intended destination. Eight advanced proposals were considered for funding but did

not qualify. Undaunted, rail campaigners will press on to achieve their ambitions. Both the Windrush line in Oxfordshire and a new Welborne station in Hampshire are on the verge of commissioning business cases.

A group in Oxfordshire has renewed the campaign for a station at Grove/Wantage Road, and the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign in northern Devon strides ever forward.

Railfuture has learnt more lessons from the RYR process. While the here-and-now railway scene is undoubtedly extremely challenging, the seasoned and successful gold award-winning campaigners who spoke after the national Railfuture AGM in Bristol have a clear message.

Expanding the market for travel by rail by extending the network of lines and stations is unavoidably a long game in which clarity of vision and collaboration are absolute essentials.

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national infrastructure and networks and freight groups on the Railfuture website. Search for campaigns or Restoring+Your+Railway

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

By Richard Lysons

The title of Oliver Densham's book is pleasingly unambiguous. It reminds me of when nationalised industries had straightforward names – British Steel, British Waterways, National Coal Board and so on!

In his modest introduction, Densham admits that he has ignored the advice that this book – his first, incidentally – is too wide a topic.

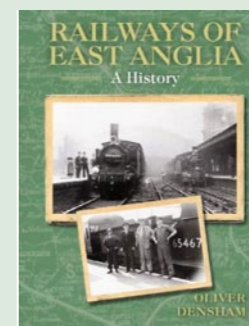
However, this overview of the railways of the four counties of East Anglia is, as the author hopes, both a "worthy" and "entertaining" read. Densham hails from Suffolk and works as an architectural draughtsman. Both of these facts contribute to the enjoyment of the book. Densham clearly has local knowledge (this reviewer has a "Google detector") and the author includes some of his own drawings and maps. The whole book is very attractively laid out and Densham avoids this reviewer's bete noir – endless fading photographs of the age of steam!

The author admits from the start that the railways of East

Fascinating for any tourist

Anglia have a long and complex history, and the book is providing a broad overview of the subject. It is to Densham's credit that the book is accessible and of interest to this reviewer living in the north-west of England.

The inclusion of contemporary maps, railway posters and even cartoons brings the past to life. As always, the contrast between the spaghetti-like network of a century ago and the current scene is both fascinating and slightly depressing. The historical narrative from horse tramroads to modern-day East Anglia is told well in a punchy and readable account. There are separate chapters on the Eastern Counties Railway, the Eastern Union Railway, the



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www.crowood.com

Great Eastern Railway, the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway and the L&NER. Thankfully, Densham keeps these complex histories understandable. Inevitably, the next chapter is called Nationalisation. The author's map of the region's railways after 1970 shows the effects of the Beeching bombshell and the extent of the closures. Chapter 8 is titled the Modern-Day Railway in East Anglia and is, arguably, the most relevant to Railwatch readers and rail campaigners. In less than a dozen pages, Densham summarises privatisation and includes sensitive accounts of the appalling Hatfield and Potters Bar tragedies of 2000 and 2002

respectively. He even gives a page and a half to the controversial Cambridge guided busway. The Norfolk Orbital Project is succinctly explained in half a page.

The Heritage Railways chapter concludes this fascinating book. The author has already mentioned the Southwold Railway Trust (and his association with it) in the delightfully named chapter Oddities and Independents, but generously gives space to the other groups in East Anglia in the heritage railway sector. It would make sense for tourist information centres and bookshops in the region to stock this book.

I enjoyed this book. I was impressed by the author's skill in summarising such a huge amount of information into a fascinating 160 pages.

I imagine that his guided tours of the Southwold Railway will benefit from a similar approach.

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

Keep it simple

Rail development should be all about cost-effective reopening of lines and stations, with the aim of increasing public transport choices rather than as an alternative to wasteful private transport.

I believe London Crossrail was extravagant, with an eye on winning architectural awards rather than encouraging efficient movement of people.

Building cheap and improving over time is wiser. One example is the Glasgow Subway, built in the 1890s as a cable railway, electrified with a third rail in the 1930s, improved in the 1970s and now with new trains being introduced.

There is also much talk of modern ticketing, but one simple and obvious improvement would be to introduce a national railcard.

James A Whitworth, Old School, Burravoe, Yell, Shetland ZE2 9BA

The fight goes on

Ian Brown mentions GWR's withdrawal of the Bristol to Brighton service in *Railwatch* 172. Readers might not be aware that GWR have made other significant cuts, notably to the Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury services.

When electrification of the West of England line was announced in 2009 the Department for Transport funded it only as far as Newbury. The Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group launched a long and involved campaign to prevent Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury's direct Paddington trains being axed in favour of a diesel shuttle service to Newbury. We won this campaign and, in December 2019, we had the best ever service – half-hourly direct bimode class 800 trains to Paddington in the morning peak and with hourly for the rest of the day, plus some additional diesel connecting services at Newbury for the evening peak.

During the pandemic and cracks appearing in the new trains, we lost a large number of these services. However, after much campaigning we built these back up and were looking forward to a full reinstatement of service from May 2022.

However, in March the DfT instructed GWR to save costs and, in consequence, GWR announced that our hourly off-peak services would, from May 2022, become diesel shuttle services to Newbury, with the class 800s being supposedly redeployed on the Cardiff to Penzance routes.

This left Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury with a largely unchanged morning peak but the evening



Glasgow plans driverless Subway trains

Glasgow's Subway operator is expecting its new trains (above) will run with no staff on board from 2025.

The open-plan Stadler trains have been test running since April and will start carrying passengers next year.

The introduction of the trains is already three years late, partly because signalling is also

being upgraded. Operator Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is planning to install platform screen doors at the Subway's 15 stations, as on London's new Elizabeth line.

The union Unite was planning to ballot Subway workers after the introduction of new rosters upset their work-life balance. Strikes were one of the options.

peak reduced to just two direct trains from Paddington. The proposed off-peak connections at Newbury were awful, up to one hour in a number of cases. With only one diesel shuttle train allocated to Bedwyn, it is almost impossible to form a timetable which connects hourly with trains running east of Newbury. However, we fought hard and achieved many of the improvements we requested, including the reinstatement of the 19.07 direct train from Paddington.

GWR promised to improve the problem of missed connections at Newbury – always a source of complaint – to make the off-peak a viable service. However, as we suspected, there are frequent delays and missed connections.

If Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn were on a branch line it would be workable. However, with no west-facing bay at Newbury the diesel shuttle gets frequently moved to sidings east of Newbury to allow platform space for West of England trains and the Newbury to Paddington class 387 trains. Additionally the Bedwyn shuttle service is always the third

consideration for being held to connect with late arrivals between Newbury and Paddington – freight and West of England services being given the priority.

The Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group continues to fight for a full restoration of our hourly off-peak services to Paddington.

*Steve Smith, Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group
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Bikes on/off trains

I read with interest the letter in *Railwatch* 172 from Tom Culver about the cycle provision that used to exist when passenger trains had a guard's van. I totally agree with the points he makes.

Cycling at either end of a train journey is an essential element in encouraging green travel but factoring in taking a bicycle on a train in this country is stressful and unpredictable. You cannot expect people to plan a journey with train and bike, only to find there is no capacity. Nor can you expect people to have to book limited spaces for bikes, especially as part

of a regular commute.

Many services ban, limit or discourage bikes instead of making provision for something that might increase custom, benefit society and provide a useful service. I have seen people refused access to trains when they were hoping to travel with a bike.

And what happens when you are booked on to a connecting service with your bike, miss the connection, and the "meathooks" on the next service are taken, or the cubby hole is stuffed with luggage or previously booked bikes?

Sadly, in this country due consideration was not given to the problem as we moved away from rakes of coaches to trainsets.

In contrast, it is normal in many countries for trains to have sufficient cycle space for anyone to turn up in the reasonable expectation of being able to carry their bicycle without fuss, as if it was a natural thing rather than some inconvenience.

If we are serious about attracting rail customers and encouraging

green travel then we really should move towards a situation where there is sufficient capacity on most trains for anyone to make a journey consisting of bike/train/bike. Railfuture should do more to highlight this point.

*John Hanahoe, Denbighshire
jhanahoe@aol.com*

Hydrogen advocate

Electrification keeps on rolling along, says *Railwatch* 172. But it has its limitations for lines with a low traffic flow because of the huge expense, especially on the many lines with 19th century low bridges and tunnels that have to be rebuilt.

The overhead catenary wires are also vulnerable to flying objects, falling trees and extreme weather. Around 40% of our railways is not electrified and Network Rail has a target to remove all diesel electric trains by 2040.

There is a much easier, less expensive and quicker alternative that does not require huge capital outlays, which is to retrofit existing diesel multiple units one by one, replacing the diesel-electric generator with a fuel cell powered by hydrogen that just produces water.

If the train is a bimode, the pantograph can use electric power from the overhead wires where they exist, to recharge the batteries and extend the range, especially useful for cross-country trains.

*David Dundas, Lichfield
david.dundas1@gmail.com*

Paper timetables

SP Vince is right (*Railwatch* 172) in stating that the lack of paper timetables acts as a disincentive to travel.

Two of us representing local users' associations made this point firmly to Greater Anglia management in April and we are pleased to report that agreements were reached for community rail partnerships on the Wherry, Bittern and East Suffolk lines to publish their own very attractive paper timetables.

Another local association, Felixstowe Travelwatch, has also published a timetable leaflet for local train and bus services because certain bus operators have also dragged their feet in producing printed material. As a result of our efforts, easily accessible timetables have been made available for local people and visitors this summer.

This sets a useful precedent, but surely it should also be a requirement on all train operators

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



Adrian Shooter and his bust which was unveiled at Marylebone station on 30 August

Station statue of rail hero

A statue of Railfuture vice-president Adrian Shooter was unveiled at London's Marylebone station in August to mark his contribution to the railway over 50 years.

Mr Shooter CBE was one of the few heroes of privatisation, making a spectacular success of Chiltern Railways after leading the management buyout.

He was Chiltern Railways founder – and managing director from 1994 to 2011. He was described as a "legend" by former transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin.

His inspirational leadership led to Chiltern's business trebling. He devised a method for infrastructure upgrades with the Evergreen programme, under which the line from London to Birmingham was restored to double track throughout.

Mr Shooter, who started his career with BR in 1970, created the new Oxford-Marylebone link, with Oxford Parkway opening in 2015. He was chairman of Vivarail which produced battery-

powered trains, introducing Britain's first diesel-battery hybrids for Transport for Wales.

Mr Shooter, who has motor neurone disease, said: "All I have ever done is create a vision and employ the best people.

Maldon alternative

I wholly agree with Roger Smith that Maldon needs a railway

powered trains, introducing Britain's first diesel-battery hybrids for Transport for Wales.

Mr Shooter, who has motor neurone disease, said: "All I have ever done is create a vision and employ the best people.

"I feel very honoured to be recognised by the industry in this way. However, I accept this honour only on the condition that it recognises the amazing efforts of the hundreds of railway men and women whom I have worked with."

Railfuture chair Chris Page sent Mr Shooter a personal message: "Great to see that Railfuture's Vice President will have a permanent presence at Marylebone station."

Mr Shooter was helping to prepare a message to new prime minister Liz Truss, highlighting the significant contribution the railway can make to the nation's future and the role of the private sector in doing so. He emphasised the need for costs and revenues to be managed in one place.

themselves, in the interests of inclusivity, to produce paper timetables and not rely solely on digital versions. Does Railfuture have a policy on this?

*Trevor Garrod, Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ
chairman@eastssuffolktravel.org.uk*

station. I feel however that the better option would be to reinstate the line to Maldon West from South Woodham Ferrers. Although this line closed to passengers from the outbreak of the Second World War, the route remains largely intact.

The site of West station is now under a bypass constructed this century, but the route is largely unobstructed up to an embankment which is still in place 100 metres or so south of the original station site.

The distance to London Liverpool Street would be much the same as to East station. The only real

obstruction to the route is some housing built on the trackbed at Cold Norton. A new line could avoid this with a relatively small detour from the old alignment.

The villages of Cold Norton and Latchingdon, a couple of miles east, are now home to London commuters who drive to South Woodham Ferrers or Farnbridge.

As a reinstatement prospect, Maldon West has a real future as a cheaper route than Maldon East to Witham.

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Manchester Tube

Ian Brown's article in *Railwatch* 172 is accompanied by a couple of diagrams relating to the 1972 proposal for an underground line connecting Piccadilly and Victoria stations in Manchester. Most articles in the railway press about the Castlefield corridor contain at least a brief reference to that proposal, with the impression often being given that that was the first attempt of that sort in the city. But there was one six decades earlier.

The January 1912 issue of the *Railway Magazine* reported: "Manchester is at last to have its own tube railway. With the characteristic enterprise of the city, a considerable proportion of the necessary capital required is already assured. The chief aim is to link up the chief railway stations in the central district." The line was to be a circle starting at Victoria, via Market Street to London Road (as Piccadilly station was then), then to Oxford Road where there was to be a branch to the university, on to Central and finally back to Victoria. A total of eight stations were planned.

My guess would be that the plans fell foul of the outbreak of war in 1914. The assassin of Sarajevo has a lot to answer for!

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Office closures

I want Railfuture to campaign against ticket office closures. Many people of my generation are unable to access online services to buy tickets and it would badly impact millions of elderly, disabled and disadvantaged passengers like myself who do not have computers or know anything about them. So I need all the support I can get from Railfuture.

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■ ■ Welcome for Alton line users

In the summer, Railfuture Wessex welcomed former members of the Alton Line Users' Association to its ranks. ALUA had decided to disband after representing rail users for almost 50 years and, in a very generous gesture, donated residual funds to Railfuture.

■ ■ Railfuture plea wins action

After pressing CrossCountry for many months to reinstate calls at both Winchester and Brockenhurst, it looks like Railfuture Wessex chair Mike Southgate has had some success. The regional manager has promised that all trains will once again call at Winchester from December and assured Mike that he will "keep nagging for resolution of other service issues" including the omitted Brockenhurst stops.

Railfuture Wessex continues to press for Island Line trains to be held to make the connection when the Portsmouth to Ryde FastCat runs late which, in some cases, can result in a two-hour wait at Ryde Pier Head. Of further concern is that passengers holding through rail tickets are now being segregated so that other travellers are given priority to board the FastCat which, again, can result in a two-hour wait for the ferry at Portsmouth Harbour. Wightlink has responded to our complaints, saying that rail passengers requiring a particular ferry should phone ahead to book on 0333 999 7333, but must arrive at least 15 minutes before the ferry is timed to depart. As the booked connection from London arrives between six and 13 mins before the ferry departs, this is not of any help to the majority of rail passengers.

■ ■ Rail is answer to road traffic

A major task over the summer months was to prepare Railfuture's response to Hampshire County Council's local transport plan, LTP4. An overall impression we had was that the council was severely challenged by projections of road congestion and pollution without fully considering the solutions offered by an expanded and fully electrified rail system.

At the end of our submission, Railfuture Wessex acknowledged that there are currently many threats facing Britain's railways, but there is also a multitude of opportunities for rail development in Hampshire which would support

many of the council's transport priorities. We suggested that they should consider employing a "railway tsar" to keep abreast of developments, fight Hampshire's corner and make sure that the South is not left behind.

■ ■ Waterside line progress

In July, Network Rail published its draft plans for the reintroduction of a passenger rail service on the Waterside line west of Southampton (formerly known as the Fawley branch), and we were pleasantly surprised that the document presented a forceful argument in favour of the project, without being hedged around by negativity. The scheme fell somewhat short of what campaigners had been calling for;



nevertheless we gave it our support in the hope that enhancements could follow later. To coincide with the project launch, the chair of the local Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership, Nick Farthing, presented an inspiring video in which local dignitaries and a handful of celebrities were invited to say in just a few words why the rail service would be a game changer for businesses, local people and visitors to the area. It is well worth watching. At the 2022 Rail User Group Awards ceremony in Bristol, Railfuture was pleased to present Nick, a former Railfuture Wessex chairman, with the Best Campaigner award, for his remarkable success in bringing the Waterside line project a major step towards fruition. Our summer newsletter, which you can read on the Wessex branch page of Railfuture's website, has further details on many of the items mentioned above, including links to Nick's video and various documents of interest. www.railfuture.org.uk/Wessex+branch [Twitter @RailfutureWessex](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWessex)



Metro Mayor Dan Norris and North Somerset Council leader Steve Bridger at Ashton Gate Stadium, the home of Bristol City football club, which could be served by the reopened line

£35m winning goal for Portishead

The Portishead-Bristol line could reopen in four years time, it is hoped, now that the final piece of funding has been secured for the line, which closed to passengers in 1964.

Leaders of the West of England Combined Authority agreed in late July to provide £10 million.

Metro Mayor Dan Norris, who leads the combined authority, said: "We can now conclude the final design work and then start the building and construction work in earnest."

"This is a really important project. It will provide fast links for people in south Bristol and across the city to Portishead and back."

Projected costs for the scheme rose earlier this year to £152 million, creating a crisis and a shortfall of £35 million.

The Department for Transport responded by providing £15.5 million, after North Somerset Council committed £10 million.

Although the money is now fixed,

the DfT still needs to approve the development consent order (with luck before February 2023) and the business case, expected in October 2023. There are still "possible minefields" ahead before the DfT can sign off the whole project, possibly in January 2024.

Construction could take two years, followed by testing and certification.

Portishead reopening is part of MetroWest phase 1, which was approved 10 years ago and will also see train services enhanced on the Severn Beach line and Bristol-Bath lines.

Ashton Gate station was briefly reopened in the 1970s to serve the football stadium and then again in 1984 to cope with the crowds who flocked to a series of Billy Graham missions.

Sevenside branch contact: sevenside@railfuture.org.uk www.railfuture.org.uk/SevensideBranch [Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide](https://twitter.com/RailfutureSevnSide)



There are no plans yet for a Clifton Bridge station and Ashton Gate station is not funded or even in the current plans. Bristol City Council has, however, sensibly 'quarantined' the site

How should rail tickets be sold?

By Neil Middleton

A regular news story is the threat to close railway ticket offices. Maybe we can look at the problem the other way round: How should rail tickets be sold?

The answer, of course, is how the customer wants to buy them. For most of us, that varies with the type of journey.

For my next journey to London from Hertfordshire, I will use a railway smart card – no queuing and guaranteed lowest price.

My most recent journey was long-distance and had to involve paper tickets as it crossed London (a story for another time) and I used a ticket splitting website to see if splits were cheaper (they were not). So I returned to a no-fee train operator's website to buy.

We all need a range of options to buy tickets, including:

- 1 From people – whether it is for advice, for preference or because it is essential.
- 2 Website and app-based purchases. There should be a choice of a printed ticket or one held on a device such as smartphone.
- 3 Ticket vending machine purchase, with printing to paper and possibly having app functionality.
- 4 Contactless cards (which includes railway smartcards) providing a pay-as-you-go service.

The railway needs to support all of these. I think the key test is that everyone should be able to buy a railway ticket.

David Harby, chair of Railfuture's Lincolnshire branch comments: "I know a very active 78-year-old who is out around the East Midlands nearly every day in summer watching cricket."

"Travelling by train with his cycle, he does not have either a mobile phone or any other IT. It is essential that people like him are not excluded from train travel."

The rail industry should not be insisting on a debit or credit card as the only available payment option. Cash needs to be supported, as it is the only choice available to some travellers.

There is talk of moving to a 100% online ticket sales process, but this will disenfranchise many, including some older people.

Thinking about it from the perspective of the customer:

- It needs to be easier to buy tickets online. A single website, as is planned for Great British Railways, should allow everyone to use it. Accessibility features

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



Increasing numbers of people on mainland Europe are switching to sleeper trains.

Austrian Federal Railways' Nightjet are leading the way because, as Austrian environment minister Leonore Gewessler says: "A journey with a Nightjet is 50 times more climate-friendly than making the same journey by plane." The latest generation of Nightjet trains include mini cabins for solo travellers as well as two-berth and four-berth compartments and will be

introduced next summer, with tickets between €50 and €100.

Germany's Greens, part of the coalition government since the end of last year, are supporting the plan for a joined-up European night train network, combining about 40 destinations such as Warsaw, Amsterdam, Vienna, Bordeaux, Munich, Barcelona and even London. The map above is their vision for the future.

must be included for the visually impaired and the neurodiverse. It must sell every ticket type, with an offer of the lowest price, including split tickets.

■ Ticket vending machines need to become more intuitive. The last time I used one (to buy an off-peak ticket), the machine insisted I chose a return time, even though it was a flexible ticket. I knew I could safely ignore that request. Others might not. Concierge staff should be available.

■ The process of simplifying fares needs to start. The myriad start times for off-peak tickets need simplifying.

■ The option to print an online ticket on paper must always be available, to support those who

do not have mobile internet. In time, using paper tickets can be optional. At the moment, one is usually required for cross-London journeys.

■ Contactless and pay as you go need to be rolled out everywhere, not restricted to London and the bigger cities, together with promises similar to that for direct debits so we can all feel confident about it when we might be spending £40 or £50 on our tickets for the day.

Ticket buying should not be seen merely as a cost to the railway. It is an opportunity to market the railway to potential passengers. There could be an introductory 50% discount, for example, for a first-time railway user. It is also important for rail companies to

remember that passengers value having staff at the station. Staff are needed not just for ticket selling but for features that encourage travel, such as open waiting rooms and toilets.

Many of us prefer to buy tickets online but persuading 100% of travellers to do so is fantasy.

■ Neil Middleton is a director of Railfuture

Railfuture Lottery winners
May M Savage, D Bailey, D Fleming, G Smith, D Peters, W Thorne.
June P Fox, D Peters, R McLean, A Colquhoun, G Smith (2).
July M Hanson, C Martindale, P Yates, A McFie, P Rabett, R White.
 Queries: lottery@railfuture.org.uk

How I spurned easyJet and took train and ferry from Athens to London



Freelance journalist Alex King spends more time than he would like on planes travelling all over Europe for work, although he prefers to travel by train. Sometimes, the train can fit the bill for him

Words and pictures By Alex King

Flying back and forth between London and Athens has become increasingly frustrating and hard to justify from an environmental perspective since I relocated to Greece four years ago.

I have long dreamed of bypassing the sterile and stressful airline experience by taking the train. But the time needed and cost involved have always been prohibitive.

When Interrail announced a 50% off deal on passes to celebrate their 15th anniversary in spring 2022, this felt like an opportunity I couldn't pass up. If not now, when would I do it?

And after a particularly gruelling period of back-to-back projects, having earned enough money and free time to spend a couple of days on a train working and catching up on admin etc, it seemed like a good way to use that bit of relative downtime.

Could Athens to London by train prove a pleasant and productive use of three days?

Due to Greece's geography and history as a western country located in the eastern Mediterranean and formerly surrounded by eastern bloc countries, there aren't as many transport links west as you might expect. There's no rail connection with neighbouring Albania, for

example, and only the most limited connections with northern Macedonia and Bulgaria.

The simplest and most straightforward route to London is taking the train south from Athens, through the Peloponnese to the port of Patras, an overnight ferry to Italy and then trains through Italy, France and finally the UK.

I leave Athens on a sweltering Tuesday afternoon in late May and take the 12.35 suburban train to Kiato in the Peloponnese.

There are no tables or wi-fi but the chill of the air conditioning makes for a comfortable 90-minute journey by train, which blasts across the Corinth Canal and at times criss-crosses the remains of the old metre-gauge Peloponnese line. The new Athens-Patras standard gauge mainline is slated for completion by 2025 at the earliest, but for now the 100-kilometre Kiato-Patras segment is traversed on a modern but unremarkable Greek railway replacement coach.

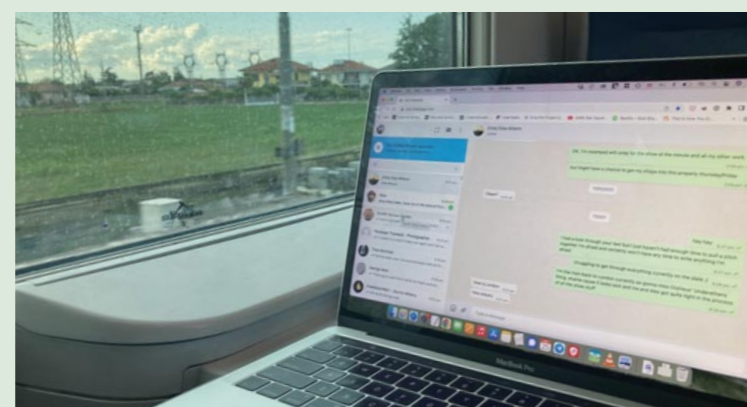
From the motorway, you can see the exact point where the laid rails end, near Sympoliteia. A little further and you can also see charred hills, which are evidence of the devastating forest fires Greece suffered in the summer of 2021.

The blackened ground is a poignant reminder of how Greece is already reeling from the effects of climate change and the urgency of improving international transport links, so that the millions of tourists who visit each year have less environmentally damaging alternatives to air travel.

The coach drops you at Patras railway station, right next to the old port. However, today the ferries to Italy leave from the New Port of Patras, a four-kilometre free shuttle bus ride away. The two-hour connection at Patras allows for a peaceful walk through the



FAREWELL GREECE: Ferry making smoke leaving Patras



WORK STATION: Laptop and a view on the train from Milano to Torino but no power or wi-fi. However, for wi-fi, I tethered my laptop to my phone which was fully charged during the previous leg from Bari to Milano on the high speed Frecciarossa train

charming town centre and for picking up local food before arriving at the ferry terminal in time for the evening sailing at 17.30.

Plastered across the side of the Superfast Ferry boat to Bari is the slogan: "Sailing together to the sustainable side of life."

However, as the ferry begins its departure, a dark black cloud of exhaust fumes billows from its chimneys – a far cry from the clean and quiet electric train that took us from Athens to Kiato.

From Patras, there are daily sailings to Bari in the south of Italy and to Ancona, further north. I opted for less time on the boat and more time on the train to break up the journey.

The basic ferry ticket is free with the Interrail pass, but you have to pay small port taxes and a booking fee. As I wanted to be fresh for work the next day, I shelled out for a bed in a shared cabin, with an overall cost of €126, which falls to

€75 when the Interrail deduction is applied.

There are plenty of comfortable tables to work at inside the ship. Paying to use the ship's wifi is expensive, but the sailing follows the Greek coastline until late evening and the 4G connection is strong enough to tether from my laptop most of the time until I retire to my cabin.

The ship docks in Bari on time at 09.00 the next morning and it's a pleasant, mostly pedestrianised, walk past the castle, through the medieval old town and modern city centre to reach Bari Centrale station. I have a short wait until my Frecciarossa long-distance high-speed train arrives. Its final destination is Milano Centrale, but for some reason when I booked, the Interrail site insisted I change trains at Bologna to reach Milano.

I enjoy a simple breakfast and orange juice before returning to my seat. There are power points to plug in my laptop under the table, but although I can connect to the



BIKES WELCOME: On this Pop local train at Bari Centrale

onboard wi-fi, there's no functional internet connection.

Again, tethering to my phone's 4G connection proves more than suitable to get a full day's work done. After following the coastline for most of the day, we pass through Ancona at around 15.00 – almost the same time I would have arrived if I had chosen to sail to Ancona rather than Bari.

But the comfort of the train, better space to get work done and some fantastic views of the Italian countryside convince me that I made the right choice taking the train.

There are announcements that the Frecciarossa is delayed and it looks like I will miss my connection at Bologna, although a useful Trenitalia web app allows me to track the progress of the journey and expected arrival times at each upcoming station.

Eventually, the train catches up time and I end up making the 20 minute connection at Bologna. This is a relief as the air-conditioning in my section of the train has stopped working and it has become uncomfortably hot.

Another hour on another Frecciarossa and I arrive at Milano Rogoredo, an interchange station on the outskirts of the city.

Again, there are power points but no functioning internet and almost every seat is taken: cramped, but still possible to work effectively.

Seat61 recommends overnighting in Milano before the early morning TGV to Paris. But after failing to find any cheap last-minute

accommodation in Milano, I decide to take a regional train to Torino, where I can pick up the same TGV I have already booked at 07.30 rather than the 06.00 departure from Milano Centrale, giving me much appreciated sleep time in a real bed. I take the metro a short ride across town and almost miss the connection while running around the labyrinthine underground passageways of the sprawling Milano Centrale station.

The 18.15 evening commuter service to Torino is incredibly long, surely at least 15 carriages, but almost every section is taken.

Compared to the modern high-speed train, this is a basic push-pull



TASTY: Croque monsieur on Paris-bound TGV in the Alps

service with no power points or wifi but after being able to keep my devices charged all day on the Frecciarossa, it's no issue to tether to my phone's 4G signal again and get another two hours of work done on the journey to Torino.

Arriving just before 20.00, it's a lovely walk to the Combo hostel, about 20 minutes away, as the late spring sun sets over the grand city centre. A last-minute booking in a smart, modern hostel in a shared room with a view out over the Roman Palatine Gate seems a bargain at €35.

After dinner at a great local pizzeria recommended by some Italian



TORINO: The 07.30 TGV for a scenic trip to Paris Gare de Lyon

friends, the sleep doesn't feel long enough – so I'm glad I'm not having to wake up for an 06.00 departure. The TGV arrives on time, I settle in and immediately pass out. When I wake, we're at Chambéry, high in the Alps. I order a tasty croque monsieur and pain au chocolat, while admiring some spectacular Alpine scenery from the windows of the buffet car.

Returning to my seat, we have powerpoints and functioning



PARIS: Alex used Velib hire bikes to get around the city

internet, so I'm able to get a full morning's work done before arriving at Paris Gare de Lyon at 13.13.

I choose to spend 24 hours in Paris visiting friends – a bonus of travelling this way – but could just as easily have taken the metro straight to Gare du Nord for the Eurostar to London.

I catch the 16.13 the following day and while every seat appears to be taken, it's an incredibly serene journey with powerpoints and great wifi.

Indulging in a family tradition, I visit perhaps the most well-stocked buffet of the entire journey as the train passes under the channel tunnel. I arrive in London St Pancras International at 17.30 local time, a two hour 15 minute journey, and feel fresher than I've

ever felt after stepping off a plane, ready to arrive at a work launch party in the evening in Shoreditch in good spirits.

All in all, I've managed almost three full days of work, have had two decent nights' sleep and only one relatively early start – although that's nothing compared to the horrors of early morning budget airline flights.

The extra journey time has been more than compensated for by the amount of work I've managed to complete along the way – with internet connection almost continuously, albeit mostly by tethering from my phone.

The price is the only sticking point: even with the 50% discount the Interrail pass comes in at €335 for a month – although this trip alone could just about be done on a four-day pass which costs around €250.

Then there's another €164 to pay for reservations and €120 for accommodation. My grand total is €617, but this could be trimmed to €459 by sleeping on the floor of the ferry and not spending a night in Paris.

www.alexkingjournalist.com

Cost breakdown

Interrail one month global pass with 50% discount: €335

[Alternative four-day pass costs €250]

Patras Bari ferry: €75

Italy and France extra reservations: €57

Eurostar reservation: €32

Reservations sub-total: €164

Turin hostel: €35

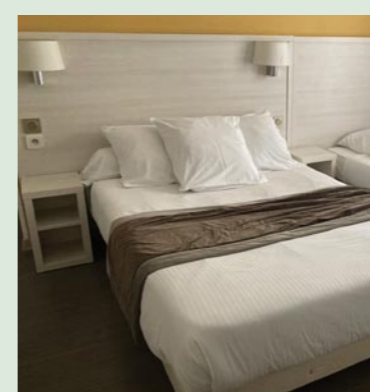
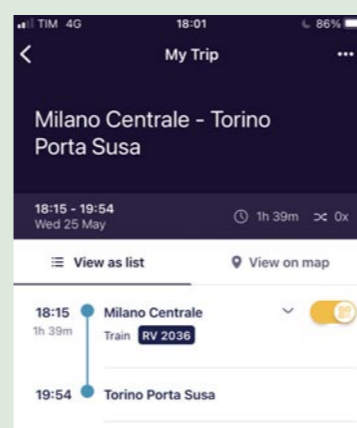
Paris hotel: €83

Accommodation sub-total: €120

Total extras: €282

Grand total: €617 = €535 approximately

| Departure station | Arrival station | Train: Frecciarossa 9540 |
|--|---|---|
| Bologna Centrale Hours 16:36 - 25/05/2022 | Milano Rogoredo Hours 17:38 - 25/05/2022 | Service: 2 ^o Standard Coaches: 7 Seats: 5C |
| Total amount*: 10.00 € | | |



PARIS: Hotel comfort

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



Network Rail image of how Oxford station could look after its £161m upgrade

martin.smith@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Oxford blockades

Oxford may soon get a station to be proud of, with the government providing most of the £161 million needed to upgrade it. Work starts later this year and will last two years, with considerable disruption for passengers at times. Rail minister Wendy Morton announced the scheme in August, saying the upgrade is specifically designed to improve passenger experience and integrate the station (8.7 million passengers a year pre-pandemic) into the local road network. A new accessible entrance will be created on the west side of the station and there will be three new high-speed crossovers to allow trains to turn round more efficiently.

The new track layout will allow 12 extra container trains from Southampton to the Midlands and north-west England to pass through and it should pave the way for the smooth introduction of services from Oxford to Milton Keynes, using the new high-level East West Rail station at Bletchley.

Network Rail has submitted its application for variations and conditions to the planning permission for rebuilding the station. There will be a nine-day blockade in July 2023, followed by further blockades in September and October. Beginning in November 2023, there will be a total blockade of 14 weeks on all rail services and road traffic through Botley Road railway bridge. Eventually there will be a

foot and cycle path under the bridge, which will be enlarged to allow double-deck buses underneath it.

During the construction period, rail replacement buses will probably radiate from a hub at Didcot Parkway, with CrossCountry services replaced by buses between Didcot and Banbury. Bus passengers from Cumnor, Botley and West Oxford will enjoy a scenic diversion along the A34. Cyclists and fit pedestrians will be able to cross the station site by a level ramp over the tracks during the station blockade, or by the Osney Lane footbridge which Network Rail has claimed is not a designated right of way.

After going through this construction purgatory, the public will have better facilities, more circulation space and more reliable services. Older members may remember the original station with its wooden buildings and separate booking offices for the up and down platforms which were connected by a dank, narrow subway. In 1971, the station was rebuilt on the cheap, because the city council was not willing to make a contribution towards the cost. A new main building and a footbridge were added in 1990, while retaining the 1971 rebuild of the down platform. We hope that the new station will be a worthy entrance to the historic city.

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

Welcome to volunteers joining Railfuture board

By Stewart Palmer

Railfuture Governance Director

Railfuture's company articles allow any member to stand for election as a director.

Please put yourself forward if you think you have the skills and personal qualities that can help Railfuture be even more successful than it is already.

The board is anxious to recruit younger board members to better reflect the spectrum of rail users in Britain today.

For the forthcoming election, applicants will be required to submit their nomination papers by 1 February 2023.

If you want to find out more about our election process please go to:

The opportunity to hold a structured discussion will be provided between 1 February and 28 February, after the closing date for nominations and will be available to potential new directors who have not had the opportunity previously to attend a discussion on the role of a company director.

This will be with two of the existing directors who are not standing for re-election themselves.

Following the discussion, an individual may of course decide to withdraw their application, before ballot papers are printed in March.

It is important to remember there is no compulsion to attend such a discussion, but company directors do have onerous and specific legal responsibilities and it is important that any potential board member understands these.

Detailed instructions regarding the discussions will be issued to candidates once nominations have closed.

Given the success of holding these discussions by video link during the Covid restrictions, it is proposed to do this again in 2023.

This will not only save Railfuture money, but it will also be much more convenient for candidates.

Railfuture's election returning officer may, in order to make voters aware, put a footnote on any candidate's election statement if they decide not to avail themselves of this opportunity.



Royal Mail joins the rail freight renaissance

Royal Mail is planning to treble the amount of material it sends by rail, as part of an overall aim to boost its parcels business and to reduce its environmental footprint.

It is building a large parcels hub at Daventry International Rail Freight Interchange, near Rugby, which is expected to open next year with fully automated parcel sorting.

Royal Mail's other parcel hub in Warrington (also rail-connected) opened in June.

Royal Mail has already publicly pledged to increase the number of Anglo-Scottish postal trains.

Three additional trains a day will run to Royal Mail's depot at Shieldmuir, near Motherwell, after the Daventry hub opens.

Currently Royal Mail runs three trains a day between Willesden (London), Warrington and Shieldmuir.

The last travelling post office ran in January 2004, but mail trains with no staff on board were reinstated for Christmas 2004 and have continued.

"Moving post, parcels and packages by rail is a huge opportunity, making online retail cleaner and greener and keeping lorries off the roads," said Maggie Simpson of the Rail Freight Group.

The search for more environment-friendly freight is now worldwide, with international group CEMEX committing to a climate action strategy of cutting carbon dioxide emissions by reducing lorry use.

It says that in Britain, it saved 143,000 lorry movements with a 3% increase in freight trains. Since 2012, it has increased the amount of rail freight by 50%.

However, there is opposition to rail freight terminals. In Hertfordshire, developers Segro have told MP Daisy Cooper they are aiming to complete the purchase of the former Radlett airfield site (on Green Belt land) by the end of this year to build a rail freight terminal, with work starting within the next 12 months. Planning permission was granted after two public enquiries.



TAKING SHAPE: The Stadler trimode loco in the Stadler factory at Valencia, Spain

Go-anywhere freight loco

Britain's first trimode freight locomotive is being built by Stadler in Valencia, Spain, for Rail Operations Group UK.

ROG has ordered 10 of the go-anywhere class 93s, which use 25kV AC from overhead lines, a diesel engine and two lithium titanate oxide battery packs.

The first loco should enter service next year, and it will have a 110mph top speed which will allow freight trains to slot in between passenger trains with minimal delays.

"It will be the first trimode locomotive to run in the UK, and it is Stadler's first trimode locomotive, which should help governments and businesses around the world to de-carbonise," said Iñigo Parra of Stadler Valencia.

On non-electrified lines, the batteries can

supplement the diesel engine or work as a stand-alone, sustainable power source.

The locomotives, which have regenerative braking, should significantly reduce exhaust emissions and could be used for passenger services.

Karl Watts of Rail Operations said: "We have been working with Stadler for four years now to specify and design a locomotive for the future."

"The end product is versatile and energy efficient and will allow us to transform UK train operations and lead the way in rail decarbonisation."

"The locomotive also enables Rail Operations UK to penetrate new operating markets, in particular express freight."

Rail User Group award winners deserve star slot at Railfuture AGM

Railfuture's Eighth Awards for Rail User Groups rewarded 17 of the 36 nominations with awards, and a further 10 with commendations.

The new format, introduced since the seventh awards during the 2018 conference in Reading, saw the presentations given more time after the national AGM in July, which this year was held in Bristol.

In the Covid-enforced absence of Railfuture president Christian Wolmar, who nevertheless was able to join remotely, the presentations were made by vice-president Stewart Palmer. The Judges' Special and Gold Award

winners who attended the AGM each made short presentations about the activities behind their awards.

The judging panel of seven vice-presidents gave OkeRail and the Dartmoor Line the Judges' Special Award, accepted by chairman Michael Ireland.

The Gold Award winners were:

Best Newsletter – the Paul Abell Award – South East Northumberland Rail User Group and Fen Line Users Association

Best Website – Friends of the West Highland Lines

Best New Group – the Oliver

Lovell Award – Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign

Best Campaign – Cooksbridge Station Partnership

Best Campaigner – the Clara Zilahi Award – Nick Farthing, of Three Rivers Rail Partnership.

The RUG Awards were organised by Roger Blake with help from the judges co-ordinator Stewart Palmer.

Full details of all the awards and commendations are on the Railfuture website under *What's on* and in the August issue of *Rail Action*.

Sussex success: Page 21



OkeRail and the Dartmoor Line won the Judges' Special Award. Chairman Michael Ireland, left, with Stewart Palmer, centre, and OkeRail executive member Cllr Kevin Ball

Amazing Accrington bids to build a regional rail freight terminal

Businesses in Accrington are backing a plan to create a rail freight terminal for East Lancashire at the former power station at Huncoat.

Huncoat is "ideally located" in the centre of East Lancashire's engineering and aerospace industries.

The site covers 22 acres and the terminal is expected to cost £200 million, with some private sector funding. A project consultant has been appointed and an economic feasibility study is being drawn up.

The project has received support from MP Sara Britcliffe, Miranda Barker of East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Debbie Francis of

the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.

"This is an unbelievable opportunity for everyone, especially our local businesses, and we are doing everything we can to help push on these plans, which will have a hugely significant impact on the North West for decades to come," said Ms Barker, chief executive of the chamber of commerce.

LEP chair Ms Francis said: "I am keen to improve corridors of transport in the north, and the LEP fully supports this project and its exciting plans."

Murray Dawson, chair of Amazing Accrington, said: "Freight rail is estimated to treble by 2050 and with our



Ripe for change: The former power station site at Huncoat

amazing businesses needing room and the opportunity to grow, we need to facilitate that. It is extremely important to remember that it is not just core businesses who use freight who would be affected. All businesses

benefit from the future economic success of our region." Miss Britcliffe, MP for Hyndburn and Haslingden, said: "It could transform so many people's lives, from businesses to our children."



How it used to be: Trains and ferries connected at Fishguard Harbour in 2016

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■ ■ 'What a mess at Fishguard Harbour!'

Railfuture and North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum took an active role in the bus and rail transport inquiry launched by the Senedd's climate change, environment and infrastructure committee. It included focus groups and one-to-one interviews on five themes including the effect of the pandemic. One comment was: "I was shocked when I saw what a mess there was at Fishguard Harbour, with the connections with the ferries. If we had a two-hourly train service that would mitigate it to a certain extent because we would have a train in two hours rather than a train in 12 hours. That might actually help."

Full details of the report are at

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s125482/paper-Bus%20and%20rail%20engagement%20findings.pdf>

■ ■ Buses and trains must be integrated

Railfuture has responded positively to a Welsh Government consultation about improving buses in Wales, supporting integrating them with rail and other modes. The consultation, *One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket: planning buses as a public service for Wales*, aims for an integrated public transport network, but leaves unanswered questions. How should existing bus and rail fares be aligned? Bus is often much cheaper than rail. Alignment should be through reducing fares on the more expensive mode, but there might be a case for a daily fare cap for bus-only journeys (as happens in London) to reflect the significant time penalty these present. Network offers giving unrestricted travel over a period at a significantly lower cost than using a car, such as the national or regional cards recently introduced in some European countries, should be considered. A supervisory board is proposed. Railfuture calls for the "users' representative" to cover all public transport modes.

■ ■ Tram-trains for Cardiff Bay stations

Railfuture welcomes a recent planning application for the remodelling of Cardiff Bay station and a new station serving Butetown. From 2024, electric tram-trains will run on this line, which will also be double-tracked for its

whole length from near Cardiff Queen Street. Railfuture is calling for more on-street extensions.

■ ■ £36m bid to boost Borderlands line

A half-hourly service between Wrexham and Bidston, originally promised for December 2021, has been delayed again. Transport for Wales previously changed the start date to May 2022, but now the earliest it could run is December. One problem is an objection by GB Railfreight, which fears the enhanced passenger service would conflict with the trains they operate to Padeswood Cement, near Penyffordd. Currently, freight trains need to shunt on the northbound line between Penyffordd and Buckley in order to split them for the short sidings, and this takes the best part of an hour. The Wrexham Bidston Rail Users Group supported a planning application for improvements at Padeswood in 2017. Flintshire Council and rail users are hoping a second £36 million levelling-up bid, backed by Railfuture president Christian Wolmar, will be successful in dealing with the pinchpoint and boosting services.

■ ■ Aberystwyth rail link in five-year plan

The Welsh Government's national transport delivery plan for 2022-27 includes proposals to develop the case for reopening Carmarthen-Aberystwyth as a way to improve access to areas of outstanding natural beauty for hiking and "other rural exercise". The plan is out for consultation until 11 October 2022. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2022-07/national-transport-delivery-plan-2022-to-2027.pdf>

■ ■ Timber on trains from Aberystwyth

Railfuture warmly welcomes the fact that the freight flow of timber from Aberystwyth to Chirk's Kronospan factory is to be made permanent, following successful trials this spring (*Railwatch* 172). Each weekly train will carry about 700 tonnes of timber, taking big lorries off the road. Suitable infrastructure at Aberystwyth station is needed to enable the efficient loading of timber. Railfuture has campaigned for the passenger service to be increased to hourly, so adequate paths will also need to be maintained for this.

www.railfuturewales.org.uk

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■ ■ Boost for Reddish South and Denton

Friends of Reddish South recently celebrated their 15th birthday with a "thank you" gathering for members who have campaigned for a proper passenger service from Stockport to Manchester Victoria, via the two stations of Reddish South and Denton. It is 30 years since the service from Stockport to Stalybridge was terminated, apart from the one "parliamentary" train per week.

The group proudly displayed three certificates (for website, campaign and social media) from Railfuture's Rail User Group awards in July.

In October 2021, the campaign for passenger services on the Stockport-Manchester Victoria line received funding from the government's *Restoring Your Railways* scheme. The Friends distributed leaflets to every residence within 500 metres of the station (approximately 2,000) which produced an unprecedented local response. MP Andrew Gwynne was made honorary president for his unstinting support.

■ ■ Rochdale rail-tram ticketing trial

As a trial, Metrolink has been allowing holders of rail tickets issued in Greater Manchester to travel from Rochdale rail station to the town centre without buying a Metrolink ticket. The trial is ongoing and has been extended.

Metrolink is also running an August-October trial to permit dogs to be carried. Dogs must be on a lead and passengers will be responsible for any mess left by their dog.

■ ■ Golborne station but no HS2 link

The government's City Region sustainable transport settlement has resulted in Greater Manchester being given cash to open a new station at Golborne near Wigan, but the promised HS2 link which was intended to pass through the Golborne area has been withdrawn from the Crewe-Manchester HS2 bill. Originally an HS2 depot was planned there and Manchester would have been connected to Scotland with a new high speed link, bypassing a congested part of the West Coast main line. A new station at Liverpool Baltic is also a beneficiary of the City Region sustainable transport settlement.

■ ■ New £80m station inspires art

Artwork from more than 300 students at nine schools features on a display at the site of the new £80 million Headbolt Lane station in Kirkby. The students drew, painted and stencilled their designs for posters to promote travel by train, safety on the rail network and action to tackle climate change. The banner is displayed on hoardings around the site of the station, which opens next year.

The station will be served by new Merseyrail trains using batteries, as well as Northern services from Wigan and Manchester.

Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotheram, the leader of Knowsley Council Graham Morgan and Tony Brennan, Knowsley Council's cabinet member for regeneration and economic development attended the unveiling.

Mr Rotheram said: "Being a Kirkby lad myself, it is great to see the local community excited about their new station."

He wants a London-style transport system to make travelling around the region as quick, cheap and reliable as possible.

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

Station beacons guide blind passengers



South Western Railway

RNIB's Dave Williams enters Vauxhall station and is helped to board at an assisted boarding point



South Western Railway

Rail trip gives a big confidence boost



A group of people from Sheffield took a trip by rail to boost their confidence in travelling independently and to reduce their social isolation.

The group, including people living with disability, anxiety or feelings of loneliness, were invited on a free day out by train.

One of them, Saada Sharif, who lives in Darnall, said: "I have never been on a train in Sheffield before and it was a really good experience. It won't be my last!"

Lizzie Davies of Better Journeys by Rail, who organised the trip, said: "We aim to help people overcome any barriers they might have to travel by train, so they can travel independently and connect with other local people."

"It would be a shame if people missed out on exploring new places because they do not feel confident enough to travel by rail. This time we went to the fantastic medieval city of Lincoln, where we explored the cathedral and the castle grounds."

"It is just over an hour away by train from Darnall and one of the many fantastic destinations that can be easily reached on our



Cathrine Ashworth/SYMCA

INCLUSIVE: The group from Sheffield at Lincoln cathedral

local network." Cathrine Ashworth of Community Rail, which is supported by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, said: "Community Rail is about supporting social inclusion and helping local people to better connect with their stations and enjoy the rail network that serves them."

"It is also about promoting this accessible and sustainable mode of transport. Guided trips like this

are a great opportunity to experience a rail journey in a safe and supported environment.

"We offer advice on navigating the station, planning journeys, buying tickets, passes, boarding the train and accessibility, among other things, to help improve their confidence."

The participants had such a positive experience that they are already planning their next adventure.

Blind rail passengers may be getting help to use trains if the trial of a new technical aid to travel proves successful.

South Western Railway says the method uses cutting-edge technology.

The myEyes mobile phone app helps passengers navigate their way around stations and is being tried out for three months at two London stations – Vauxhall and Putney. The app uses the same technology that allows contactless payment by mobile phone, to provide audio directions.

It helps passengers find the precise "assisted boarding points" on platforms, although they need to give 10 minutes notice if they need help to board the train.

The device guides the passenger via Bluetooth beacons installed on the station.

The trial started in August and could be rolled out at other stations across the SWR network. Battersea MP Marsha de Cordova (pictured), who is visually impaired, brought the technology to the attention of SWR's accessibility team.

She said: "SWR recognised the value of having fully accessible



stations. This app could transform travelling for blind and partially sighted people, as ultimately travelling and navigating around the city is probably one of the biggest challenges we face."

SWR accessibility manager Mike Adlington said: "SWR is absolutely determined to make rail travel more accessible for all."

RNIB's Robin Spinks said: "Travelling independently is one of the biggest challenges for people with sight loss."

The SWR accessibility team is encouraging customers to try the app and is asking for feedback to be submitted by completing a short survey at:

<https://survey.alchemer.eu/s3/90378258/App-Survey>
or email direct to: accessibility@swrailway.com
Dave Williams demonstrates the app at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tun4CqJdwk>

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paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

■ ■ Wisbech tram train

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has released two reports from Network Rail which bring Wisbech reopening into sharp focus. The first report *Wisbech to March: Potential for Light Rail* was written by Network Rail's light rail knowledge and development team. Railfuture is pleased to see that, although the study concluded that tram, tram train or very light rail (VLR) could all be used, when the short and long term aspirations were taken into account "a tram train solution appeared the best credible light rail option. Tram train would enable future operation on both the national rail network and any on-street operation into Wisbech town centre or to the garden town." The main factors driving this choice were these well-chosen items:

■ Requirement to operate on the national rail network (for example to Peterborough, Ely, Cambridge)

■ The multiplicity of level crossings on the route and vehicle's suitability to create a cost-effective solution at each

■ Opportunity to operate into Wisbech town centre using the highway network

■ Future extension of the service to serve the Wisbech Garden Town development

■ Consideration of passenger demand and thus vehicle size

Tram trains are a major part of the modernisation of the Valley lines in South Wales and are similar to the new Stadler trains operating in East Anglia, so would be welcomed by passengers, and would have the flexibility to operate to cheaper light rail standards on the Wisbech branch, but could also work to Cambridge and Peterborough if paths can be found.

The second report is Network Rail's report assessing the development work completed to date by the combined authority on reconnecting Wisbech and March by heavy rail, along with the recent light rail proposal, and concludes that further work needs to be done to complete PACE 1 (Project Acceleration in a

Controlled Environment), broadly equivalent to Network Rail's GRIP 3 (Governance for Railway Investment Projects).

Tram train could have a role in other areas of the county. Our recent bid to the Restoring Your Railway fund, which was rated as "a good case for future development", was assessed by the Network Rail light rail team who noted that "this proposal has potential as a tram train scheme, especially if the access to West Anglia main line into Cambridge is required. The development of a tram train fleet in the area could also tie with other opportunities such as Wisbech."

These two schemes in Cambridgeshire could be implemented with a shared depot, which could be the start of a flourishing tram train network in the region, transforming access to other places such as Peterborough and Cambridge, whereas light rail or VLR would permanently lock Wisbech into nothing more than a shuttle to March.

<http://www.wisbechrail.org.uk/>

■ ■ Census opportunities

The first results from the 2021 census show that over 300,000 additional people now live in the Railfuture East Anglia area. The largest increase is in the Cambridge area, with over 35,000 added to its population over the past 10 years. We have mentioned the search going on for the best solution for Wisbech to link it to Cambridge, but there are other adjustments to the network that could be made more immediately.

Use of the Ipswich-Cambridge service is the fastest growing in the region, with every station serving rapidly growing settlements. For example, Kennett station (Cambridgeshire) serves the immediate catchment of Kennett, Kentford, Red Lodge, Moulton, Gazeley and Barrow (population 7,500 in 2011), with another 500 homes now growing out of the fields next to the station that will add up to 1,500 more people.

The problem is that the sectional running times along the route match the previous generation of trains, which meant that in a robust timetable, they could not serve Kennett and

Dullingham on the same journey. Both stations thus have a train stopping every two hours, a service interval that now is not appropriate for Kennett. The new trains, however, are much more fleet of foot and could easily fit in a call at Kennett on the journey that also calls at Dullingham. Railfuture is repeatedly asking Greater Anglia and Network Rail to speed up their work to enable this, all the more urgent as another arm of NR is currently renewing the junction at nearby Chippenham to 50 mph rather than the long-established 30 mph.

Read more about research carried out by a Railfuture member using Facebook in the Railfuture East Anglia branch newsletter *RailEast* 194, published in June 2022.

<https://railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Newsletters>

■ ■ Bittern line potential

A new station for the Bittern line is back on Norfolk County Council's agenda. The station would be within the Greater Norwich area, three miles out from Norwich station, and would serve the growing Broadland Business Park to the east of the line and a large residential area to the west. A broad time frame allows for further feasibility work to be carried out over the next year (building on the original 2016 study), with design and development work running through to 2027, and potentially construction taking place around 2028.

Meanwhile Taylor Wimpey has put in for outline planning for 3,850 homes at Rackheath, five miles along the line. These dwellings form part of a major expansion of housing north-east of Norwich and which Salhouse station can serve. Developers, Network Rail and Greater Anglia have discussed what improvements could be made to the station.

The 2016 Bittern line study also found a positive case for improving train frequency to half hourly as far as North Walsham. This would be needed to realise the line's potential in helping to meet the transport needs of this growing part of Norwich.

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

Twitter: @railfuture

Your views extra

Be fair to the railway unions

I was surprised by two things in Ian Brown's article and the accompanying maps of Manchester (*Railwatch* 172). First he expresses disappointment over the failure of Manchester's Picc-Vic tunnel scheme in the 1970s, a saga which appears "to follow the pattern with other Mancunian infrastructure projects".

However, Manchester actually got itself a brand new light rail Metrolink system, unlike Leeds on the other side of the Pennines.

More serious is his reference to the rail industry being too expensive, with the trade unions seemingly bent on ensuring it remains so.

I do not feel it is appropriate for a Railfuture director to adopt the stance of the Tory media in trying to blame unions, such as the RMT, for the current state of the network. With inflation at 9.1%, rising to 11% later this year, can you really expect a wage offer of just 2% with 1% for productivity to be taken seriously?

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Ave, Grimsby DN31 2JP
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Rail pay justice?

I see that Railfuture policy director Ian Brown still has his BR manager's hat on for his mention of Great British Railways in *Railwatch* 172. He says: "The rail industry is too expensive and the trade unions seem to be bent on ensuring it remains so."

So rail staff are to blame for the costs, not the bungled failed privatisation thrust upon us by the Tory government? I think Ian needs to take another look at where the costs are going.

There is a list on the TSSA website identifying Network Rail's top 73 highest "earners", with more than £150,000 a year. It starts with Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines at £585,000, chief financial officer Jeremy Westlake at £415,000 and route services managing director Susan Cooklin at £385,000.

While the "industry" says staff should tighten their belts, Network Rail's top 73 enjoy a combined pay total of £15 million per year.

Maybe I should also mention that train operators are paying out dividends to shareholders, and also point out the obscene profits of the rolling stock companies. Are we really all in this together?

You can see the full list at:

<https://www.tssa.org.uk/find-your-company/network-rail/news/nr-top-bosses-and-what-they-are-paid>

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Bikes on trains are a priority

I agree wholeheartedly with South Hampshire Rail Users Group's conclusion that if trains could have increased space for cycles, it would boost revenue and Hythe might gain an enhanced role as a gateway to the New Forest. To my mind though, spaces for cycles on trains should be a priority everywhere.

Catherine Barber
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Can we count on Wisbech?

I was somewhat bemused to read in *Railwatch* 172 about the reopening of Reston station "bringing Edinburgh and Newcastle within easy reach of 450 residents as well as many others in the hinterland". In the same edition was a report

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



CHAIN GANG: Stuttgart's rack railway takes people to a viewpoint high above the city

Cyclists can take their bikes up to a spectacular 405 metre high viewpoint at Stuttgart thanks to enlightened rail managers who have made special provision for them. The rack railway to Degerloch, nicknamed the Zacke, has a wagon for bikes on the front or back of the train.

Bikes are also allowed free on the Stuttgart U-bahn and S-bahn except in rush hours.

In Britain, more cyclists can now expect to be able to take their bikes on the train following the setting-up of a cycle-rail forum for the north of England. Over 100 organisations, including councils and community rail partnerships, are involved in the forum,

of the delays in restoring services to Wisbech and its 40,000 people who live in and around the town.

In the East Midlands section, mention was made of the wish to see the Ivanhoe line and local stations reopened. While reopening Reston is good news, there, at least on paper, appears to be an imbalance here.

Neil H Berry, Pershore, Worcestershire
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Yours, sitting uncomfortably

Please can Railfuture step up its campaign for comfortable seats, particularly on long distance inter-city trains?

When the original IC125 trains came into service in the 1970s, the seats were very comfortable. Fast forward to a few months ago when I had to go to an appointment in London. Upon my return to Paddington, I was really happy to see that one of the new "bisexual" (diesel and electric) trains awaited me. On I hopped, found my seat, then reality kicked in. Was it made out of concrete blocks, I wonder? I stuck it until Reading, then spent the rest of the journey to Plymouth standing. I complained to the guard,

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

ticketing). The railway provides this option and he implies that we must use it.

An option is a choice. Surely someone speaking for an organisation that campaigns for better rail provision – trains, accessibility, ticketing and everything else – should be advocating as wide a choice of ticketing modes as possible?

Railfuture should be asking for an inclusive railway, so that those who do not have mobile phones and tablets – or those like me who do carry a mobile phone but do not want apps for every aspect of their life on it – can buy their ticket in the manner they choose.

Why, Neil, must we be "be prepared" to use our phones? I do not often use ticket office counters, as I am happy with using ticket machines, with many years' experience of them.

I am freeing up the counter for the occasional traveller who might genuinely need to ask a person for help.

Many different people, with widely varying degrees of experience with technology, or attitudes to it, use – or would like to use – the railway.

Forcing us all on to phone apps is not the answer.

I recently took a Conservative MP to task for saying on a BBC TV programme that "people do not want to go to ticket offices, people want to buy tickets on their phones". Some people, not all people.

Adrian Willats
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We need proper information

The *Railwatch* 172 report about Railfuture director Neil Middleton's visit to the international station at Birmingham tells us that the station does not have a conventional ticket office but instead has ticket vending machines and a receptionist/concierge to give advice and to sell the occasional ticket when needed.

Most people are not regular rail travellers, and there was no mention of any consultation with passengers, so we cannot gauge how people feel about the lack of a travel centre.

There may be an argument for extending such a system to other main line stations but this assumes staff would be available. Most people do not live near a main line station and printed timetable, are no longer available.

Lincoln Travel Centre now displays a notice on the entrance doors which states: "From 29 October this will be a Penalty Fares Station. This will mean you must buy a ticket otherwise you may have to pay a Penalty Fee (at least £20)".

The travel centre is sometimes closed and is normally occupied by only two people. I find it difficult to see how potential travellers are going to access the required information.

Self service may be suitable for regular rail travellers but it will create resentment and confusion if it is forced on to people.

There is in any case an enormous amount of fraud perpetrated by internet scams. Unlike a supermarket, chain store, or utility provider, customers do not have an alternative choice about which railway they use. Everyone should have the right to travel on our railways.

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■ ■ Nexus What's On guide

Nexus is now publishing weekly news bulletins concerning a wide variety of journey possibilities in and around Tyne and Wear. It is a good example of local effort to attract more people to use rail rather than car.

■ ■ History boosts rail

The 1,900-year history of Hadrian's Wall prompted a "Roman Routes" initiative by Tyne Valley community rail partnership. It brought together refugees, asylum seekers and other underprivileged groups for a day's outing by train and bus to Hexham and Chesters Roman fort. Similar projects are being worked on with more information at [@tvcrp](https://twitter.com/tvcrp) and [tvrcp.org.uk](https://twitter.com/tvrcp.org.uk)

The partnership's Fiona Forsythe also helped in the CrossCountry Trains sponsorship of Newcastle College Rail Academy awards. The college has adopted MetroCentre station.

The partnership used the evacuation of children during the Second World War from industrial Newcastle to rural Haltwhistle to raise the profile of rail. It commissioned a film about the evacuation which will be offered to history groups, schools and museums.

■ ■ Levelling up in North-East

In August, the leader of the House of Commons Mark Spencer visited the north-east.

As well as Ferryhill (see picture story), he went to the Locomotion railway museum at Shildon where £5.9 million of government levelling-up cash is being spent on a new hall to house 50 additional vehicles. It will open next year, when the museum will be home to the largest covered collection of heritage rail vehicles in the world.

■ ■ Transport for future

An upgrade to the East Coast main line, reopening the Leamside Line and extending the Tyne and Wear Metro are among plans included in the first North East Rail and Metro Strategy, which was approved in June. The strategy, which covers Tyne and Wear, Durham and Northumberland, was developed on behalf of the North East Joint Transport Committee after two months of public consultation.

It follows the North East Transport Plan, which identifies £6.8 billion of confirmed transport schemes and aspirations for more up to 2035. Railfuture North East submitted ideas and will be continuing to campaign for them. We want to see the rail network extended to include as many towns and villages as possible, minimising the need to change trains in the course of a journey. But connection



FERRYHILL VISIT: (from left), County councillors James Rowlandson, David Sutton-Lloyd, Elaine Peeke, Tony Stubbs, former rail minister Wendy Morton, Joe Quinn, MP Mark Spencer and Ferryhill town councillor David Farry near the station

On track for Ferryhill station reopening

The reopening of Ferryhill station took centre stage in August when leader of the House of Commons Mark Spencer met residents and commuters who would benefit from it.

Mr Spencer was joined by rail minister Wendy Morton.

Ferryhill is one of nine of the Restoring Your Railway schemes to receive a share of government funding so it can progress to the next stage.

Mr Spencer praised the determination of county councillor and avid Ferryhill station campaigner Joe Quinn, who worked with Paul Howell, MP for Sedgefield, in the reopening campaign.

Reopening Ferryhill, which closed in 1969, would also be the first step in the proposal for the Leamside line reopening. Ferryhill station would

possibilities, especially by Metro and bus services must improve, to simplify journeys.

Sunderland-London services, calling at Hartlepool, Stockton and Eaglescliffe en route to York, should be planned in combination with CrossCountry services along the Durham Coast route.

An hourly service is needed from Saltburn, Redcar, Middlesbrough, Thornaby and Eaglescliffe to London.

TransPennine services should be enhanced between Saltburn and Manchester Airport, and from Newcastle, Chester-le-Street, Durham, Darlington and York to Liverpool and Edinburgh, as well as from Newcastle to Manchester Airport.

An hourly all-stations service is needed between Berwick and Durham, using 110mph electric

potentially use the existing Stillington line, currently used only for freight services, to create a passenger rail service running from Ferryhill to Teesside.

Durham county councillor Elizabeth Scott said: "This is incredibly exciting and brings us one step closer to realising our plans. The station offers a unique opportunity to link the south of the county with key employment sites in Teesside, including the proposed Teesside Freepport and Tees Valley multi-modal hydrogen transport hub.

"Partnered with the potential long-term reinstatement of the Leamside Line, which is still under review, a Ferryhill station could be part of a potential new Tyne-Tees connection, seeing rail services continue all the way up to Newcastle."

trains. An accelerated service is needed linking Carlisle, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Prudhoe, MetroCentre, Newcastle Central and Morpeth.

The existing Hexham, Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Nunthorpe and Whitby service needs to be upgraded to a half-hourly frequency as far as Nunthorpe, with eight of these trains continuing along the Whitby line.

A direct through service is needed between Newcastle and Teesside via Ferryhill and the Stillington line. On the Metro routes, more frequent trains are needed from South Shields to St James via the coast.

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Twitter @RailfutureNEast

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■ ■ Marsh Barton's new station

Exeter's new Marsh Barton station, planned to open next year, is under construction.

The two new platforms will accommodate up to six-car length trains, which will be hourly Paignton to Exeter and Exmouth services, plus additional peak hour trains.

There will be no normal car parking and this may well exclude older and less able passengers.

The original plan included a station footbridge with steps down to the platforms, but now passengers will face a walk of almost a quarter of a mile to reach the southbound platform.

■ ■ Bideford wins backing

Under the auspices of the Tarka Rail Association, Railfuture-affiliated ACE Rail's Tim Steer, who is campaigning for Bideford-Barnstaple reopening, took a presentation to Crediton Town Council which was very warmly received and attracted enthusiastic support.

Broadcaster Jeremy Vine, who is patron of the Appledore Book Festival, has taken a positive interest in the scheme. Sir Geoffrey Cox, MP for Torridge and West Devon, has been supportive, and North Devon MP Selaine Saxby has been given a detailed briefing.

Next step in the ACE Rail campaign will be production of an initial business case for the Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme.

At the Railfuture AGM in Bristol, Rail User Group Awards were presented to ACE Rail, which won gold for best New Group, and to the Tarka Rail Association which received a commendation in the Best Newsletter category.

Star prize, the Judges' Special Award, was presented to Michael Ireland as chairman of OkeRail, with his executive member Kevin Ball in attendance, for their exemplary campaign to secure the rebirth of regular passenger services for Okehampton.

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Devon County Council

Dino Bishop



WELL DONE: Awards organiser Roger Blake, left, and Railfuture chair Chris Page present the Rail User Group Awards commendation to Vic Ient and Dr Janet Baah of Lewes Rail Users Group, right

Sussex success

Cooksbridge Station Partnership struck gold, winning the award for Best Campaign in Railfuture's Rail User Group Awards.

Lewes Rail User Group received a commendation in the Best New Group category but no one from the group was able to attend the awards presentation ceremony at the Railfuture AGM at Bristol in July. So, a Railfuture team went to Lewes to present the award.

A fuller report of the RUG awards can be found in August's *Rail Action* www.railfuture.org.uk/Rail+Action



Graham Ellis

Cooksbridge Station Partnership's Robert Baughan received his award at Bristol

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■ ■ Restoring your Railway

Two of our region's Restoring Your Railway projects were among the nine which Rail Minister Wendy Morton announced would be funded for the next stage. These are the Ivanhoe line (Leicester to Burton-on-Trent) and the Barrow Hill line in north-east Derbyshire.

Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) has welcomed the announcement, with spokesman Douglas McLay saying that it will "give a real boost to the often forgotten populations of South Derbyshire and north-west Leicestershire".

CRIL will now work with the Department for Transport and Network Rail to develop the project further. Areas identified by the DfT as needing work include: access to Leicester station (the existing junction with the Midland main line faces the wrong way); projections of passenger numbers, to inform decisions on service frequency and station locations; and a full economic appraisal of costs, revenue and benefits. There are also operational considerations, relating to implications of a new passenger service for freight traffic on the line, level crossings, and platform availability at Burton.

The Barrow Hill line is proposed to have stations serving Whittington, Staueley, Eckington and Killamarsh. Its parliamentary sponsor Lee Rowley MP welcomed the DfT's announcement, as did representatives of county, borough and parish councils. The aim is to be able to show early, visible progress, with at least spades in the ground before the general election. The project will then be phased to spread the costs, with the easiest of the station builds to be tackled first.

◆◆◆◆ Recruit a new member for Railfuture

■ ■ Clay Cross station proposal

North East Derbyshire District Council recently won £24.1 million of "Town Deal" money from the government to fund its Clay Cross town investment plan. The three strands in the plan include improvements to: 1) workforce skills and productivity 2) range of high quality jobs and training 3) connectivity

The A61, A38 and M1 roads are regularly congested and are unlikely to support the planned growth alone. The district council is launching a feasibility study into reinstatement of a station at Clay Cross and Railfuture members Owen O'Neill and Stephen Chaytow have joined the study team. Railfuture members wishing to contribute ideas can contact branch secretary Steve Jones.

■ ■ Maid Marian line

One project that has not been given further funding under the RYR scheme, but may still progress with funding from elsewhere, is the proposal to reopen the Maid Marian line which connects the Erewash Valley north of Langley Mill with the Robin Hood line at Kirkby-in-Ashfield. The government is providing £2 million to the newly formed East Midlands Development Company to develop a strategy to take full advantage of HS2 coming to the region at East Midlands Parkway. This will include the Toton regeneration site and rail links from north Nottinghamshire via the Maid Marian line and Toton to EM Parkway, with the potential for direct trains from Mansfield to London St Pancras and also to Derby.

■ ■ Railfuture social gathering

Railfuture East Midlands members gathered at the Victoria Hotel, next to Beeston station, for an informal

The Midland main line is in a tunnel under the town, so the original Clay Cross station, closed in 1967, was near Tupton, more than a mile north of Clay Cross. A new housing development is close to another possible location for a station, where the A6175 from Clay Cross to North Wingfield crosses the Erewash Valley line.

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lunchtime "railway conversation" on Tuesday 16 August. These social gatherings have become a well-established feature in the calendar. There is no agenda, but they enable discussion of topical matters.

Among numerous topics covered this time were the future development of the branch; reopening campaigns including the Peaks & Dales line north from Matlock; the potential for a station serving Clay Cross; and devolution.

It is not clear whether current devolution activities in the region will lead to a combined East Midlands of England authority, but the benefit to railway development locally is that a full, Level 3, devolved authority would have a "Partnership" with Network Rail (and Great British Railways in future) leading to a closer relationship for discussing rail development aspirations.

The next "conversation" is in the run-up to Christmas, at The Canallhouse pub in Nottingham. All present and prospective members of Railfuture are warmly welcome to come along. Keep an eye on the East Midlands branch web page for details:

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

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 Get four copies of *Railwatch* magazine a year,
 early-bird price for our annual national conference
 and the chance to help improve Britain's railways

YOU CAN JOIN at www.railfuture.org.uk/join

- Individual £20 per year
- Joint £22
- Under 26 £14
- Rail user groups, community
and parish councils £25
- Businesses £35

Or you can write to Railfuture, 1 Queens Road,
 Barnetby le Wold DN38 6JH, giving your name,
 address, postcode and email if you have one
 Cheques payable to Railfuture
 Email: membership@railfuture.org.uk

RENEW membership

Renewals and other membership queries:
www.railfuture.org.uk/renewal
 or by post to Railfuture Renewals,
 14 Ghent Field Circle, Thurston, Suffolk IP31 3UP
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Rail can and must win

History repeats itself...
...unless we learn from it

Rail has a great opportunity at the moment. The demand for leisure travel is now back to or above pre-pandemic levels, driven in part by the increase in fuel prices. There may be a return to commuting during the winter, as a result of increased heating costs for people currently working from home and the need for face time with the boss for people in fear of redundancy due to cost of living pressures on businesses. With commuting below pre-pandemic levels, the same service frequencies can be run all day, giving more efficient utilisation of rolling stock and staff and so lower cost.

Not running the network at capacity will improve reliability and enable more freight services to get lorries off the road,

reducing both congestion and air pollution, making a major contribution to transport decarbonisation and using the network more effectively and profitably. A focus on customer service to deliver the best journey experience costs nothing. It just needs well-motivated staff. Satisfied passengers will travel by rail again, increasing rail revenue and so enabling cheaper fares. Get it right and the rail industry will contribute to economic growth. See: www.railfuture.org.uk/satisfied

Our national conference *Turning Point for the Railway*, planned for 15 September in Leeds, was set to explore these opportunities but (like the National Rail Awards) had to be postponed when rail strikes were called for that day.

The global price rises in energy and food mean that we are all suffering a real terms pay cut. The 1973 oil price crisis, when petrol prices increased threefold, triggered an inflationary spiral which showed that increasing pay for everyone in line with inflation merely creates more inflation the following year. The only

way any section of the community can maintain its standard of living is by earning more by working longer or more effectively, or by using its industrial muscle to get more pay at the expense of other, weaker, sections of the community.

The Treasury has learnt that lesson and will be looking for a settlement in line with other public sector pay awards. Changes in rostering to enable seven-day operation and create multi-skilled maintenance teams will allow staff to work more effectively and so earn more.

Rail staff may not remember that the prolonged ASLEF strike in 1955 killed the wagonload freight business as customers transferred to newly deregulated road transport. Many rail jobs were lost and the British Railways 1954 modernisation plan investment in marshalling yards was wasted.

In 2022, the government can afford to play hardball because, since the pandemic, many more people (though not all) can work from home and most leisure journeys can be taken by car or on another day, making rail travel much more discretionary. Rail strikes no longer stop the economy. People who get a good experience travelling by road instead will not come back to rail, which means fewer passengers, train services and rail jobs. See: www.railfuture.org.uk/article1892

Nor will the government invest in a rail industry that costs too much and cannot be relied upon to deliver a service consistently. British Railways closed the Varsity line between Oxford and Cambridge in 1968, the year after Milton Keynes was founded. In 2022, there are suggestions that East West Rail phases 2 and 3 will be cancelled even though half a million new homes are planned in the area of the route. See: www.railfuture.org.uk/EWR

A win/win outcome is possible with meaningful negotiation, hopefully before our rescheduled conference in March 2023. Otherwise rail will snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.



RAGES

■ ■ Rail Action Group East of Scotland

Now that Reston station is well and truly up and running, attention is switching to East Linton, also under construction. The picture, above, shows the station site in East Lothian with a train passing through. Soon there will be trains stopping there, the culmination of a 20-year campaign. Since the picture was taken, lift shafts were constructed in early September as part of the £15 million project. The footbridge will be installed this month and the station should open in 2024.

Contacts:

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

Beattock Station Action Group:
www.beattockstationactiongroup.org.uk/
facebook.com/BeattockStationActionGroup

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

Levenmouth Rail Campaign:
www.levenmouth.co.uk/
facebook.com/LevenmouthRail/

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

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

Thornhill Station Action Group:
facebook.com/thornhilltrainstation/

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

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

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

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■ ■ Railfuture's local action

In May Railfuture had a stall at the Faversham Festival of Transport while in June we had a "Bridge the gap" campaign stall at the Uckfield & District Lions Club's Jubilee Picnic. Also in June we joined other branches at the second Community Rail Showcase day at Southampton.

The same month, Railfuture took part in a seminar by anti-car-dependency group Transport for New Homes, promoting our slogan Rail Transport for New Homes. June also saw Railfuture support the launch of sub-national transport body Transport for the South East's draft 30-year strategic investment plan.

In July, Railfuture took part in a Westminster reception of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the South East. Another Railfuture "Bridge the gap" campaign stall was at the Uckfield Festival's Big Day. The campaign was promoted again in August, when a Railfuture team

met the planning committee of Lewes Town Council. See the Railfuture presentation on the Railfuture website Uckfield-Lewes page.

In November Railfuture is planning to have a display in Ashford International station as part of its 180th anniversary celebrations.

■ ■ Consultation campaigning

Responding to consultations and calls for evidence, and also planning applications and appeals, remain core parts of our campaigning, lobbying and influencing activities.

Our most recent submissions include Gatwick Airport's revised proposals for surface access relating to a second runway for use by some aircraft, revised plans to Lewes District Council for Ringmer, where land might be needed for an Uckfield-Lewes station, and Transport for the South East's draft 30-year Strategic Investment Plan. Railfuture has also made submissions to the Planning Inspectorate on two appeals affecting housing proposals to Lewes District

Council. Another Planning Inspectorate submission related to redevelopment around South Kensington Underground station. Details are available under the *Submissions* section in the *Library* at the foot of the Railfuture website.

Current consultations are under the *Rail dates* in the *What's on* section of the Railfuture website's home page or on the branch website page.

■ ■ A bigger better railway

The collapse of plans for a Watford-Croxley link has led to public discussion about the possibility of a new rail-based Herts-Bucks Connector (Watford to Aylesbury and Milton Keynes) as an alternative to traffic-ridden roads.

■ ■ Railfuture updates

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

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

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

Axeman Shapps provokes battle for East West Rail

By Martin Smith and Ray King

Network Rail reports that construction of East West Rail is on schedule – with Oxford to Milton Keynes services to start in 2025.

It is not all good news, however. When he was transport secretary, Grant Shapps said in July that he would cut the Bedford-Cambridge stage when asked what cuts he would make if he were prime minister.

Rail campaigners were alarmed and then angered by reports in August that he had nevertheless authorised the extremely expensive Black Cat road scheme – ten miles of dual carriageway which may cost more than £900 million.

Railfuture’s policy director Ian Brown warned: “The government has a track record of halting rail schemes halfway through. They must not be allowed to do this yet again with East West Rail.”

Railfuture chair Chris Page said: “There needs to be a much more ambitious case for the railway line. Electrify it, use it for freight services as well, relieving local roads and reducing the cost of pothole repairs.

“Then run proper regional services on it such as Swindon to Ipswich and Oxford to Leicester – and recognise that a railway is essential to support the extra housing needed in the area.”

He added: “It can be a diversionary route as well. Let us have fewer of those dreaded rail replacement buses.”

The road from Black Cat corner on the A1 near Eaton Socon will run to the new town of Cambourne, west of Cambridge.

Although Mr Shapps cancelled plans for an east-west expressway last year, rail campaigners now question whether the Black Cat scheme is the first step in building an expressway by stealth.

Rail campaigner Andrew Long commented: “This road equates to over £90 million per mile. Hardly value for money.”

Ignoring the role of road building in accelerating climate change, the government also announced in September that major road schemes would benefit from a new fast-track planning process.

Transport Action Network director Chris Todd said: “New roads are hugely damaging projects that are putting our climate targets at risk.

“There is absolutely no case for road building to be part of the fast-track process for green infrastructure.” By contrast,



FROZEN HEART: Platforms were being constructed as snow fell in December last year at Winslow station which will be at the heart of East West Rail when it transforms travel between Oxford, Milton Keynes and, eventually, Cambridge. More than 500 pre-cast concrete platform units were lifted into position using a crane with a boom longer than Nelson’s Column

EWR is rated the overriding transformational opportunity for the region in the three-year business plan of England’s Economic Heartland, the transport body which embraces an area from Swindon and Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire.

Securing funding for East West Rail between Bletchley and Cambridge, including the link to Aylesbury, is an overriding priority for both EEH and the East West Main Line Partnership.

East West Rail has the potential to take containers from the east coast port of Felixstowe to the freight terminals at Daventry and Northampton. Ten trains a day could use EWR if a link was built at Bletchley, although eliminating the bottleneck at Ely is crucial for more freight trains to operate from Felixstowe.

Some of the uncertainty about East West Rail was prompted in July by the “red” rating given to the Bletchley-Bedford and Bedford-Cambridge stages in an annex of the annual report of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which reports to the Cabinet Office and the Treasury.

The IPA wants EWR’s Bletchley-Cambridge stage, along with three other rail projects and 37 non-rail projects, to be re-scoped and their viability reassessed.

EWR’s proposal to demolish houses north of Bedford station to make way for two extra tracks on the already four-track Midland main line (for services to Cambridge) had already provoked protests in Bedford.

Following the protests, East West Rail said the business case and delivery programme were under review, partly because of the uncertainty of government policy on the wider Ox-Cam Arc.

One solution to the row about demolition at Bedford could be Network Rail’s proposal to build a new platform on the London-bound fast line. The Bedford Area Strategic Advice document, produced by Network Rail and published in July, said this would provide more capacity on the slow lines for both freight and East West Rail trains because East Midlands services would not have to cross on to the slow lanes to stop at Bedford. On the Oxford-Bletchley section,

expectations that the Bicester London Road crossing might be replaced by a bridge have receded and the crossing is deemed to be capable of handling four trains per hour in each direction, sufficient for services to London and Milton Keynes.

Railfuture still has a fight on its hands to get the Aylesbury link fully reinstated in EWR. We believe Aylesbury-Milton Keynes needs a half-hourly EWR service rather than the suggested hourly.

The crucial Ely upgrade, half the price of the Black Cat road scheme, is stuck in ministerial no man’s land (even though prime minister Liz Truss is on record as supporting it) and awaiting project development funding in Network Rail’s current control period and RNEP – the rail networks enhancements pipeline. Decisions on RNEP have been frozen for three years.

The Railway Industry Association advised Ms Truss in September: “A pipeline of work is the best way to keep costs down and deliver value for money for the tax and fare payer.

“Rail is key to the UK’s future, not only connecting towns, cities and communities across the country but also in creating and supporting economic growth, hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of pounds in tax revenue. For every £1 spent on rail, £2.50 is generated in the wider economy.”

One example of success is the reopened Exeter-Okehampton service, which is carrying double the number of passengers that was predicted.

There are fears the government’s levelling-up policy may result in funds being diverted from essential schemes such as Ely to projects in the north of England.

And the soaring cost of electricity is expected to produce a financial crisis for Network Rail over the next financial year.

Pass it on

The best way to recycle *Railwatch* is to pass it on to a friend who may be interested in railways and tempted to join Railfuture.

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