

# railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway No 175 £3 April 2023



**On the steps of the Scottish Parliament:  
Railfuture vice-president honours  
Campaigner of the Year. Full story: Page 2**

Picture by BARRIE FORREST

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PAGE ONE PICTURE

## Scottish salute for Campaigner of the Year

Members of the Railfuture Scotland committee met the new Scottish vice-president, Paul McLennan MSP, at the Scottish Parliament on 26 January, for the presentation of the 2022 Railfuture Campaigner of the Year Award to Jane Ann Liston, secretary of Railfuture Scotland and an active campaigner.

"As well as being a long-term active campaigner in her own local area of St Andrews for the re-instatement of their railway, Jane Ann is an essential part of the branch," said Railfuture Scotland chair Allison Cosgrove. She carries out all the media work, which can on some occasions mean writing an article for a national newspaper at only a few hours' notice, or taking part in a national phone-in, again at short notice.

"She produces knowledgeable and well-informed articles, and is an invaluable member

of the team, promoting rail use around Scotland.

"Jane Ann does not own a car, and her travels around Scotland on her trusty Brompton bike, laden down with laptop, bags and on occasion golf clubs when she's going on holiday, are a testament to her belief in public transport, as a Brompton can accompany her on buses, trains and ferries – sometimes all three in the same journey"

Paul McLennan said: "It was a pleasure to meet Railfuture Scotland members at Holyrood and present this well-deserved award to Jane Ann Liston, who has shown a huge commitment to Scotland's railway and to increasing passenger usage."

Paul kindly provided tickets for First Minister's Questions for branch members, and hosted lunch for the group after the presentation.



**ANOTHER NEW STATION:** Work is expected to start soon on a £250 million second station (Beaulieu Park) for Chelmsford, Essex, on the Great Eastern main line. The station should open in 2025  
Picture: Chelmsford City Council

# A steep hill for rail to climb

By Ian Brown

Our rail industry is at rock bottom. It has lost the confidence of stakeholders, the public and its own staff.

It is ironic that, having been on life support over Covid, that it is the industry's own staff that have put the nail in the coffin.

Repeated strikes and overtime bans seem designed to make rail untenable.

In his column on page 23, Railfuture chair Chris Page makes the point that we need better leadership than this from government, management and trade unions.

The fact that many staff seem prepared to destroy their own future prospects and our railways is a real concern, irrespective of thoughts on whether the various pay offers are enough or not.

This begs a serious question: Why would staff close down their own future prospects? The answer is that they too have lost confidence in the industry's leadership. Underneath all this are the real people on the railway who have served us well day and night, in all weathers, and want to continue to do so. They need and deserve the context to do this. This must come from management.

The new rail structure announced on 7 February is a modest start in terms of putting the structure of the industry on a more sustainable footing.

We must not waste this opportunity by complaining about its deficiencies. It is not privatisation or nationalisation.

The challenge is whether wiping the slate clean, or cleaner than it was, is an opportunity for leadership. The industry must rise to that challenge or die.

This is the necessary condition for rail's fight back. Is it enough?

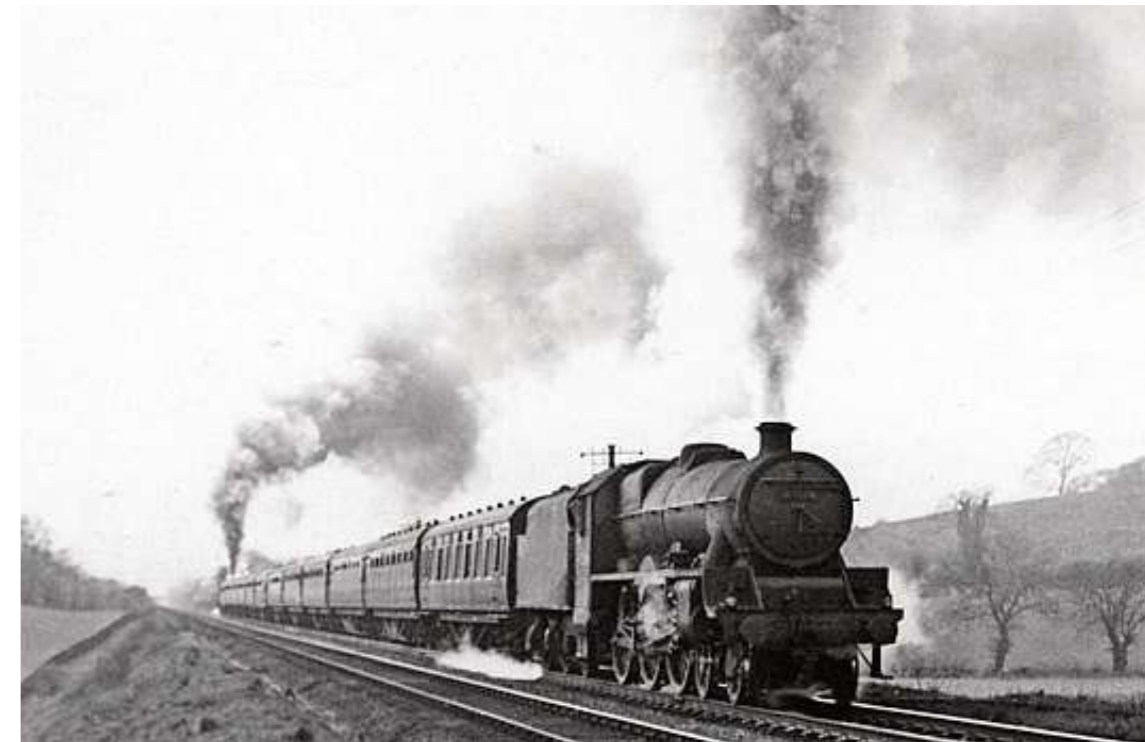
We know that just about everywhere in the world, cities and national governments are investing in railways – even in the USA.

They are doing this because railways are seen as a cost effective way of addressing economic, social and environmental issues, making cities work and countries cohesive.

This need still exists in the UK with our north-south divide exacerbated by transport inequality. Indeed, the government is still committed to HS2 to partially address this.

Investment in making our railways more efficient and sustainable is still the key to the future.

The stark reality of just 2.4 kilometres of main line electrification being completed in 2022 is not good enough.



**STRUGGLING:** A passenger train climbing the 1 in 37 Lickey incline in 1949 needs aid from by the banker Big Bertha just as the rail industry needs a banker for the uphill task it faces today. Picture: Creative Commons



**OPTIMISTIC DAYS:** Ian Brown (left) dug out this pre-Brexit happy snap of a Folkestone to Calais Channel Tunnel awayday with colleagues in 1994 when BR's Sir Bob Reid stepped in to borrow a fleet of nine French electric locomotives because the British locomotives for Tunnel freight were not ready. One month later, the Channel Tunnel officially opened  
Picture: British Railways

Passenger numbers had been rising continuously up to Covid and were recovering before the strikes.

Passengers have found other ways of travelling, as evidenced by a reverse in car sales from decline to growth and a strong boost to coach travel on inter-city routes, particularly London to Manchester, in the absence of a viable rail service. This clearly means diminished rail prospects in the future. This can be minimised only if passengers and freight customers start to get back their confidence in railways. London's Crossrail, now

known as the Elizabeth line, has carried 100 million passengers in less than 10 months, a staggering performance well above expectations. It has been significantly helpful to Transport for London by easing its financial losses resulting from Covid.

We should be building more Crossrails, particularly in the English Midlands and North, as well as in Scotland.

The Welsh government is doing precisely that with a totally new rail transport system for South Wales and equipment replacement for

the rest of Wales. Railfuture is not resting on its laurels. We have the confidence of many stakeholders and industry players and we must build on this opportunity.

The alternative is one of continued strife, cutbacks and little prospect for the country achieving the objectives.

Let us start by addressing the leadership of the industry, with staff recommitted to its future and stakeholders and customers coming back.

■ Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture's policy director

## No fast way forward for high speed rail

### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

The suggestion that High Speed 2 could end permanently at Old Oak Common was an idea born of desperation.

Although chancellor of the exchequer Jeremy Hunt appeared to knock it down, he actually left the door open to it with his weaselly response to whether he was committed to the line reaching Euston:

"Yes we are. And I do not see any conceivable circumstances in which that would not end up at Euston."

Hmmm, yes, but there are always "inconceivable" circumstances. Just think Covid or indeed Brexit and certainly the chancellor was leaving the door just that bit ajar.

Actually, it is a terrible and unworkable idea. The notion of stopping at Old Oak Common (only old trainspotters like me who used to bunk 81A Old Oak or 1A Willesden sheds know where it is) came about because ministers have no clear idea of what to do with a project that is increasingly

out of control and yet will apparently never hit the buffers. They are stuck between two totally undesirable outcomes, and have no way of getting out of the mess.

Regular readers of my work will know that I am no fan of the scheme, which never had a clear purpose and which is sapping up huge amounts of money that could have been spent to create a proper 21st century railway for the whole country. However, irrespective of my views, the crisis over HS2 is all too apparent but is also irresolvable. HS2 elicits opinions as firmly argued as Brexit and inevitably that generates more heat than light. Opponents of the project were quick to use the suggestion of not reaching Euston to highlight the profligacy and argue that it should be completely shelved given the cost of living crisis. Lord Berkeley, a long time sceptic of the line, suggested that while £20 billion has either

been spent or is committed, stopping the scheme now would only cost in the order of half that as some of the land could be sold off and contractors could be redeployed on other tasks.

Cancelling HS2 would leave the Chilterns littered with half-built tunnels and lengthy embankments and make archaeologists of the fourth millennium scratch their heads about their purpose. Berkeley's optimism about land sales is misplaced. Euston has been devastated with the loss of some excellent council housing (and the house owned by Boris Johnson's father). While the land could be sold off, the original

owners would surely claim they were entitled to any uplift in value. Scrapping HS2 would be terrible politics as it runs counter to the Levelling Up agenda which is one of the few positive policies being pursued by the Tory government –



Christian Wolmar



**SUPPORT: South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard and lead campaigner and Railfuture member Graham Moss, centre, with MP Ed Miliband at the Askern station site** Picture: SYMCA

davidpennierail21@gmail.com

**South Yorks backing for Askern reopening**  
South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard and Doncaster North MP Ed Miliband visited the proposed Askern station site in January to reaffirm support for bringing rail services back to this part of South Yorkshire.

A leading *Restoring Your Railway* initiative, the aim is to reinstate direct services between Leeds and Doncaster, via Pontefract, Knottingley and a new station at Askern, potentially by extending one of the existing half-hourly Leeds-Knottingley services to and from Doncaster. New platforms would be required on the Doncaster line at Knottingley, but all the necessary track is already in place. At present, the line through Askern is used only by freight and Grand Central's King's Cross-Bradford services. Askern has seen substantial housing development in recent years, which has contributed to the severe congestion that now blights the main A19 road into Doncaster.

**Haxby station progress**

The executive of City of York Council has already committed more than £4 million to a new station at its preferred site on the York-Scarborough line about a mile north of Haxby village. Further approvals were given in October to take the scheme forward, and it is hoped the remaining £12 million needed will come from the government. A report in October to the council's executive indicated that 83% of the 1,200 people who responded in a consultation would use Haxby station. Depending on government funding announcements and the outcome of a planning application (likely this year), the council hopes work could begin in about a year with the station opening shortly after. Separately, the council also applied – without success – for £5 million of levelling up funding to improve active travel links and accessibility to the new station. Many people in Haxby are said to prefer a site closer to York outer ring road. The Labour opposition leader on the council has expressed fears that without active travel routes to Haxby station, residential streets could be swamped by car parking.

**Update on reopening campaigns**

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority submitted a strategic outline business case to the government in September last year for the reintroduction of passenger services on the

**INSIDE YOUR RAILFUTURE**

**Could you help to run Railfuture?**

Would you like to join one of Railfuture's groups?

Railfuture groups develop policy on national and company-wide issues.

As a result of the sad and sudden death of William Whiting of West Midlands branch, a vacancy has arisen in the governance group.

Any Railfuture member who is interested in wishing to join the group is invited to apply to the chair of the group.

The terms of reference of the group and the process for selection, are available on the Railfuture website at: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2199>

While governance is perhaps not considered the most exciting subject, you will be helping to perform a vital task in keeping Railfuture on the right side of the law and ensuring we are operating transparently, ethically and fairly.

If you have a working knowledge of best practice in governance, or useful practical experience in these matters, with an eye for detail, this could be the place for you.

Participation in any of the groups will give you a greater insight into the workings of Railfuture at a national level, and for those interested in becoming board members this could be useful experience.

If you are interested, please send a CV and contact details to Stewart Palmer at [stewart.palmer@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:stewart.palmer@railfuture.org.uk) before 30 April 2023.

**Why Join the Lottery?**

**Lottery winners**

**November** M Edgell, D Scott, J Rabett, A Cosgrove, D Fleming, J Henderson

**December** M Kneen, J Rabett, R Saxby, P Odell, R White, A T Davies

Railfuture Lottery profits go towards the Fighting Fund which supports the campaigns our members are working on. For the small sum of £12 per year for 12 entries, you can take part and win one of 6 prizes every month. Multiple entries are possible.

Taking part is easy – contact [lottery@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:lottery@railfuture.org.uk) and decide how many entries you want every month and how you would like to pay: via online banking, Paypal or cheque. With 72 winners every year and increased prizes in the December draw, give it a try – who knows, you could easily be a winner!

**Excellent: A silicon valley for rail**

By **Jessika Venn and Ray King**

The British and European rail companies are being urged to get on board an ambitious project to build a global centre for rail excellence in South Wales.

Railfuture attended the launch of the centre in November and the investment initiative in February at the Railway Industry Association headquarters in London.

Construction work is already under way at Onllwyn, a former opencast coal mine 15 kilometres north of Neath.

The £400 million GCRE will have better facilities than any other centre in Europe and will equal the American centre near Pueblo, Colorado and the Integrated Train Testing Centre under construction in Tuas, Singapore.

Rail equipment manufacturers are being invited to provide showcase equipment for the fitting-out of the Onllwyn site and also to respond to a unique investment opportunity for the long term.

**Total menu**

While global spending on rolling stock and infrastructure is around £600 billion/year, there is a major shortage of testing facilities for it, with high speed and infrastructure particularly neglected.

The consensus across both industry and government is that this is holding back rail innovation, especially in the UK.

Both the UK and Welsh governments have already provided financial and lobbying support for the project.

The core of the GCRE concept is to provide "total menu" testing facilities running 24/7 which can simulate a lifetime of wear and

extremes in mere months.

It will enable a fast-track approach to meeting Network Rail accreditation requirements for new trains.

There will also be rentable research and development suites, where both railway and energy technologies of tomorrow can be tested and promoted on one site.

GCRE will allow the acceleration of tech development timelines, eliminate the "technological valley of death", and bring down the cost of rail.

**Rain and wind**

Another aspect in which the centre is looking to the future is weather. Literally on the top of a mountain, the site receives some of the highest and heaviest rainfall and winds in the UK, and will necessitate some extreme earthworks (1-in-37 rail gradients and 35 metre-high slopes), all of which are seen by potential clients as perfect for worst-case proofing their products for the future changes to world climate.

Designers are hoping to push existing standards to the limit with 360mm of cant on parts of the track and up to 125mph running speeds.

Boosting this central work, an attached science and business park for the rail industry and academia is planned.

Both manufacturing as well as research and development can be accommodated.

Once established it is hoped the GCRE will become a magnet project, drawing in non-rail engineering and research ventures to the area for the base of skills and facilities. Several "anchor" tenants are already seeking permanent



**AN EXCELLENT RAIL FUTURE: How the two test tracks will look at the South Wales site of GCRE looking down from above the Brecon Beacons to the Bristol Channel** Picture: GCRE

residence with other organisations reserving time and space. Birmingham University will create a satellite research campus on the site for the UK Rail Research Innovation Network.

Network Rail, Transport for Wales, Transport for London and High Speed Two have already confirmed their interest.

The centre has its eye on the 2026 delivery date of the first HS2 electric trains, which will need somewhere for proving trials and warm storage until Phase 2a opens in 2029.

Groundwork started last year and the centre is due to open in 2025, with rolling stock storage opening this summer.

With £50 million of public funding already in place from the Welsh government and £20 million from the UK government, GCRE is now seeking single investors and a

consortium of investors to develop the commercial potential of the 700-hectare site.

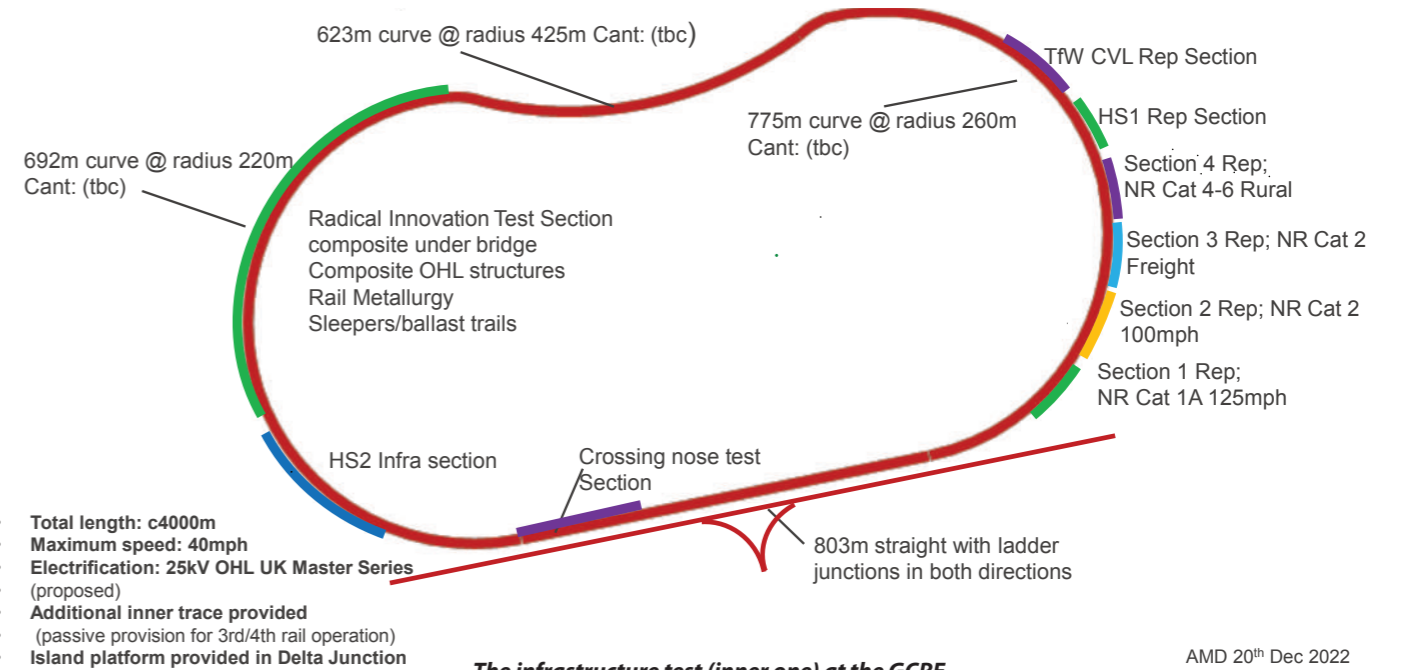
The centre is to have an open door public relations policy, with the whole site being set up and marketed as a tourist attraction in addition to its core work.

GCRE aims to be much more than a test track. Its aim is to supercharge the evolution of rail technologies while bringing down costs.

It will also be a public beacon for rail. It could light a new passion for rail engineering among students and young people, who will see the excitement of new technology being developed.

A fuller version of this article will be available in *Rail Wales* issue 74 from about the beginning of April. It can be found at

<https://railfuturewales.org.uk/en/news.php>



**The infrastructure test (inner one) at the GCRE**

# Rail is the answer for East Anglian growth

By Martin Cooper

The Railfuture board backed East Anglia branch's application for help from the Fighting Fund to employ independent Jonathan Roberts Consultants to help make the case for rail and put down a marker in the regional discussions about place shaping, sustainable growth agendas and transport investment.

Heavy rail is the cleanest, most space- and energy-efficient means of fast and frequent transport between cities and for accessing those conurbations.

Nothing else comes close, and since the mid-1990s rail ridership has been increasing by 40% more than the GDP growth per annum, while the increase in car traffic has lagged at 70% of GDP growth.

Yet while Railfuture successfully campaigns for new stations and reopening former railway lines, rail carries just 6% of all journeys in the region.

Some hoped that implementing net zero policies would deliver sustained growth in rail travel post-Covid but there is no room for such complacency.

Electric vehicles offer the illusion of guilt-free motoring and there is a real prospect of increased car traffic if we do not improve what rail has to offer.

This is significant when regional hubs are growing but running out of development land. Victims of their own success, they are experiencing overheated housing markets, traffic congestion and air pollution hazards which greater reliance on electric road vehicles will only make worse.

These are the economic and geographic trends that we have wrestled with in looking to paint a sustainable vision for East Anglia and answer the question: "How can we persuade land use planners or transport planners, who are battling congestion and growing their regional economies, that rail can make a difference on a sufficient scale for it to count as a mainstream solution?"

The consultancy has provided Railfuture with the means to influence discussions in the corridors of power by producing an evidence base for an ambitious vision of rail's role in the future of East Anglia.

It is up to Railfuture East Anglia and in particular its work with the official sub-national transport bodies to make the most of the material.

This is the beginning of a conversation in which we want to inject our ideas into the mainstream political debate for East Anglia by bringing to the table new suggestions for the way that growth can be accommodated



with investment in rail. The study looked at the idea of managed development along existing transport corridors, because this is a way in which regions can achieve growth without further dispersed village development adding to car dependency.

By containing the growth of road traffic, rail can improve connectivity and produce wider economic, environmental, public health and social benefits whose value outweighs the costs of initial investment.

This is not about lines on maps but being clear about what we want a railway to deliver and accentuating the benefits that will accrue.

It is about the impact that a targeted programme of infrastructure interventions can make.

Our suggestions are modest in scale compared to investment in roads over the past 40 years, but will help contain the growth in road traffic and reduce the need for future road enhancements.

The rail schemes are affordable, and faster inter-urban trains will help make public transport the default choice for travel between conurbations and within large conurbations.

Developing and linking communities along specific transport corridors makes sense for protecting the wider rural environment.

It helps the large agglomerations

to disperse their growth to the surrounding areas provided they have access to sustainable public transport.

We encourage land-use planners to move in lock step with devolved regional transport planning to deliver this agenda.

We cannot delay the move from "business as usual" investment in roads, otherwise we will bake in another generation of car-dependent developments.

Finance is tight and will remain so for some time, but there is no acceptable "do nothing" option for a region threatened with large-scale sea incursion.

The funding shortage applies to road investment as much as rail. Deciding how best to share road and rail investment in managed

development corridors makes the best use of these limited funds. Add in land value capture as a way to reduce the burden on HM Treasury and it ought to be a win for all concerned.

This article is my personal view of the main lessons learned as Railfuture's lead client dealing on a day-to-day basis with the consultant. It does not necessarily represent the settled policy of Railfuture.

If you want to learn more about what we did, how we went about the review, its key findings and recommendations. See the latest edition of *Rail East*.

A final report is being prepared for publication in April. The software is available so the review can be replicated by other branches wanting to do it on their own.

## Climate Perks for holidays without guilt

**Rail could benefit from a new initiative to persuade professional people to choose environmentally friendly modes of transport, rather than flying or driving to holiday destinations. Staff members can be given paid "journey days" if firms join the Climate Perks scheme aimed at encouraging longer overland journeys.**

**Software company Silvrail is one of the 65 organisations covering 2,200 people which have so far signed up to the Climate Perks scheme. Silvrail says its aim is to make rail easy for travellers because the world is a better place when people choose not to fly and also cut back on driving. Climate Perks is run by the climate change charity Possible which says: "We are on a mission to speed up action on climate change." Possible wants to avoid the greenwashing and "offsetting" to which many companies resort.**

◆ About 50% of 18 to 44-year-olds would prefer to work for an employer that helps them to take clean travel on holiday.

# 5.9% fares rise is not very appealing

By Neil Middleton

The rail fares rise which took effect on 5 March was capped at 5.9%, which the government said was in line with earnings in the year to July 2022, rather than inflation. The government said the rise was 6.4% below July 2022's retail price index. At the time of the announcement in December, Railfuture issued a position paper *The 2023 Fare Rise and Deckchairs* which can be read on the Railfuture website. While a smaller fare rise is always

welcome – and moving away from RPI is also welcome, we will resist any attempts in the future by the government to reintroduce fare rises based on RPI. Although below inflation, as measured by RPI, the government's rise is actually not very appealing when a few basic facts of railway life are taken into account, including rumours that motorists are to benefit again from road fuel duty being frozen.

1 Even when there is no industrial action, services

currently offered do not meet "fitness for purpose" tests – either on delivery, or on the timetabled frequencies and capacities. Railfuture accepts that there is considerable variability on performance.

2 Railfuture is still not seeing enough action to create a level playing field for rail. For instance, the government is still likely to cut domestic air passenger duty. This reduction is not good for the environment or the fight against climate change.

The importance of rail's role should be acknowledged. It is a better choice for routes such as Edinburgh to London. Rail travel also brings money into HM Treasury's coffers. Rail fares go to the Treasury and open access operators contribute through track access charges.

■ *The 2023 Fare Rise and Deckchairs* can be read at [www.railfuture.org.uk/article1900](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1900)  
 ■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture board director with responsibility for communications

## PROFIT AND LOSS IN THE RAILWAY MONEY-GO-ROUND

One of the reasons rail fares have increased in spite of public investment is that profits are siphoned off by private companies involved in the railways, say critics of privatisation.

Free enterprise enthusiasts say this is a price worth paying for a competitive and efficient railway. Others say the profits going out of the railway should be used to improve the railways and bring down fares. This is complicated by the fact that ticket revenue now goes to the Treasury, as train operators have post-franchise direct contracts with the Department for Transport. One campaigner says that, before Covid, the franchised operators were making a profit of about 3% of turnover if they were lucky, but taking a lot of risk on both cost and revenue, and sometimes losing considerable

sums. He says the DfT TOCs take virtually no revenue risk and they take no cost risk. The DfT pays every single cost the TOCs incur, including the managing director's salary. Big profits have been made by the rolling stock companies – the ROSCOs. Journalist Solomon Hughes says: "The ROSCOs have been quietly and secretly squeezing enormous profits from our railways for decades. Passengers have been forced to pay more than they should, just so the train operating companies and ROSCOs can plunder a profit from the rail network and pass it on to their shareholders."

During Covid, the government paid to keep the trains running while the ROSCOs continued to make profits. ROSCO defenders say investment levels are vast and there is some financial risk.

The three original ROSCOs, Eversholt, Porterbrook and Angel Trains, dominate the market. Eversholt made a combined profit of £96 million over 2020 and 2021. In the same two years, Eversholt paid £83 million to its parent company (UK Rails SARL) based in Luxembourg. During the pandemic, £179 million from UK taxpayer payments went to the Luxembourg based company.

■ Avanti West Coast, which recorded the worst performance for punctuality among train operators, received £343 million from the taxpayer under emergency contracts. The operator which cancelled 3,600 trains and received 35,000 complaints from passengers in 2020-21, received performance awards and paid its shareholders £12 million from its "profits".

By Richard Lysons

*Network Greater Manchester* is a fascinating book by veteran railway photographer Martyn Hilbert.

Published just before lockdown, it may have escaped the attention of *Railwatch* readers. The book is still relevant and, for transport campaigners, highly useful.

Publishers Fonthill Media should send a copy of the book to the current rail minister and his shadow.

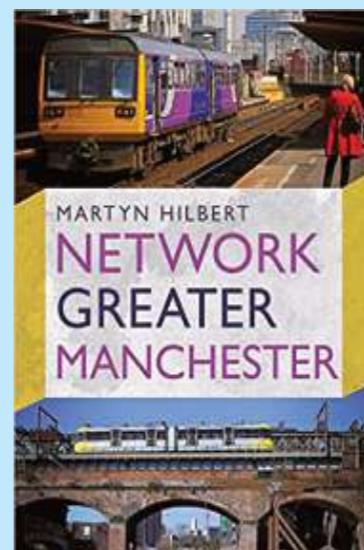
Stretching the budget, copies would also be helpful for all members of the House of Commons transport select committee.

This "photographic journey", chronicling the changes in the rail scene in this metropolitan county from the late 1970s to the present day, gives a clear picture of the challenges of improving the rail network in Greater Manchester. Even now, the network is only partly electrified and too many journeys are still quicker by car.

Greater Manchester consists of 10 metropolitan districts and covers an area of just under 500 square miles. Nearly three million people live in Greater Manchester, over half the population of Scotland. There are over 90 stations, some without step-free access, on a 142-mile heavy rail network.

Greater Manchester also has the

## A textbook for campaigners



*Network Greater Manchester* by Martyn Hilbert  
 Fonthill Media (2019)  
 96 pages. £16  
 ISBN 978-1-78155-767-9  
[www.fonthill.media.com](http://www.fonthill.media.com)

largest light rail system in the UK. Metrolink has a 62-mile network with 99 stops. This book was published a few months before the opening of the extension of Metrolink through Trafford Park to the Trafford Centre.

As many *Railwatch* readers will know, Manchester saw the first passenger railway in the world, but

the city region has also suffered the closure of both Central station and the electrified Woodhead route to Sheffield.

Throughout all 10 boroughs over the past four decades, we read about the removal of platforms, station canopies and double rails.

However, there have also been imaginative reopenings of stations, the introduction of new stations such as Horwich Parkway and, of course, the Ordsall Chord.

The book is divided into five chapters covering different areas of the county with a sixth chapter covering Metrolink.

A short introductory chapter relates the history of rail in Greater Manchester.

As someone who complains about the balance of photographs and text in many railway books, it is refreshing that Hilbert gets the balance right in this book, a companion volume to his earlier *Network North West* (2017).

Hilbert's photographs, over 150 in number and all colour, are excellent and his commentary is clear and jargon-free. I would have liked perhaps a rail map of Greater Manchester but that can get very complicated.

As I write this review, the much-delayed Transpennine Route Upgrade is slowly starting to

happen with electric catenaries appearing on the line to Stalybridge. I am optimistic about the future of rail in Greater Manchester. Transport for Greater Manchester is pro-active with an inspiring rail team which works closely with commuters, station friends groups and community rail partnerships. Since the book was published we have seen two new partnerships established – South East Lancashire (based around Bolton) and Calder Valley (between Rochdale and Halifax) and a third one – Liverpool to Manchester – launched last year. If Mayor Andy Burnham's dream of an integrated Bee network is properly funded, more positive developments are on the horizon.

Reference is made in the book to platforms 13 and 14 at Piccadilly and the line between here and Oxford Road as "one of the most intensively used stretches of railway in the UK".

Most Railfuture members might highlight this problem a little more forcibly. There is a lot of work to be done. Hilbert's book works both as armchair reading material and campaigning tool and will appeal to readers both inside and outside Greater Manchester. Despite living in the area for four decades, I learned a lot.

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

## Women's safety

I was pleased to see the article in the recent *Railwatch* about the research highlighting women's safety on trains, which I feel is an equality issue and one that needs addressing if we are to attract more women to travel by train.

Both Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Railfuture branches will have heard me talk about Platform Zero at Doncaster station, which is set apart from the rest of the station. I have been there on my own waiting for the last train of the day with no sign of security or other staff, and know from experience that the help button is rarely answered.

While there are good reasons for having Platform Zero, for smooth running of main line trains, there has been no regard paid to passenger safety by having proper staffing in place.

Women train guards have told me stories of providing refuge in their cabs for young women being harassed on late night trains.

If we move to driver only operation, this option will no longer be available. A member of my household witnessed such an incident (in broad daylight) which was handled by other passengers, but it needed a conductor to alert the driver, stop the train at the next station and contact BT Police.

We will attract more women to rail travel only if they know they will be safe.

Changes in working practices have equality implications and I would not like to see women deterred from train use because of fears for their own safety.

**Ann Hindley, Crowle, North Lincolnshire DN17 4EX**  
ann@hindley.gn.apc.org

## Myth drives forward

I enjoyed your splendid back page article entitled "Railway waits for certainty" in *Railwatch* 174.

I loved the reference to the 1960s car and "advertisers going to extreme lengths to sell a polluting nightmare as a dream". Aren't they still doing the same with electric vehicles?

**Colin Burgess, Christow Station**  
teignrail@gmail.com

## Electrification top 10

I was pleased to see that you regard the Doncaster-Immingham route as a Top 10 priority for electrification (*Railwatch* 174). Outside the area, few may know that Immingham and Cleethorpes jointly is the biggest UK port in terms of tonnage. So it needs to be served by a better rail service than is the case at present.

I know that North East Lincolnshire

## Ukraine forges forward



**OVER THE BORDER:** The diesel train at the Romanian border  
Picture: Alexander Kamyshin

**Ukraine and Romania reopened an international rail link in January that had been closed for the past 17 years, described as an amazing achievement in the middle of a war.**

**A diesel train built in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February last year worked the first trains. The new service will allow Ukrainians to travel to Cluj-Napoca airport in Romania which has international flights, including two each day to London, as well as by rail to the Romanian capital of Bucharest.**

**It will also enable Ukrainian rail freight traffic to gain access to the Baltic at Constanta. Ukrainian railway chief Alexander Kamyshin said: "Cargo export is blood for our economy."**

**"But it will also allow Romanians to travel to ski resorts in Ukraine or for hiking in the Carpathians in the summer."**

**Orest Klympush, aged 81 and "a legend", drove the first train across the border. Mr Klympush was Ukrainian transport minister in the 1990s.**

**Despite the war, Ukraine also announced in January that it has rebuilt 120 electric commuter trains to accommodate 24 bikes on each eight-car train.**

**Ukraine also agreed an "historic" deal with Poland in January to build a European gauge line from Kiev to Warsaw via Lvov with 155 miles per hour trains.**

Council will be right behind you on this, as I put forward a motion early in the year calling for improvements to local rail that got unanimous approval.

**Clr Tim Mickleburgh**  
Boulevard Avenue  
Grimsby DN31 2JP

## Hydrogen hope

I was very interested to read the article on hydrogen trains being successfully used on lines in Germany (*Railwatch* 174). It raises the question whether extensive electrification of rail lines will really be necessary. Electrification is very expensive, so might it not make more sense for investment to go into hydrogen trains, storage and local electricity generation (by wind power as proposed in Germany, or other means)? Has Railfuture considered the issue?

**Martin Wright**  
Otley

**Editor's note:** Hydrogen is being considered as a way to improve

services on the Far North line in Scotland and the Cambrian line in Wales. But critics have pointed out many problems, some of which have been aired in previous editions of *Railwatch*.

## Short circuit

I read with interest the article entitled *Electrification: Greener, faster, better* in *Railwatch* 174, and much as I fully support its aims I strongly doubt if the plans will ever be realised.

When I moved to Harrogate in 2007, there was much debate about how the York-Harrogate-Leeds line would soon be electrified.

Fifteen years later and the only visible change is that some hand-me-down ScotRail 170 sets now ply for trade on the line, replacing the detested Pacers.

The map shown depicts only a part of the UK's rail infrastructure. There are great swathes of the national

network that are crying out to be electrified, but where is the electricity going to come from to power any transformation, let alone the funding?

Throw into the mix the current government's ill-considered race to 'net zero', leaving motorists with no long term choice other than electric vehicles (without a decent charging infrastructure), and plans to force householders to replace efficient gas central heating with inefficient heat pumps, and it is clear that the existing power generating infrastructure is woefully inadequate.

Battery charging requires a source of electricity, as does the generation of hydrogen, which is recognised as not being as fuel dense as fossil fuels.

The current administration's plans seem to centre on more wind turbines, in some vain hope that that will be enough to power the UK when fossil fuel generated power is eventually decommissioned, backed-up by nuclear power, if new stations ever get built, and relying on foreign power sources to plug the supply gaps. The tragic situation in Ukraine has demonstrated just what a flawed policy that is.

Governments of all political hues have failed to address the UK's need for energy security, always kicking it into the long grass. As a result, the country is now threatened with rolling power blackouts.

With continued under-investment in national rail infrastructure, especially in the north of the country, I sincerely believe that diesel-powered rail passenger and freight transport will be polluting the country for many decades to come, or that large sections of the network will endure a second coming of Dr Beeching.

**Clem Dye, Hookstone Chase,**  
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## Negative reaction

I was interested to read the letters in *Railwatch* 173 commenting on the anti-union tone of a previous article.

Recently I attended my first ever Railfuture event – the one held in Birmingham as part of the Conservative Conference fringe, and was surprised – shocked even – at a similar right-wing bias.

I was the only person in the room to mention that the prime purpose of the private companies who run most of our railways is to make as much money as possible for the benefit of their shareholders and directors and that passengers are not there to be served but to provide as much profit as can be

## Northern tribute to Paul Abell



**Paul's daughter Anne, wife Shirley and sons Brian and Malcolm stand next to the plaque unveiled in Paul's memory**

Report and pictures by Andrew Dyson

A commemorative plaque was unveiled at Ashburys station on 16 November 2022 in memory of Paul Abell, the former vice-president of Railfuture and *Railwatch* stalwart, who died in autumn 2021. Since giving up the role of editor of *Today's Railways UK* in 2015, Paul had been heavily involved in the project to equip every station on the Manchester-Glossop line with a Heritage Information Board.

In a ceremony to dedicate the plaque, Owain Roberts, stakeholder manager for Northern, welcomed everyone and gave an account of Paul's diverse career. This was followed by Paul's son Brian, who gave some personal recollections of his late father. Chair of the Friends of Glossop Station, Neil Williams, then presented Paul's wife, Shirley, with flowers.

As well as recognising Paul's lifetime of service to transport heritage, the plaque features a Stanier 2-6-2T locomotive, a type that worked regularly in the area. Below that is Manchester Corporation Tramways 765, the only remaining electric tramcar from Manchester Corporation in regular operation, now at Heaton Park. Both these types were particularly important to Paul.



**The Glossop Line information board at Ashburys station. Paul created the content for the boards at Ashburys and Gorton and provided invaluable technical assistance with the other boards**

squeezed out of them. The continued private running of the railways was taken as a given. Indeed one member of the panel was positively tub-thumping about this.

While the unquestioning acceptance of this status quo, and of the role of Great British Railways

in it, was disappointing (and makes me think twice about renewing my Railfuture membership) it was also stupefyingly ignorant!

Just a week before this, the Labour party, which seems likely to form the next government, had declared its intention to renationalise the railways. Yet this was not

mentioned even once. Time for Railfuture to wake up and sniff the coffee?

**Peter Geall, Kenilworth Court,**  
Coventry CV3 6JD  
thb@waitrose.com

## Bonkers idea

I have read about a bonkers and expensive idea to electrify one lane of the M180 motorway between Immingham and Scunthorpe for electric lorries.

The motorway parallels a busy freight railway which railway authorities have obviously deemed not deserving of electrification.

Large amounts of mineral traffic travel by rail on this route and the idea of electrifying the road should surely be strangled at birth.

**Wesley Paxton, Annerley Road,**  
Annan DG12 6HE  
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## Senior service

I turned 60 in July, and on that very day I got a senior citizens railcard for only £30 which can be used on day trips.

I think it is ridiculous, however, that the senior card cannot be used to obtain discounted season tickets, whether they be weekly, monthly, six monthly or 12 monthly.

I have just renewed my yearly season ticket to go between the part of Cardiff where I live, Radyr, and Cardiff city centre. I had to pay £592 but would have appreciated the saving if the senior discount had been applied.

**Paul Hooker, Drysgol Road, Radyr,**  
Cardiff CF15 8BT

## Fares unfair

We are told that passenger numbers on trains are below pre-pandemic levels, so it is hardly conducive to encouraging people on to the railway by increasing fares.

In Germany a scheme was introduced to entice people to use public transport, including buses, trains and trams.

Here in Britain, we have a £2 cap on a single bus fare. There is no similar scheme for trains and trams, and the £2 offer lasts for only three months.

**R A Smith, Station Road, Witham,**  
Essex CM8 2FP

## Spent to Bradford

Regular travellers to and from Bradford will be very disappointed by the removal of a Bradford station from Northern Powerhouse Rail – and the loss of the proposed through services to Manchester Piccadilly & Airport, Liverpool and

**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**

Sheffield with the collapse of Northern Connect. Realising that the government currently considers the cost of tunnelling new lines through the Pennines and building a through station in Bradford to be prohibitively expensive, there is a much, much cheaper solution which nobody seems to have considered. That would be to build a new high-speed spur from the upgraded Manchester-Leeds Integrated Rail Plan route to Bradford Interchange. This could follow the alignment of the old Spen Valley line from Ravensthorpe to Low Moor. This is largely intact as the Spen Valley Greenway and even has an extant bridge over the M62.

I would argue that it is not necessary for every single IRP working to run through to Leeds. Surely an hourly service from Liverpool and Manchester to a terminus station in Bradford would be viable and would offer big time savings relative to the winding route through the Calder Valley. The upgraded Bradford Interchange-Leeds route could provide separate services to the east.

**Peter Zemroch, Little Sutton,**  
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## Class correction

The *Railwatch* 174 article on Ukraine's railway was an excellent read and my thoughts are with them all.

The fossil fuel feature was also appreciated with one small error. The electric unit from ScotRail was a class 314 which became a 614, as the front page of our BLASTPIPE magazine shows.

**Alistair Moss, Scottish Railway**  
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**Main line disruption**

When a landslide at Hook caused major disruption to rail services on the South West main line in January, there was an obvious need to restore limited services for passengers at the earliest opportunity. Railfuture put forward various suggestions to the train operator at the outset in the hope of influencing outcomes.

In the immediate aftermath of the landslide, we questioned the blanket “do not travel” advice when there were perfectly viable alternative rail services for most journeys. By pooling train crew and rolling stock resources, it would have been possible to divert Exeter-Waterloo trains to Reading and maybe on to Paddington, but shared working is clearly beyond the capability of today’s fragmented railway so that did not happen. For some unknown reason, the well-rehearsed diversion of Weymouth services via Havant did not happen either. Predictably, Great Western’s two or three car Basingstoke-Reading shuttles became full and standing – a situation made worse by severe cuts to CrossCountry services on the route since the onset of the pandemic.

South Western Railway and Network Rail’s engineers on site must be given credit for restoring a semblance of normality within 10 days of the original landslide. Engineering teams were a bit quicker off the mark in days gone by, so rapid response units will be needed if landslips are going to occur more often as predicted. Perhaps a more visionary, cooperative approach is needed when planning train service contingencies. There should also be a sharp focus on providing help for bewildered passengers caught up in service cancellations.

**Ryde pier completion**

At the Isle of Wight Bus & Rail Users’ Group public meeting in January, attendees were promised the restoration of the long-awaited two trains an hour service throughout the day once the pier works are completed in April or May. Until 2021, Island line users had two trains an hour but, with the introduction of the Vivarail class 484s, this was reduced to one train an hour for much of the day. The bad news is that it will not be a regular 30 minute service, as originally promised, and only one train an hour will run along Ryde pier, with alternate trains terminating at Ryde Esplanade. As the group has pointed out since 2016 when the passing loop at Brading was first planned, the location of the loop is not half-way along the line so, unless the performance of the new units could be improved to match the previous stock, a 30 minute service was never going to work.

If all goes to plan, the hourly train to Ryde Pier Head will provide a good connection with the hourly FastCat ferry service from Portsmouth. Some late-evening sailings have been restored, so trains will no longer trundle along the pier for non-existent connections. Also, following pressure from Railfuture and others, the unpopular two-hour gaps in the ferry timetable have been consigned to history.

**Wareham service expectations**

The Swanage Railway’s 60-day trial of a passenger service running on to the main line at Wareham in 2017 was considered a success, albeit with some financial pain. Up to now the railway has been unable to follow this up with the promised 90-day service because of operational problems and then the Covid pandemic. The line’s management team is hopeful that it can run heritage diesel units to and from Wareham on four days each week (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday) through the summer of 2023, and will be relying on high levels of support from the public to turn a profit. Meanwhile, the application for long-term funding for a regular service between Swanage and Wareham under the *Restoring Your Railways* programme still awaits a decision from the Department for Transport.

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

For members, the rail industry and anyone interested in the railway

**RAILFUTURE AGM 2023 IN LONDON**

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

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

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

As well as formal business, such as receiving the annual report and financial statements, there will be an update from our honorary president, Christian Wolmar, and a chair’s review looking at the year just gone and the year ahead. It will be followed by the Member of the Year award before

lunch. After lunch, there will be the Rail User Group Awards and presentations. We are planning to live stream the day, but do note that for the AGM portion watchers will not be counted as attendees, nor able to vote on the day. Only physically present members will be able to vote on the day.

More details to follow, or visit [https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/#2023\\_london](https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/#2023_london) nearer the time.

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

**Severnside**

bruce.williamson@railfuture.org.uk

**Portishead breakthrough**

The construction company VolkerFitzpatrick has been chosen by Network Rail to carry out work to reopen the Bristol-Portishead line.

It will build two new stations at Pill and Portishead, as well as restoring the line closed in 1964.

£6 million worth of design and surveying work is expected to take up to 18 months, before the overall £150 million reconstruction starts.

West of England Metro Mayor Dan Norris said it was an important milestone for the project, part of the area’s net-zero-by-2030 target.

Steve Bridger, leader of North Somerset Council, said it is a vital project, a sustainable alternative to roads and part of the government’s *Restoring Your Railway* programme. He said it will provide rail services for 50,000 people.

**Ashley Down new station**

Construction work could start soon on a new station at Ashley Down, on the line between Bristol Temple Meads and Filton Abbey Wood, once funding is confirmed by the West of England combined authority.

Bristol mayor Marvin Rees said: “It is fantastic that work is set to get under way.

“Improving the rail network is an important part of our long-term strategy to boost sustainable transport and increase connectivity across Bristol and the wider region.”

Ashley Down station should be open next year, as part of the MetroWest Phase 2 project. New stations are also planned for Henbury and Filton West.

Work is almost finished on Bristol’s first new station for almost 100 years – Portway Park and Ride.

Severnside branch contact: [severnside@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:severnside@railfuture.org.uk)  
 Twitter @RailfutureSevnSide

**Pride and potential across Yorkshire**

By Stephen Waring

Rail campaigners are impatient to see improvements to rail travel throughout the north of England.

The hiatus left by indecision over the future of HS2 services to Leeds has prompted speculation over what can be done to improve rail journeys between Sheffield and Leeds, York and Bradford.

**What can realistically be done?**

That is the “What’s Next?” question which research group Greengauge 21 has tried to answer in its new 56-page report.

The need for high speed rail was recognised in the government’s £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan last year. But Greengauge 21 warns that the network between Sheffield and Leeds risks being the land that time forgot.

Between these two cities are former industrial towns which have had new housing developments, but feel left behind. They could, however, become an innovation corridor. Regional pride would be boosted if Wakefield, Rotherham and Barnsley could become multi-modal hubs.

Greengauge 21 says that strategic improvements can be made quickly without prejudicing more ambitious long-term aims.

Extra Leeds-Sheffield fast trains could be introduced without delay, with a new station at Rotherham.

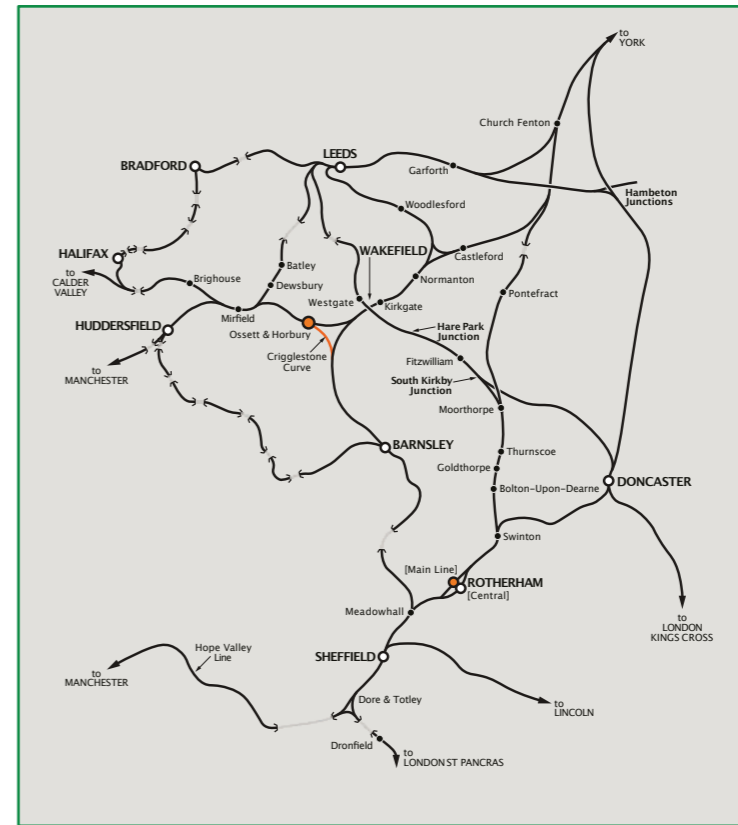
London-Sheffield expresses should be extended via Barnsley to York.

A second phase, all possible within 10 years, could be:

- A Sheffield-Chester service, linking with trams for Manchester International Airport.
- A Sheffield-Halifax-Bradford service with lower Calder Valley stops, including a new Horbury for Ossett station.

Greengauge 21 says: “We believe passionately that the national transport system needs to be re-fashioned to achieve zero carbon and facilitate a better spread of economic prosperity and social well-being.”

Its *Sheffield-Leeds: What’s Next?* report comes over very much in line with that belief: Expanding the possibilities of rail travel with new connectivity, new stations, and better use of existing routes. The



proposed interim strategy has three phases:

**1. Immediate action to provide:**

■ A second hourly fast service Leeds/Sheffield to Wakefield Westgate, complementing existing CrossCountry trains.

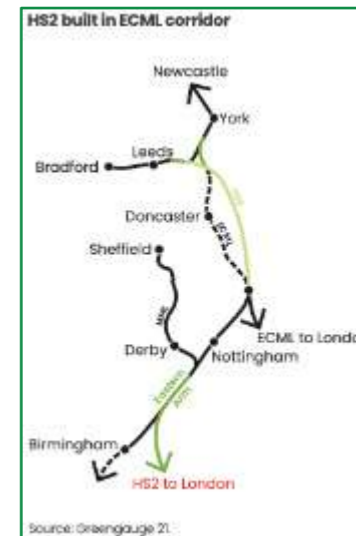
■ A new Rotherham “Midland” station. Three fast trains per hour would call, linking with Doncaster, the North East, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham. The location would interchange with buses and tram-trains.

■ St Pancras-Sheffield trains extended via Barnsley, Wakefield Kirkgate and York.

**2. Initiate planning for:**

■ New service Sheffield to Manchester Airport. The proposed third Hope Valley line fast service, instead of going into Manchester Piccadilly, would run towards Altrincham and Chester. There would be interchange at Baguley, south of Manchester, for Metrolink trams to the airport. A recent Railfuture Yorkshire committee meeting had mixed feelings about this idea.

■ New service Sheffield-Barnsley-Halifax-Bradford via Craggstone



Maps from Greengauge 21’s *Sheffield-Leeds: What’s Next?*

curve, one of West Yorkshire’s “five curves” closed in the 1980s, still largely intact, and eminently reopenable. A new station would serve Horbury and Yorkshire’s biggest trainless town, Ossett. Other calls would include Mirfield, Brighouse and Low Moor. We reckon journey time would be 75 minutes Bradford-Sheffield. This beats current timings and the inconvenience of changing at Leeds. Pathing through Bradford-Sheffield trains via Leeds would be a challenge.

Passengers from the west end of West Yorkshire at present suffer the annoyance of going “round the houses” via Leeds. The proposal opens up massively improved connectivity for Bradford, Calderdale and the lower Calder

Valley. An attractive extension to Leicester is mooted.

■ Examine a second hourly Leeds-Birmingham service by extending the new Leeds-Sheffield fast. (There may be choices to be made in terms of destinations of these services.)

**3. Renew investigations for infill electrification**

Sheffield-Doncaster/Leeds is essential, plus an “holistic examination” of capacity solutions north of Sheffield Midland station, including digital signalling.

**Other areas include:**

■ The Barrow Hill line *Restore Your Railway* scheme. This could avoid congested Sheffield Midland by using the former Victoria station. A link would be possible with another proposed reopening towards Stocksbridge. And, just maybe, the direct line to Penistone and Huddersfield.

The disadvantage of having two city centre stations is acknowledged, underlining the need for more capacity. Could alternatives include integration with Sheffield’s tram-train network?

■ Direct Huddersfield-Sheffield trains could (we estimate!) cut the journey time, currently 80 minutes, to about 50 minutes – at least to Victoria. Restoring the long-closed direct line would be costly. In the meantime, doubling of the present Huddersfield-Barnsley-Sheffield service at least as far as Barnsley would deliver big benefits.

A longer term development could be more direct routing of the Sheffield-Bradford service via the Spen Valley (Cleckheaton) route. Would this be at odds with West Yorkshire’s mass-transit proposals? It would leave Halifax and the Calder Valley unserved by the Sheffield trains. Would this be a price worth paying for a faster inter-city journey?

On long term options for HS2 (East) the report favours the Nottingham and East Coast Main Line option – bypassing Doncaster, putting Nottingham on the HS2 map and creating a faster NE-SW cross-country corridor.

But this is about developments we can all live to see. Exciting proposals deserve the support of train companies and local and combined authorities in West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire. We cannot wait decades until IRP delivers.

Let us make our existing routes better. Let us lobby for action now.

The Greengauge 21 report can be read here:

<http://www.greengauge21.net/wp-content/uploads/Sheffield-Leeds-Whats-Next-A4-FINAL-1.pdf>

# Tram Trains – the way to go – in Wales and East Anglia

By Paul Hollinghurst and Peter Wakefield

Wisbech and Haverhill are the focus of Railfuture East Anglia reopening campaigns, regularly featuring in the branch's column in *Railwatch*.

With populations of 35,000 and 27,000 respectively, and village catchment areas adding thousands more, both towns are in a region of strong economic and population growth that is centred on Cambridge – but both lose out by having poor transport links into Cambridge.

The local authorities in Cambridgeshire have commissioned a series of studies looking into their reopening, and Network Rail's Light Rail Team has recently linked the two projects, suggesting tram-train could be an ideal technology to use for the reopenings.

So, what is the progress so far? What are tram-trains? Are they suited to these reopenings? And what is the way ahead?

## Wisbech

The Wisbech line is currently mothballed, with most of the track in place. The trackbed is unobstructed over its seven-mile length to March where it joins the line linking Peterborough, Ely, Cambridge, Ipswich and Norwich.

Cambridgeshire County Council, and more recently the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, are committed to the restoration of passenger services.

This is supported by over 5,000 local people who signed a Railfuture petition.

Over 10 years, a series of studies has produced a business case which is broadly aligned to Network Rail's **GRIP 3/PACE 1** project stages, showing the best benefit to cost ratio of 4.4:1 for a half hourly through service from Wisbech to Cambridge.

The reopening would seem to be straightforward but there are a couple of problems:

1 There are a large number of rights of way crossing the line, including many little used farm crossings. Network Rail believes expensive measures are necessary to protect these.

2 The business case assumes paths would be found through Ely to accommodate the half hourly service. The long-awaited Ely Area Capacity Enhancement could potentially have provided this, but despite the combined authority helping fund the study there are no guarantees that any new paths would be allocated to Wisbech, and the cost of these paths could have a significant impact on Wisbech's benefit to cost ratio.



**WALES SHOWS THE WAY: Stadler Citylink tram-trains will run on new track between Cardiff Bay and Cardiff Central stations as part of the South Wales Metro**  
Picture: Transport for Wales

Network Rail has reviewed this work and at its recommendation the combined authority is commissioning yet another report – an *Options Assessment* report.

Our view is that after 10 years of work Network Rail should get the line rebuilt and introduce a shuttle between Wisbech and March until such time as paths are available through Ely.

## Haverhill

In 1967 Haverhill was chosen as a London overspill town. At the same time, the railway was closed and the track lifted. Happily the line is relatively unobstructed from the junction off the West Anglia main line at Shelford through to Haverhill.

In 2015 the county council commissioned a *Cambridge to Haverhill Corridor Study* which was used as the basis for Railfuture East Anglia's bid to the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* fund.

It envisaged stations serving substantial settlements and businesses in Sawston, Linton, Granta Park and Haverhill, linking housing to jobs, education, healthcare and leisure in Cambridge.

The *Restoring Your Railway* result was announced in the autumn 2021 budget statement. The Haverhill proposal was found to be suitable for funding in principle and a good case for future development.

The DfT team was asked to keep the scheme under review for a future point in time but there was insufficient funding to cover the study.

The scheme has the strong support



**South Wales tram-train interior**  
Picture: Transport for Wales

of the people of Haverhill and district with 5,000 signatures on a petition calling for the railway to be restored.

## Tram-trains

Network Rail's Light Rail Team has suggested tram-train could be the most appropriate solution for Wisbech. The DfT asked the team to

assess Haverhill as part of the *Restoring Your Railway* bid and came to the same conclusion.

In this context the tram-trains would operate as light rail on the reopened sections of line, then continue on the existing National Rail network from March and Shelford through to Cambridge.

	Tram	Tram Train	Very Light Rail	Conventional Train
Ability to access Wisbech town centre	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Compatibility with a future Garden Town extension	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Ability to service an edge of town Wisbech Station	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Comparative complexity of signalling control required	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Comparative complexity of level crossing interventions	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Complexity of station design/integration	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Ability to operate on the main line	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Comparative indicative capital cost	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
Comparative indicative operating cost	Green	Green	Yellow	Red

**GREEN FOR GO: The traffic light chart from Network Rail's Light Rail Team report Wisbech to March: Potential for Light Rail**

There are many tram-train systems operating in Europe and they are a major part of the modernisation of the Valley lines in South Wales. The Stadler-built tram-trains include an interior and ambience which is similar to the well-received new Stadler (class 755) trains operating in East Anglia, including several branch lines.

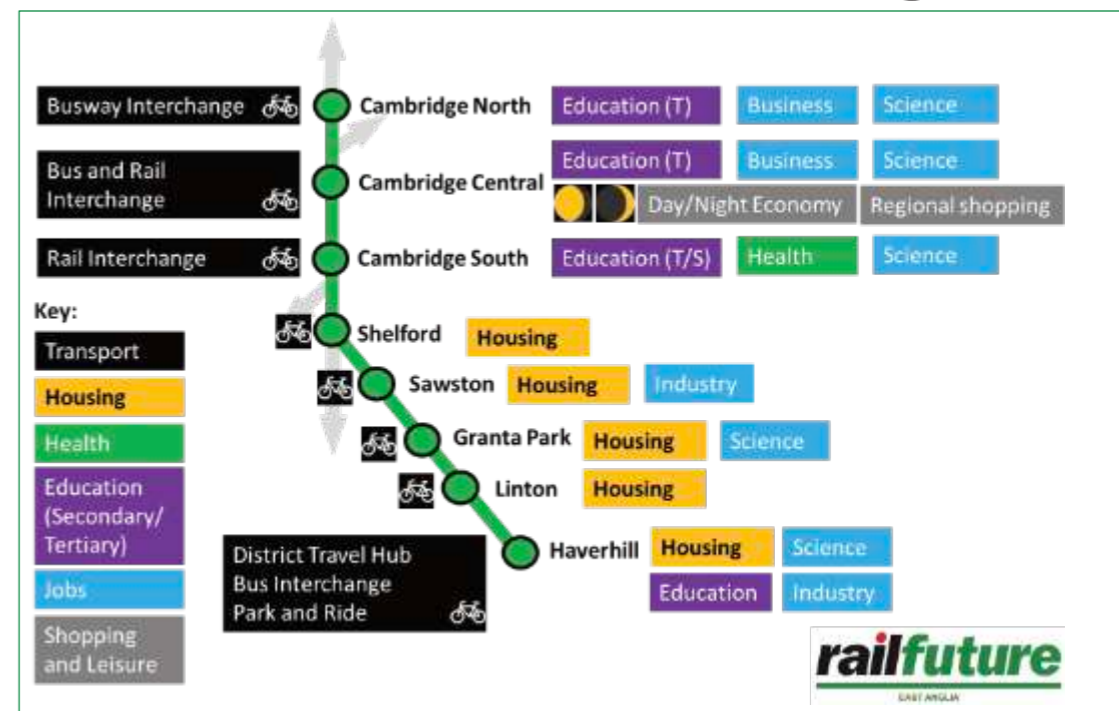
When operating to tram-train (light rail) standards, there are two major advantages over heavy rail:

- ◆ Level crossings are significantly cheaper
- ◆ Extensions can directly serve town centres and new housing developments including street running, roadside alignments, and sharp curves and steep gradients to make use of available land.

They are also very attractive to passengers both inside and out.

## Tram-train for Wisbech

In December 2019, Network Rail's Light Rail Team issued its *Wisbech to March: Potential for Light Rail* report which concluded that tram, tram-train or very-light rail could all be used, but 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 Garden Town is a plan to double the size of Wisbech to



70,000 or 80,000 people. The main factors driving this choice were:

- ◆ Ability to operate on the national rail network between Peterborough and Cambridge
- ◆ Cost-effective level crossing operation
- ◆ Ability to operate into Wisbech town centre and future extension of the service to serve the Wisbech Garden Town development using the highway network. Network



**COLOURFUL OPPORTUNITIES: Tram-train routes which could both link and run over the existing Cambridgeshire rail network**

Rail's traffic light chart shows tram-train coming out a clear leader for the aspirations of the combined authority.

Wisbech has considerable potential for freight so the track also needs to be adequate for heavy trains.

## Tram-train for Haverhill

Responding to the Railfuture *Restoring Your Railway* bid, Network Rail's Light Rail Team noted that "this proposal has potential as a tram-train scheme" and "a light rail solution would reduce capital infrastructure costs for the reinstatement to Haverhill."

The team also noted that "the development of a tram-train fleet in the area could also tie in with other opportunities such as Wisbech."

Tram-train would give the opportunity to serve new housing developments in Haverhill and better serve research parks south east of Cambridge including Babraham and Granta Park.

## Tram-train for Cambridgeshire

Railfuture agrees with Network Rail's vision, with the map showing how combining these two reopenings, along with a common tram-train fleet and depot, could be the start of a flourishing tram-train network in the region, linking into Cambridge Connect's vision of a light rail network for Cambridge City.

Manchester Metrolink has shown how, once a light rail network is established, there is a continuous desire to extend it.

## Way ahead for tram-train Cambridgeshire

To make progress with this tram-train vision for Cambridgeshire, the

local authority organisations, including the combined authority, the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Suffolk County Council, need to set up a team to progress this with the DfT and Network Rail's Light Rail Team.

This is particularly urgent as the Greater Cambridge Partnership is proposing a rival scheme for the Haverhill corridor which envisages a large unsustainable park-and-ride facility linked by a dedicated bus road to Cambridge.

This is deeply unpopular locally and would permanently scar sensitive and historic landscapes as it is driven across the foot of the Gog Magog Hills, undermining sustainable public transport including the railway reopening and instead encouraging people to drive to the park and ride facility alongside the traffic-clogged A11 road.

Restored railways to Wisbech and Haverhill provide the only sustainable, long term, high quality public transport answer which the region needs to support its rapidly growing economy and population. For further information about these reopening schemes including links to the studies mentioned, look at the Railfuture East Anglia webpages:

[www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Wisbech](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Wisbech)  
[www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Haverhill](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Haverhill)

**GRIP** is the Governance for Rail Investment Projects (formerly Guide to Rail Investment Projects)  
**PACE** is Project Acceleration in a Controlled Environment (Network Rail's replacement for GRIP)

# GBR is still in the waiting room

By Ian Brown

Transport Secretary Mark Harper reassured the rail industry in February that Great British Railways is coming soon.

He hinted that GBR would have a similar effect to George Bradshaw, whose timetables brought order to the chaos of the Victorian railway network.

Mr Harper chose his address at the Institute of Civil Engineers in London to affirm his commitment to rail, and outlined plans to modernise the industry.

In a telling comment, he said: "The more things have changed outside the railways, the more they seem to have stayed the same inside."

He reiterated the then Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin's address six years ago when he called for a more flexible, more accountable and more joined-up railway.

It was clear Mr Harper feels that no progress has been made and that these principles still apply.

Given this prolonged failure, there is evidence in Mr Harper's speech that Great British Railways will address this issue. Railfuture has therefore looked carefully at each section of his speech.

## Modernisation

The key allegation is that the railways "are not fit for purpose", citing strikes and the need for a seven-day railway, for reliability, for flexibility for freight and for efficiency, given scrutiny on public spending. His message was: "The railways need fundamental reform."

He said: "Britain is yearning for a modern railway that meets the needs of the moment."

## Context

Mr Harper stressed that, despite political and economic turbulence, the government has given full backing to the £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan (HS2 to Manchester, Northern Powerhouse Rail and East West Rail).

Railfuture members will be aware that this actually refers to a scaled-back HS2 and a more modest upgrade of the existing TransPennine route.

## Broken model

The proposition is that future infrastructure spending is wasted if our railway model is stuck in the past, with fragmentation taking little account of the customer – "an industry in no man's land."

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks and Freight & Logistics Groups at [www.railfuture.org.uk/articles](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/articles) and our dedicated campaign web-page [www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway)

Also on Twitter: [@RailfutureNetws](https://twitter.com/RailfutureNetws) and [@RailfutureFret](https://twitter.com/RailfutureFret)



Transport Secretary Mark Harper has confirmed the government's rail reform plans have been hijacked by the private sector

Dr B Ching's verdict Private Eye 17 February 2023

Mr Harper repeated the seven-day -a-week requirement, without the current need to depend on volunteers, citing the misery of attempting to use the railway on Sundays.

## Pandemic impact

Mr Harper stressed that the railways would not have survived over the Covid period but for government support, and also that an economic model that depends on five-day-a-week commuting is out of date.

He also questioned why subsidies should be made to an industry that delivers only 1.5% to 2% of all journeys.

The actual number depends on how we define journeys. It is commonly accepted that rail has a 10% market share.

So back to the "broken model", unable to adapt to customer needs, with the inevitable consequence, if left untreated, of driving passengers away with poor performance and hence fewer services.

"So yes, we will create a more customer-focused and joined-up railway," he said.

Mr Harper should have stopped there, but in dogma mode he added: "But we want to go further and actually enhance the role of the private sector...."

Mr Harper reassured us that Pay as you Go and the move toward single-leg ticketing with airline style pricing (on specified trains) would continue.

Both these initiatives are welcome, particularly as many journeys are not simply out and back.

Critics may say prices will go up, but of course the industry is perfectly capable of increasing prices anyway as we all know. Single trips should be cheaper. Whether this means flexibility and

less complexity for passengers is another matter.

## What about freight customers?

Mr Harper's speech writers appear to have largely forgotten about rail freight, an area where effective leadership has led to reform of operations and flexibility, actually to the benefit of customers – and rail freight's survival. A shame.

To be fair, he did say: "We cannot overstate rail freight's untapped potential for green growth."

He also said that a long-term freight growth target would be decided later this year.

## Structure – what structure?

The big news is that Great British Railways will go ahead. Agreeing on where the HQ will be is deferred until Easter. There was no information on the branding.

Surely there will be a better title than Great British Railways?

Will the BR double arrow symbol be used? It certainly now figures in publicity about Great British Railways. Let us hope we do not see that awful version of the logo with the blue background.

Track and train will not be combined but there will be "a single coordinating body".

Can we say goodbye to the blame culture and internal compensation bureaucracy? There should be a single point of accountability.

To be meaningful, there have to be single points of accountability well below the level of chief executive.

Mr Harper stressed that this is not a return to British Rail nor a Network Rail takeover, but an arms-length body with "industry experts" for regional contact. Could this mean there will be no further devolution?

The speech had no detail on the actual structure proposed, which is what we were hoping for.

## Private sector offer

"Passenger numbers doubled under privatisation," we are constantly told. We all know, however, that the jury is still out on whether that was on account of private sector marketing expertise

or other factors such as the economy and congestion.

It is clear though that there will be no turning back on "commercial expertise".

There will be new passenger commercial contracts with performance incentives (albeit with less commercial risk for operators), opening up railway data systems, lowering barriers for new entrants and encouraging open access operators.

The old chestnut of commercial exploitation of land and property is also there as it has been in all previous announcements, presumably discounting progress already made in this area.

## Mark Harper's conclusion

There is no detail on rail reform and it is clear that Mr Harper was careful not to reveal a detailed plan.

It would appear that the process of preparing a detailed plan is only just starting.

There was little detail in Mr Harper's speech, but near the end of it, leadership was mentioned. Railfuture contends that lack of industry leadership is the root problem, and has said so in consultation responses.

## The three key objectives

- ◆ Put customers first
- ◆ Realise the benefits of GBR
- ◆ Help enhance the role of the private sector

## What Railfuture will be doing

Railfuture will be checking on the plans for GBR as the structure and detail are revealed. We will look particularly at how these objectives will be addressed, and how they will influence Railfuture's objectives of a bigger, better railway to serve the country's economic, social, transport and environmental objectives. In particular we will be asking: How will customers be put first? What are the GBR benefits? How will these be delivered?

## Private sector role?

Is this just Tory party dogma, devoid of the lessons learned with the 1996 privatisation? Is it the result of lobbying from the private sector, anxious to retain profits and of course lower risk?

We will also be asking just how accountability will be addressed by GBR, and whether the proposal will reduce fragmentation and complexity. It is not easy to predict from the speech that it will.

Railfuture members are welcome to contribute ideas, questions and thoughts so that we can maximise our impact on stakeholders and industry players as discussions continue.

■ Ian Brown is Railfuture policy director

# Adrian Shooter – Elizabethan railway baron

By Chris Page

Adrian Shooter, one of the rail industry's stalwarts and a Railfuture vice-president, passed away on 13 December 2022. He was an inspirational leader with a simple creed: look after your customers and they will look after you.

"I am risking offending every other boss I have had, but Adrian Shooter was unique," said Thomas Ableman, previously commercial director at Chiltern Railways.

"He had that combination I have seen in the best leaders of being totally clear on the long-term future, obsessive about today and empowering his team to focus on everything from tomorrow to 10 years hence."

Adrian decided at school that he wanted to run a railway company, and after graduating in mechanical engineering at North Staffordshire Polytechnic, joined British Rail in 1970 as a management trainee and maintenance engineer. He grew through various management roles across the network, before becoming director-designate of the Chiltern train operating unit in 1993 and winning the initial Chiltern Railways franchise in 1996 in a management buyout.

Adrian's genius was to realise that the way to reduce subsidy was to go for growth, while the bus bandits focused on cost cutting.

He invited a driver and a revenue protection officer to join the board to help decide the strategy for Chiltern Railways, because he recognised that they understood what it would take to deliver the strategy.

When asked where the money would come from for the Evergreen track-redoubling projects, new platforms, station car parks and



Adrian Shooter and statue at Marylebone Picture: Chiltern Railways

new rolling stock needed to increase capacity between Birmingham and Marylebone, his answer was "from the passengers". The strategy was delivered and Chiltern soared away under his leadership, partnered with John Laing Group.

He expected a lot from his staff, which they delivered because he had earned their respect.

At his memorial service and in the media, there were numerous anecdotes about his soaring ambition and inability to tolerate mediocrity, in contrast to the current malaise in the industry.

He would listen to your explanation of what you had done to try to resolve a problem, then ask what else you would do to fix the issue and deliver for passengers.

Examples included running trains when London Underground had closed the Metropolitan line because of flooding ("Our trains don't use electricity, do they?") and getting a reliable service on the North London line when freight trains always turned up late. The solution was a schedule which

assumed that freight trains would be late. When Chiltern was bought by Deutsche Bahn in 2008, Adrian became chair of DB Regio UK, subsequently Arriva Rail.

He had connections with the Ffestiniog Railway and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, had his own garden Beeches Light Railway, and was a director and subsequently chair of the Association of Train Operating Companies.

Adrian was created a CBE in the 2010 New Year's honours list. His citation read "Adrian Shooter, Chairman Chiltern Railway Company Ltd. For services to the Rail Industry".

Adrian became a Railfuture vice-president in 2012, coincidentally the inaugural year of our annual Awards for Rail User Groups, and he was one of the judging panel from its inception.

His steadfast loyalty to that particular cause was exemplified in 2022. Despite ailing health and not content with only assessing nominations for the best website remotely, he came to London to be

present in the meeting of his fellow vice-presidents and our honorary president for the full panel's judging session. He was also active in the process of electing and coaching Railfuture directors. Nothing was ever too much trouble for Adrian.

He took great pride in founding Vivarail with the aim of delivering a low-cost replacement for the Pacers by rebuilding ex-London Underground D-Trains as class 230s.

When local sensitivities prevented this opportunity, he moved the goalposts to focus on decarbonisation, with a battery-electric solution. The patented fast-charge solution, to be trialled this year, has a good chance of surviving the failure of the company.

His interest was not only in rail. He and his second wife Barbara made road trips to 70 countries in vintage cars, including having to wait in Mongolia for a replacement gearbox to be sent out.

Adrian was honoured with a statue at London Marylebone station, unveiled on 30 August 2022.

In 2021, Adrian was diagnosed with motor neurone disease. The impact of MND is both physical and mental.

It is not a battle you can fight, it is an onslaught which always wins. It was typical of Adrian that he remained active as long as he could, then with characteristic determination, he took back control, dying in Switzerland at a time of his own choosing.

The railway needs more leaders like Adrian and, vitally, the freedom for them to be able to make such an impact.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/Adrian-Shooter](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Adrian-Shooter)

# Wonderful William, a rail champion for the disadvantaged

By Colin Major

We are very sad to announce the death on Sunday 29 January of William Whiting, the former chair of Railfuture West Midlands branch. William was also a former director of the Railfuture board and was the current chair of the Stourbridge Line User Group.

William was the essence of partnership. He had a shared understanding with railway companies and local authorities of the challenges facing the industry in delivering the best services for passengers and communities, and he worked with them constructively, pragmatically but robustly to seek the best solutions.

His influence was wide. He was instrumental in helping establish the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership in 2019, and as its first chair led its many successful initiatives.

He came to the end of his three-year service as chair in December 2022 and was especially proud of his role in the WCRP's Platform

Community Education Scheme, which won the Community Rail Network's 2022 award in its category titled *Influencing Positive Change & Sustainability*.

Platformrail.org, which aims to connect classrooms to local rail, said: "William was wonderful. He was a champion for those from disadvantaged communities."

Wendy Thorne, membership director of Railfuture, said: "I have so much to be thankful for, with knowing and working with William."

"He has been invaluable in helping to organise our 2023 annual conference in Leeds. He was really looking forward to the future with renewed vigour, and I had even just signed his nomination form to the board as he was really keen to get back involved at board level."

Railfuture's 2023 Leeds conference will be dedicated to William's memory.

Toby Rackliff of West Midlands Rail said: "RIP William – a true advocate of rail in the West Midlands."



William Whiting Picture: Platformrail.org



# Railfuture's plan for Eurostar

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

## Railfuture Wales AGM

The 2023 Railfuture Wales AGM will be held at 1330 on Saturday 22 April in Shrewsbury station. We hope to have a guest speaker - details can be found nearer the time at

[www.railfuturewales.org.uk/](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk/)

## Crossrail for Cardiff

Railfuture has long campaigned for a light rail network in Cardiff and so warmly welcomes the allocation of £50 million from the levelling up fund (round 2) for a link between Cardiff Central station and Cardiff Bay. The Welsh government is expected to match-fund the grant. The 800 metre line will run on street from new platforms at Cardiff Central to the existing line between Cardiff Queen Street and Cardiff Bay. This line is to be modernised (including redoubling) to prepare it for tram train working.

This link is a core part of Cardiff Crossrail, which could eventually link the west of Cardiff through Cardiff Central and Cardiff Bay to the city's eastern suburbs.

## Timetable consultation

Railfuture has attended the first meeting of the Transport for Wales liaison group meeting since before Covid. A major agenda item was the draft timetables to be introduced in December 2023. This is the first time Railfuture has been invited to comment on these.

Increased frequency on the North Wales main line is welcomed, although the Llandudno branch service will still be inadequate. Two trains per hour are needed here between 0800 and 2000.

The South Wales main line sees more trains too, including nine trains per day to Fishguard and restoration of an hourly stopping service between Cardiff and Swansea. However, although Cardiff will see three trains per hour to Swansea, westbound they are bunched together, leaving a 49-minute gap. Cardiff-Cheltenham Spa also gains an hourly service.

The Cambrian coast line fares less well. It keeps its two-hourly service, but capacity on the new two-car class 197s will be less than on the class 158s they replace.

## Anglesey issues

The Menai Bridge between Bangor and the Isle of Anglesey partially reopened in February after a four-month closure for emergency repairs. It led to severe road congestion on the alternative crossing, the Britannia Bridge.

Railfuture suggested that rail travel between Bangor and stations on Anglesey be free while the bridge is closed. A few weeks later, an agreement between Coleg Llandrillo Menai, based in Bangor, but with campuses on Anglesey,

and Transport for Wales allowed free train travel for students while the bridge is closed.

Railfuture is delighted that the suggested third Menai crossing is now off the agenda. Deputy climate change minister Lee Waters said: "We will not get to net zero unless we stop doing the same thing over and over."

The £400 million saved would go a long way to meeting our aspirations for the rail network in the area, especially reopening Bangor-Caernarfon and Gaerwen-Amlwch.

## Meet the manager

Railfuture was among 255 guests invited to meet Mark Hopwood, managing director of Great Western Railway. Six other senior members of GWR were present at the online meeting, as well as Francis McGarry of Network Rail.

Mark gave an overview of GWR's plans, including extending its services west of Swansea. He said the most unreliable aspect of the GWR's intercity trains is their diesel engines. He wants to see further electrification, but he does not hold out much hope at present.

Over a hundred questions were asked on diverse subjects, including one from Railfuture about competition with Grand Union Trains' forthcoming service (see page 18). Francis McGarry answered one question about the disruption caused during the extended heavy rain in January by admitting that the drainage of the Chipping Sodbury tunnel (between Swindon and Bristol Parkway) on the South Wales main line had been unable to cope. A lagoon equivalent to five Olympic swimming pools was built a few years ago to take excess water in times of heavy rain, but was overwhelmed. Network Rail is looking at upgrading it.

## Station plan "called in"

The creation of Cardiff Parkway station, mid-way between Cardiff and Newport, has suffered a setback. The £120 million station, to be mostly financed privately, had previously received planning permission from Cardiff Council. Now, however, the application has been "called in" by the Welsh government as it is deemed "likely to significantly affect sites of scientific, nature conservation or historic interest, or areas of landscape importance". The plans will be reviewed by a planning inspector, with a final decision made by the Wales climate change minister.

Railfuture supports the building of the proposed station, at which most trains between Cardiff and Newport would stop.

[www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)

Twitter @RailfutureWales



Merseyrail's new level-boarding trains

Picture: Merseyrail

arthur.thomson@railfuture.org.uk

## Merseyrail's user-friendly trains

Merseyrail's new class 777 trains are being introduced, initially on the Kirkby line. They offer much better accessibility, featuring an extending plate to bridge the gap between the train and the platform. Users of wheelchairs, buggies and bikes are full of praise. All stations will soon have step free access to the platform.

Train maker Stadler displayed the first completed battery electric version, destined for use on the Merseyrail network, at the Innotrans conference in Berlin last year. They will operate beyond the end of the third rail network and will help meet Merseyrail's carbon emissions targets, with just 20% of the energy consumption of the diesel trains they replace. The first use of these trains is expected to be on the Kirkby line to a new station at Headbolt Lane, being built as a new interchange station between the Merseyrail and Northern networks.

## No Dales Rail this summer

Northern will not be running the Dales Rail service from Blackpool North to Carlisle via the Settle-Carlisle line this summer. This will leave Clitheroe-Hellifield without a passenger service. Previously, Dales Rail provided a summer Sunday service. Railfuture is checking whether Northern and the Department for Transport are obliged to go through the official closure notice procedure, as an existing passenger service is being withdrawn.

## Cancellations on TransPennine

Railfuture members carried out counts of cancelled TransPennine Express services in January on Monday to Saturday trains.

TPE admitted officially cancelling only 10% of the trains that it actually did not run or cut short, Railfuture members reported.

At that time, the system contained a loophole allowing operators to avoid paying out for delays.

Most affected by cancellations seem to be the routes from Cleethorpes to Liverpool and Manchester Airport to Edinburgh and Glasgow routes.

## West Coast main line closure

The West Coast main line between Wigan and Lancaster was closed for four consecutive weekends in late February and early March, with a further continuous closure at Carstairs affecting services to Glasgow and Edinburgh from the North West from 4 to 19 March. Further closures are expected.

Railfuture wrote to Network Rail North West to express its disappointment at the short notice of the first closure, which was announced a little over two weeks before the first weekend closure in February.

Meanwhile the lines between Manchester and Stalybridge are closed completely from 11 March to 5 April, with service diversions via the Calder Valley route for some TransPennine services and replacement buses for Northern services. Neither of these closures complied with the notice that the industry is required to give passengers.

## Bolton Metrolink worries

Plans for housing on brownfield land close to Leverhulme Park in Darcy Lever, Bolton, could prevent the introduction of Metrolink services on the former Bolton-Bury line. Thankfully local councillor Sean Hornby will not support an application by Muller Property Group for up to 100 houses on the site while the council is awaiting the outcome of a feasibility study into the possibility of Metrolink services.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/North+West+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/North+West+Branch)  
Twitter @RailfutureNWest

Railfuture's European passenger group member Dennis Fancett was part of a delegation of European Passengers' Federation members which met the senior management of the now merged Eurostar - Thalys group on 13 January 2023

Ticket prices on Eurostar are now significantly higher than pre-Covid levels.

Calls at stations such as Ebbsfleet and Ashford have been withdrawn, as have direct services to Disneyland and Avignon.

Through ticketing to non-Eurostar destinations such as UK cities outside London, which at a previous meeting in March 2019 Eurostar said had been dropped due to a temporary glitch in its at-the-time new booking system and would be reinstated within a few months, have never in fact returned, and show no signs of doing so.

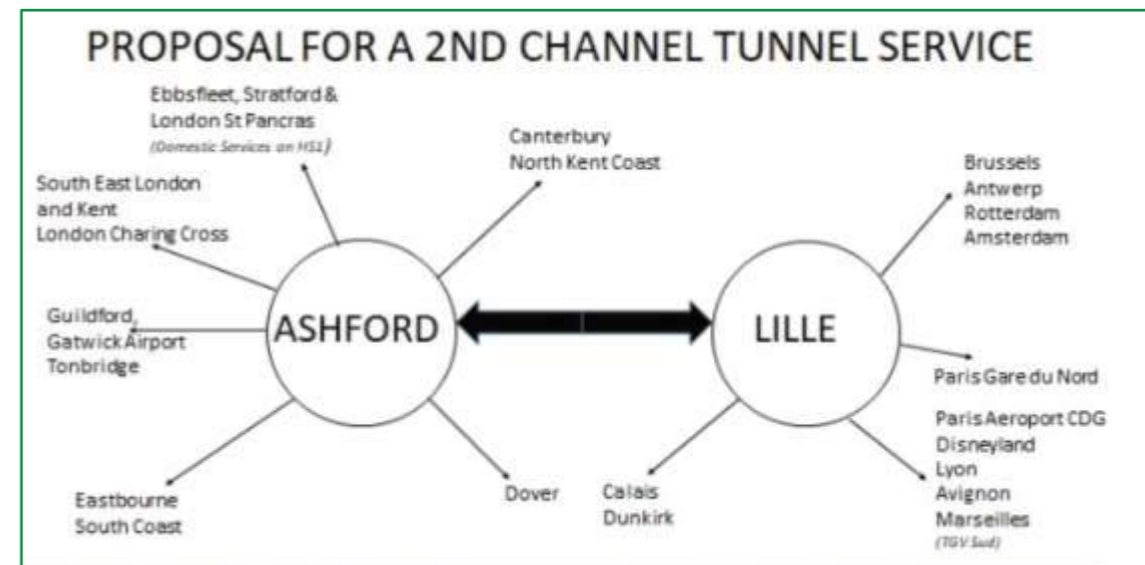
For its part, Eurostar has pointed out that the additional post-Brexit border checks means it cannot get passengers through key terminals such as St Pancras and Gare du Nord fast enough.

In response, and unlike the airlines which were completely unable to cope with the post-Covid bounce back, with passengers missing flights and flights being cancelled on the day, Eurostar has both reduced the number of services running, and the number of seats it sells on each train.

All this leaves Eurostar in a significant financial predicament.

The company is quick to point out that it received no financial support from the UK government at all during Covid, though observers would be aware that Eurostar was already in significant financial trouble before the pandemic began. Nevertheless, the company now has a robust recovery plan in place. This includes sticking to its core capital-to-capital routes only. Doing anything else is seen as a distraction of management effort and focus and, Eurostar made clear, is not going to happen in the short term. Before the meeting, Railfuture had prepared a paper, acknowledging Eurostar's problems but also putting forward some practical suggestions.

For instance, noting that Eurostar simply cannot get enough passengers through border control at St Pancras in time, Railfuture suggested the station at Stratford, originally designed to serve Eurostar but which has never done so, might be brought into use. The station has excellent connections to both the City of London and with the Elizabeth line now open,



A second route providing a regular shuttle between Ashford and Lille overcomes capacity shortages at London and Paris (track, station and border control facilities) while offering a significant range of connections which could be provided by through ticketing arrangements

the West End and West London too. It would be possible to fill the trains and run at capacity if half a train load joins at St Pancras and the other half joins at Stratford. Ebbsfleet is more problematic because of its lack of connections to central London, but Railfuture suggested a deal might be explored with government in which Eurostar reintroduces this station if the Elizabeth line is extended beyond Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet as once intended.

Railfuture also suggested a new Ashford-Lille shuttle might be introduced, making use of Eurostar units currently being left in sidings as the company is not running a full service at present.

The thinking behind this proposal is more than to serve the conurbations of Ashford and Lille alone, but to promote, with through ticketing, the excellent onward rail connections both stations offer. On the UK side this includes Gatwick, Tonbridge, Dover, and Ebbsfleet (avoiding the need for north Kent passengers to

travel into London and then back out). On the continent, onward connections with through ticketing could serve Brussels, Paris and the south of France.

It has to be said that this proposal was rejected by Eurostar immediately, which does of course leave Railfuture and EPF free to explore it with other open access operators.

In summary, however, it was clear Eurostar's senior managers had studied Railfuture's proposals carefully. As such it was a positive meeting. While nothing was committed to, proposals other than Ashford-Lille were not rejected either, and quite possibly remain under genuine consideration and evaluation within the company.

Perhaps the biggest ray of hope relates to through ticketing. It is difficult to understand why Eurostar has not embraced this, as it represents no additional operational cost, although there would be some liability for missed connections in the event of delay. With Eurostar and Thalys now a

single operation, Railfuture did detect an acceptance that something needs to move here. So we might expect through ticketing to be reintroduced on the European side before the UK side.

The announcement of a new service from Berlin to Brussels by open access operator European Sleeper, with onward connections to London, may have been a bit of a wake-up call for Eurostar. However, Railfuture has examined European Sleeper's proposals, and welcome as the service would be, based on the information published so far, it will not offer through ticketing to and from London, and on the homeland side, the inter-connection time of just 24 minutes at Brussels is regarded as hopelessly inadequate to make the suggested connection allowing arrival in London by 1100.

Other things were discussed at the meeting too. London Travelwatch raised some issues relating to customer service policy, and European colleagues also raised some Thalys-specific issues, though it was cross-channel services that took up most of the discussion time.

A further meeting will be held in a year's time, and meanwhile, specialist Eurostar-EPF sub-groups may be set up to look at specific issues - through ticketing and connections being examples.

A slightly different version of Railfuture's paper was also sent to the House of Commons transport select committee. This followed a submission from Eurostar itself and a follow up response from ALLRAIL (the Alliance of Passenger Rail New Entrants in Europe).

However, Railfuture has not received a response from the select committee so far.

## RAILFUTURE MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2023

Railfuture welcomes nominations for the renamed Member of the Year 2023 award, writes Wendy Thorne. The award will be presented at the Railfuture AGM in London in July. Do you know an individual Railfuture member who has contributed to the success of the organisation? Perhaps they have raised the profile of Railfuture in their local area? Or they may volunteer helping run their local branch?

Whoever they are, if you think they deserve recognition, we would like to hear about them. We will require a written statement of no more than 500 words explaining why they deserve to be recognised. All Railfuture individual members (not rail user groups) are eligible to be nominated. This award is completely separate from the Rail User Group Awards which have their own nomination criteria. The deadline for nominations to be received is 21 May 2023. For further details or to submit a nomination please email membership director Wendy Thorne at [wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:wendy.thorne@railfuture.org.uk)

# Open access trains for South Wales as electrification continues

Report and picture by Julian Langston

The application for a new open access London-Carmarthen service has been approved by the Office for Rail and Road.

Grand Union Trains have permission to operate five daily return services, calling at Bristol Parkway, Severn Tunnel Junction, Newport, Cardiff Central, Gowerton and Llanelli, for 10 years from December 2024.

Bypassing Swansea and running fast from Cardiff to Gowerton will shave 20 minutes off journey times between Cardiff and West Wales. The original application was to operate the route for 20 years.

Bimode trains will be built for the service, but the service is unlikely to start before 2025.

Great Western Railway also wants to run five daily train pairs between Paddington and Carmarthen. Carmarthen could then see a roughly hourly service to London for much of the day.

Permission has not been given for the new operation to serve the proposed Cardiff Parkway and Parc Felindre stations as originally requested, as they do not yet exist.

Applications to call at these will be made separately. GUT has committed to invest in Parc Felindre, to be a park-and-ride station on the Swansea District line, which bypasses the city to the north. Until this is open, trains will stop at Gowerton, west of Swansea.

Railfuture has long campaigned for passenger use of the Swansea District line, so we supported the



**WAITING FOR WIRES:** The Carmarthen service will use bimode trains as electrification goes only as far as Cardiff on the main line from London. This gantry is on the Cardiff City line, part of the South Wales metro

original proposal. It is sad this will not happen immediately, but we hope GUT will continue to seek permission to serve Parc Felindre. Their commitment to invest in this potentially very useful station, close to junction 46 of the M4, Swansea's Morrision Hospital and

the DVLA, is very welcome. Railfuture wants to see 10 trains per hour between London and Carmarthen, but there are concerns about track capacity in several places. One area is the approach to Paddington, which is already heavily used. However, the ORR has

judged that there is sufficient capacity on the approaches to London, so it has "directed Network Rail to enter into a contract with Grand Union".

Great Western Railway no longer plans to run its originally proposed third service per hour between Bristol Temple Meads and London via Bristol Parkway, so some capacity is freed up.

West of Swansea, the Heart of Wales line and the lines to Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven and Fishguard feed into the double track main line. These are mostly single track routes, which means pathing is more restricted.

Railfuture is concerned that new services from Carmarthen to the east could marginalise services on these branch lines.

A further concern is that GWR will try to run their services shortly before the GUT trains to try to crowd them out of the market.

However, Richard Rowland from GWR has said that on the East Coast main line, additional open access services such as those operated by Lumo have served to expand rail's market, and he predicts the same will happen between London and Carmarthen.

Railfuture looks forward to this happening, although we note that Lumo is owned by First Group, which also owns GWR.

The ORR decision letter is at:

<https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-01-grand-union-london-carmarthen-s17-decision-letter.pdf>

[tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk)

## Rail campaign pays off

England's south-west area has seen significant rail development progress since the last *Railwatch* was published in December.

Railfuture's number one regional priority – the South West Rail Resilience Programme, to secure the existing asset of a strategic route between Exeter and Plymouth via Dawlish – has continued apace. It pursues an established risk management approach of investing to reduce the chances of disruption, to reduce the impact of disruption and to reduce the time to recover from disruption. The current focus is on solutions to the problem of rockfall between Dawlish and Teignmouth.

A new station at Marsh Barton, on the Riviera line a mile south of Exeter St Thomas and part of the Devon Metro network, was nearing completion in February. Marsh Barton is one of three awarded funding in 2021. Railfuture wishes to see a fourth round of the new stations fund soon, as there are plenty of worthwhile candidates, such as Plympton between Plymouth and Ivybridge.

Dartmoor line feeder bus services increased in the autumn to include "virtual branch line" services connecting Okehampton station with Bude and Launceston. Tavistock has had a bus link since 2021. This is the kind of transport integration applauded by Railfuture.

## Flying the flag

In December Great Western managing director Mark Hopwood gave leading members of the Tarka Rail Association the Christmas present of a visit to Barnstaple, where he performed the first public unveiling of the new ACE Rail campaign banner, which also bears Railfuture's logo.

## Cornwall Metro

In January, levelling-up fund Round 2 support was announced for a successful *Restoring Your Railway* bid, the Cornwall Metro.

There will be nearly £50 million to create a direct train service linking Newquay, St Austell, Truro and Falmouth, alongside better walking and cycling access to stations.

## Devon transport hub

In Devon, there will be £13.5 million for a new railway station on the eastern edge of Okehampton – the West Devon Transport Hub – complete with high quality cycle facilities and electric vehicle charging points.

Together with the Dartmoor line reopening two years ago, Railfuture is keen to see modal shift to rail of some journeys from the nearby A30 road. Economic benefits will be generated in the area around



**CLEAR MESSAGE:** (from left) David Northey, freelance railway senior strategic planner and Tarka Rail Association committee member, Andrea Davis, Devon County Council cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport who is also the TRA president, Tim Steer, TRA's ACE Rail lead officer, and Mark Hopwood, Great Western Railway managing director, at Barnstaple in December. Picture: Mike Day

Bideford, following the £15.6 million investment in the Appledore clean maritime innovation centre which will research green technology.

In November, Harland & Wolff's Appledore shipyard was included as preferred bidder for a £1.6 billion contract to build three ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

If this much can be achieved with the prospect of a railway to Bideford, imagine the area's long-term economic prospects with a passenger train service actually running again and being only 60 minutes from Exeter, ACE Rail campaign's target!

## Restoring Your Railway briefing

In January, Railfuture assisted Tarka Rail Association with a briefing requested by North Devon MP Selaine Saxby ahead of Torbay MP and former Rail Minister Kevin Foster's Westminster Hall debate on the *Restoring Your Railway* fund.

Her speech can be seen here: <https://www.selainesaxby.org.uk/restoring-your-railway-fund-debate-24th-january-2023>

## Railfuture banners

Two further ACE Rail campaign banners, like the one illustrated and both funded by Railfuture, have been installed at Crediton and Eggesford stations. All 12 stations along the Tarka line are getting new station news posters on their dedicated Tarka Rail Association notice boards including mention of last year's Railfuture Rail User Group Awards – a Commendation to the Association in the Paul Abell Best Newsletter category and the Oliver Lovell Gold Award for Best New Group for its ACE Rail campaign.

## Tim's Talks and media success

ACE Rail project lead's "Tim's talks" have in recent months been at Connect Bude's AGM, in Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership's revived Tarka Line Forum, at the Taw U3A

Railway Group, to Barnstaple Christ Church Community Choir, to the official Devon Rail Forum, with North Cornwall MP Scott Mann, and to a joint meeting of parish councils around Eggesford station.

Our campaign has featured on Network Rail's website, the *Cornish & Devon Post*, *Heritage Railway Magazine*, *Railway Magazine*, *RAIL Magazine*, in a joint letter with Railfuture in *Modern Railways*, in the winter issue of Bideford railway heritage centre's *Atlantic Coast Express* magazine, the *Lynton Lynmouth & Exmoor Advertiser*, in the *Crediton Courier*, and in Torridge & West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox's Review of the Year column in the *North Devon Journal*. More information in the "Railway reopenings" section of the branch website:

[www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch#Railway\\_Reopenings](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch#Railway_Reopenings)

## East Anglia

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### Soham station's first birthday

Soham station's inaugural year was a soaring success, says the press release put out by Greater Anglia on the first anniversary of the reopening. Soham station has seen healthy and consistent passenger usage over its first year since opening to the public, with almost 50,000 journeys starting or finishing there. This is indeed a startling success as Greater Anglia's desires to operate an hourly service have been stymied.

Network Rail is reluctant to allow such a frequency because it has concerns about the safety of level crossings at Ely Queen Adelaide. So Soham is served by a train only every two hours. Just think what a train every hour would do to those footfall figures.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has further plans for the railway through Soham that would dramatically improve connectivity

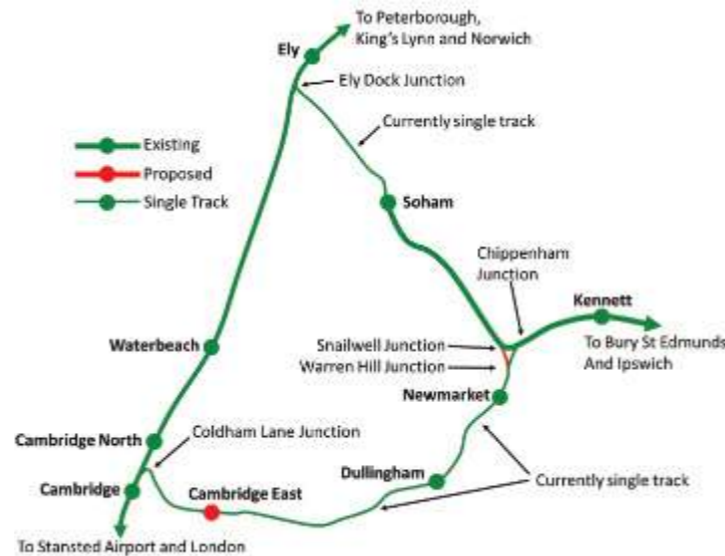
over a wide area of East Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk.

It has been working to build the business case for the restoration of the short section of closed railway that ran from near the mouth of Newmarket tunnel at the former Warren Hill Junction to Snailwell Junction on the Chippenham Junction to Soham line.

This would allow trains to run from Ely and Soham directly to Newmarket once again and on to Cambridge, offering direct Soham-Cambridge services.

Railfuture East Anglia is actively campaigning for the reinstatement of the curve, doubling of the line from Newmarket to Cambridge, and Soham to Ely, and for an increase in capacity at Ely, along with a new station at Cambridge East (see map).

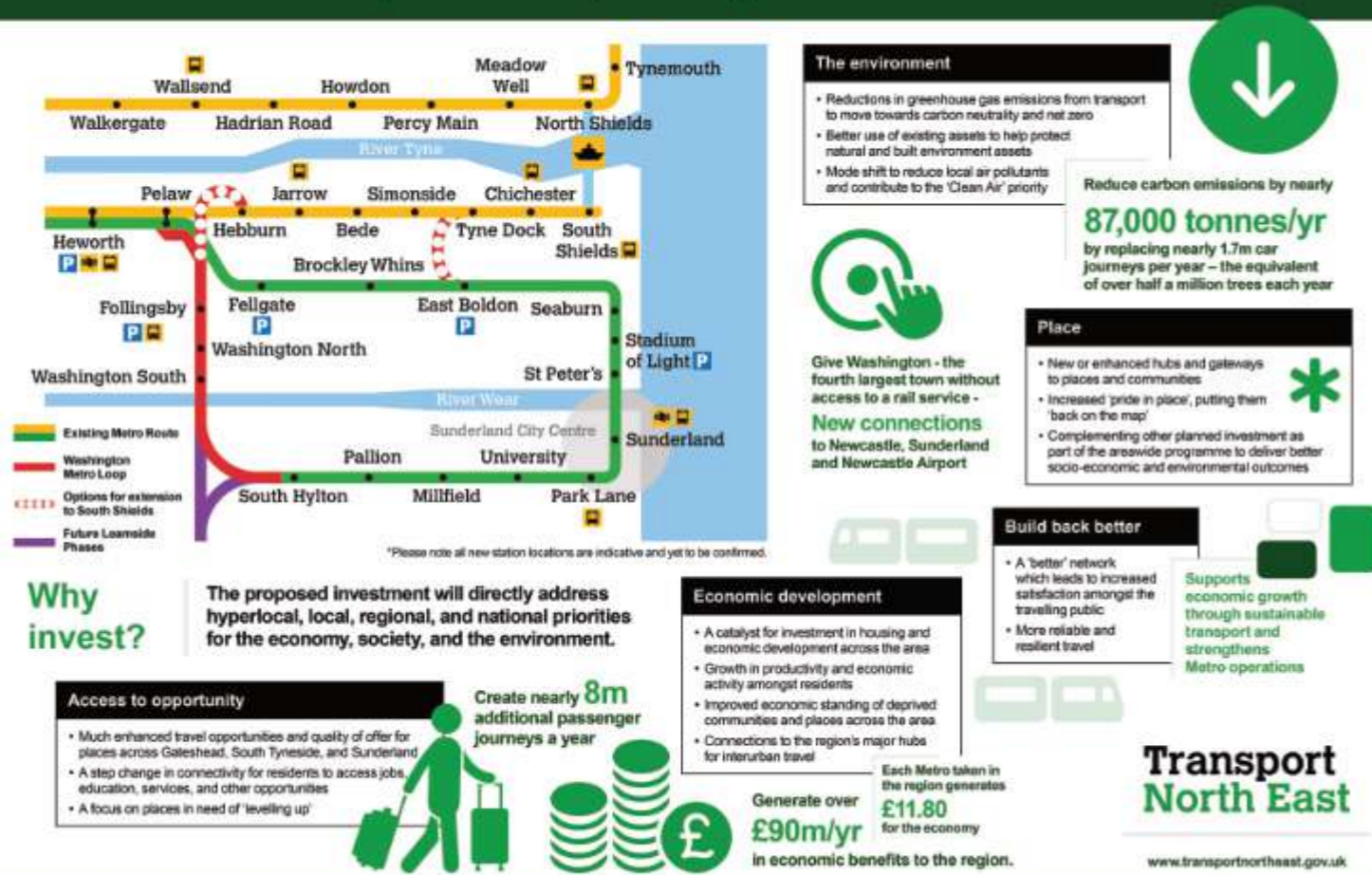
This station is an aspiration by the local authorities to serve the thousands of knowledge-based jobs and new homes close to the railway. The exact site has not been



decided. New stations point towards the future of greater and greener connectivity for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, at the heart of an active travel and public transport network which will

give people the option of leaving the car at home for many commuting or leisure journeys. [www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia) **Twitter: @RailfutureEA**

## Leamside Line – Washington Metro Loop – Strategic Outline Case



## Thames Valley

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### Green Fair

Every year on the first Saturday in December a Green Fair is held in Oxford Town Hall which Railfuture Thames Valley always attends. It is our primary showcase to the public. One of the benefits is the fascinating conversations we have with the public and the insights gleaned into attitudes to rail travel. This year was no exception with, as ever, a clear desire to be able to travel directly eastwards (on East West Rail) and westwards, without having to change at Didcot. The prospect of a train service for Cowley is clearly also very welcome.

The following week at Railfuture Thames Valley's AGM, Oxford City Council's green transport planner, Pete Brunskill, gave a wide-ranging presentation which featured details of the Cowley proposal. The station there would be called Oxford East and the intermediate station Oxford South, with opening expected in 2026. He reminded us that Oxford City Council met in December, seeking £4.65 million funding for further progress on preparing a business case. Railfuture welcomes the news that the funding was approved.

### County council backs investment for rail

With councils working on their budgets for the next year, Railfuture Thames Valley has tried to influence Oxfordshire County Council to ensure that there is investment in rail development. In the year 2022-2023, the council allocated a figure of £250,000. There will be further expenditure in 2023-2024 and we will be seeking a meeting with the council.

### 100% support for Grove station campaign

Railfuture Thames Valley is assisting its affiliate Wantage and Grove Station Supporters Group. Grove has been moving up our priorities and we are fortunate to have this new group.

<https://wantagegrovestationsupportersgroup.com/>



Railfuture's Andrew McCallum, left, and Wantage Grove Station Supporters Group's Andy Holding engage with visitors at Oxford Green Fair  
Picture: Richard Stow

The group held a meeting with local councillors which had 100% support. Many were surprised at the number of houses to be built. The group's detailed research suggested the station would achieve approximately 2 million passengers per year and would help to relieve congestion at Didcot Parkway and on the busy A417 road from Wantage. Railfuture Thames Valley was able to point to the stunning continuing success of Oxford Parkway as a model for the Wantage and Grove station design.

### CrossCountry services need a boost

Thames Valley branch contributed to Railfuture's response to the CrossCountry consultation. We called for restoration of the full pre-pandemic timetable with the return of through trains between the Thames Valley and both Yorkshire and the north-east of England, and a half hourly service to Birmingham.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch)  
Twitter @RailfutureTV

## East Midlands

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### Ivanhoe line station sites

North-West Leicestershire District Council has started work on identifying possible sites for stations if the Ivanhoe line is reopened to passenger services through its area. Two possible sites have already been found close to Coalville town centre, as part of a wider set of regeneration proposals for the town.

Ashby-de-la-Zouch may be more problematic, with the former station building now in private hands. However, one major employer in Ashby, Siemens Mobility UK, which is currently providing signalling equipment for the Ashington line reopening, has publicly welcomed the prospect of the Ivanhoe line reopening, saying that it would like its employees to be able to travel to work by train.

Other potential station sites include: Leicester South (from where there needs to be an integrated bus service to the city centre), Meynell's Gorse Park-and-Ride (on the western edge of Leicester), Kirby Muxloe, Desford, Ellistown/Bardon (a major employment area), Moira, Castle Gresley and Drakelow/Stapenhill. We are concerned to ensure that all viable station sites are included in the business case currently being developed by Network Rail.

### East Midlands County Combined Authority

Railfuture East Midlands has responded to a consultation on the creation of East Midlands County Combined Authority, which would cover

the areas of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, including the cities of Derby and Nottingham. The combined authority would be given devolved powers including many related to transport and major infrastructure. Railfuture East Midlands has welcomed the proposal, which has the potential to increase investment in rail in the region, for example in developing the Nottingham Express Transit tram system and introducing smart ticketing. We have emphasised the need for good interchange between rail and other modes, and the need for new housing and employment developments to be well served by public transport. The Railfuture response can be found here:

[https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation-responses#Local\\_Authorities](https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation-responses#Local_Authorities)

### EMR stakeholder conference

Several members of Railfuture, including from East Midlands and other branches, attended this annual event at Nottingham's Trent Bridge cricket ground on 23 January. As well as EMR, there were presentations from Network Rail, the Department for Transport and the Great British Railways transition team. The afternoon session was divided into sessions covering timetables and performance, customer experience, the rolling stock fleet, and a more general meet-the-manager session.

Overall, EMR passenger numbers are back to pre-Covid levels, but revenue is only about 90% because of reduced premium business and



EMR Regional train at Boston, Lincs, in 2021

season ticket travel. Performance is generally good, with few cancellations, though there have been challenges. Most of the cascaded Turbostar units will be in service with EMR Regional by the May timetable, with the remainder expected by the end of the year. EMR is also retaining the class 158 fleet for Liverpool-Norwich services. We in Railfuture continue to press for a full reinstatement of regional services from the May timetable, but a firm commitment cannot yet be given. The conference was valuable in covering a range of current topics, as well as giving a good opportunity for the various stakeholder organisations to network with each other.

Railfuture East Midlands was also represented at the Nottingham Transport Summit, arranged by Midlands Connect on 16 January. Rail topics covered included upgrading of the Nottingham-Newark-Lincoln line, EMR's current position with performance and rolling stock, Midland main line electrification and the Nottingham-Leicester-Coventry service proposal.

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

## North East

Hexham and Newcastle, led to the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership's officers and volunteers helping to guide passengers to alternative facilities in the environs of Carlisle. These often included Haltwhistle in its role as temporary terminus of services to and from Newcastle (and beyond). The partnership provided much direct feedback to Northern about how such guidance could be improved, and a plan be prepared, in case of similar future interruptions to normal service.

Meanwhile, the buildings and facilities at Haltwhistle station continue to be improved and put to good use for the community locally as well as for rail users. Moving further east, there are reports that the current pattern of services linking Carlisle with Morpeth (via Newcastle, of course) now enables passengers to change, at Manors, to Metro services to North Shields, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and elsewhere on the north bank of the Tyne. The CRP has noted with interest that the Newcastle branch of the charity St Vincent de Paul Society has adopted Manors station, so they hope to be able to work with it to encourage greater use of the station – mainly by making its users feel more welcome at what at present seems a rather bleak set of platforms.

### Coast line news

Now that rebuilding works are in evidence at no fewer than four stations on the Durham Coast line – and five, if you include Eaglescliffe, on Grand Central's direct route to London – Coastliners' rail user group has been discussing with various agencies the main purposes of these enhancements. Clearly, Sunderland

station needs expanding, to cope with the increased Metro services among others, but exactly what advantages will an extra platform at Hartlepool provide, once the Tall Ships event has come and gone this summer? The new lifts and footbridge at Billingham are long overdue and will be welcome, as will the up-graded facilities at Middlesbrough. But nothing is planned for Stockton, despite its historic role in rail history. Be this as it may, Railfuture North-East is generally in favour of adding more Inter-City services to the Coast line timetable, and Coastliners in particular would like Cross-Country to restore its services from Newcastle to Reading and Southampton. Some at least should run via Sunderland, Hartlepool and Stockton, to take advantage of these enlarged station facilities. Doing something of this sort, while adding at least some of the "missing" services to the Darlington/Durham route, would very usefully link, for the first time ever, the Coast's larger towns to South Yorkshire and the Midlands generally – Sheffield, Derby, and Birmingham in particular.

### Metro promotes its Pop pay-as-you-go card

Metro operator Nexus introduced a fare cap in January at £2 for single journeys and £4 for all-day travel for people using its Pop pay-as-you-go smartcard or through Google Pay on Android smartphones.

Nexus said it was to help people with the cost of living, but it is also keen to persuade people to switch over to its PAYG system. The fare cap was introduced to match the £2 fare cap on buses. The fare caps were reviewed at the end of March and extended for a further three months.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch)  
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### Metro expansion plans

Nexus and Transport North-East have prepared an ambitious scheme to expand the Metro network by, in effect, adding a second route between Sunderland and Newcastle. They have applied for financial help from the Department for Transport – total cost estimated at £745million – and await a reply. Their proposal is best understood from the map included in the Strategic Outline Case leaflet reproduced above.

The existing branch line to South Hylton would be extended westward to Washington New Town, one of the largest communities totally lacking in rail facilities of any kind. It would then continue, via the former Leamside route, to Pelaw and the present tracks to Newcastle and the Airport.

Railfuture North East, while supporting this in principle, has warned that it should not be allowed to replace the long-standing ambition to revive the rest of the Leamside branch, connecting it southwards to the East Coast main line. It is also important to electrify the South Hylton-Pelaw stretch, rather than relying on the batteries of the forthcoming replacement trains to cover the gap. We are therefore pleased to see that the new order for a totally replacement fleet of 46 electric train sets takes the increased requirements into account, and that the new depot to house them at Gosforth has now opened.

### Tyne Valley news

It may seem a long time ago now, but the derailment near Carlisle of a heavy freight train, and the subsequent seven-week disruption, from late October, of all train services on the Settle-Carlisle line and from Carlisle towards



# Railfuture hails post-Beeching era

By Roger Blake

Publication of this issue of *Railwatch* marks the 60th anniversary of the Beeching Report.

It is worth remembering though that railway lines and stations had been closed long before anyone had even heard of Beeching – or Ernest Marples.

Marples was appointed Minister of Transport by “Supermac” prime minister Harold Macmillan in 1959.

Marples lasted until Supermac’s successor Sir Alec Douglas Home lost the 1964 general election.

But rail closures became the order of the day with the Conservative government and the Labour administration which followed.

Richard Beeching joined the British Transport Commission in March 1961, becoming its chairman in June. He was later appointed the first chairman of the new British Railways Board from January 1963. He lasted until June 1965.

Some lines and stations did not close despite the Beeching Report recommendations that they should, and some were closed even though they were not earmarked for closure.

For six years from October 1964, the new Harold Wilson government then had four transport ministers deliberating on the individual recommendations.

In far too many cases, they implemented Beeching’s closure recommendations.

Tom Fraser was there until December 1965, Barbara Castle until April 1968, Richard Marsh to October 1969, and Fred Mulley until the June 1970 general election.

For Railfuture, however, all of that matters far less than the scores of stations and track miles which have opened or been reopened over the past 60 years.

We can take 27 March 1963 as our reference point, and we can be proud that many achievements were the result of campaigning efforts of individual and affiliated Railfuture members.

Documented in Railfuture’s own 2017 publication *Britain’s Growing Railway* – the sixth edition of our A-Z guide – the stations tally is eight in the 1960s, 55 in the 1970s, 144 in the 1980s, 109 in the 1990s, 44 in the 2000s, and 45 in the 2010s. With Inverness Airport station opening in February 2023 we have seen 10 in the 2020s (excluding the complications of the Elizabeth line’s stations).

The record of line reopenings, short chords as well as longer lines, is one in the 1960s, six in the 1970s, 26 in the 1980s, 32 in the 1990s, 20 in the 2000s, and 15 in the 2010s.

How was this amazing record of



## Children plant tree to mark Inverness Airport station opening

**Scottish transport minister Jenny Gilruth was joined by school children from Croy primary school to mark the opening of the new Inverness Airport rail station, which opened on 3 February. They helped plant a tree to mark the event. Ms Gilruth said: “The £42 million package provided by the Scottish government, including the station and wider rail network infrastructure investment, will build resilience and additional capacity. It will encourage inward investment and housing growth, which will support both the local and wider economies.” The first train was piped into the platform**

Picture: Transport Scotland

success achieved? *Railwatch* readers may recall *Connecting Communities*, the 2009 report from the Association of Train Operators.

That report was crucial because it identified the social and economic value which add to the transport benefits of rail reopenings.

Politicians and officials associated with the government’s *Restoring Your Railway* programme have moved on from a focus on disconnected centres of population to embrace clusters of population.

That perspective goes some way to explaining why certain lines are seeing their projects developed and others not.

The Northumberland line will add a catchment of around 100,000 people to the passenger rail network, while for the Ivanhoe line the figure will be about twice that.

Reopening old routes which would link places which are already on the rail network, but adding no additional populations of significant size, will struggle to make their cases. Campaigners may need to be able to identify populations of 25,000 or more to be taken seriously in Whitehall. It will be a big challenge. Further

*Restoring Your Railway* programmes may even be re-badged to something more like *Connecting Communities*.

The purpose may well be to cultivate new markets for rail by taking the network closer to significant-sized communities.

There remain at least 24 communities of over 25,000 people which do not have rail access within five kilometres.

In west Oxfordshire, the proposed Windrush line was unsuccessful in its bid to the *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund. But in January it attracted a Network Rail visit.

The A40 corridor through which it would run, via Eynsham/Salt Cross garden village and Witney to Carterton/RAF Brize Norton, is already a corridor of 50,000 people which, by the time the new railway is open, will have grown further.

A particular reason for Network Rail’s interest is the potential, in an area of higher land values than Northumberland, to co-finance an entirely new railway.

Very little of the old railway remains, and is not best placed now. But innovative funding may

make less demand on the public purse and is therefore more likely to be of more interest to the Department for Transport and the Exchequer.

In northern Devon, the population principle also applies, with the Tarka Rail Association’s ACE Rail campaign targeting “Greater Bideford” as by far the largest population cluster in the South West without ready access to rail.

## 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.

## Eco-friendly

The see-through wrapper in which *Railwatch* is delivered by post is starch film and is 100% compostable and biodegradable.

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