

# railwatch

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Campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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## Scotland shows the way



**THE RAIL WAY FORWARD:** The opening of East Linton station is celebrated by ScotRail managing director Alex Hynes, back row left, with Scotland's minister for transport Fiona Hyslop and Bill Reeve, director for Rail Transport Scotland. Front: Four pupils from East Linton Primary School who took part in the ceremony, with head teacher Gill Gardner  
Picture by Tom Dickson

**Scotland is set to chalk up five successful rail station reopenings in three years**

Reston opened in 2022, Inverness Airport and East Linton in 2023, and later this year the line to Cameron Bridge and Levenmouth will also reopen

**Report and pictures: Page 3**

IMPORTANT PASSENGER ANNOUNCEMENT :  
The Next Train from LEVEN  
to EDINBURGH  
(and Other Destinations),  
Calling at CAMERON BRIDGE, is  
Now Due : Spring 2024!

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## Railfuture takes campaign to the Senedd

By Peter Kingsbury

I was invited to provide evidence to a committee of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) in November, on behalf of Railfuture Wales.

The climate change, environment and infrastructure committee is investigating the work of Transport for Wales in rail delivery and performance.

Transport for Wales now has direct responsibility for its subsidiary train operating company, Transport for Wales Rail.

Also giving evidence were David Beer of Transport Focus and Jools Townsend of the Community Rail Network.

The three of us were asked to comment on a wide range of topics.

In a statement before the hearing, Railfuture Wales said: "TfW Rail's performance since the majority of passengers returned to rail post Covid has been poor in terms of cancellations and punctuality.

"However, TfW Rail has done more to restore services suspended as a result of Covid than many operators in England, and is now providing services which have not been operated in recent times, for example, Ebbw Vale to Newport. The poor quality of timetable-related performance



**UNSUNG HEROES: Quietly, often in the hours of darkness, freight trains support Britain's economy by transporting all kinds of essential supplies, such as this train pictured by Bruce Williamson at Lawrence Hill station in January. It was on its way from Whatley Quarry in the Mendips to Stoke Gifford, Bristol. The public has long called for transport policy to favour rail freight over heavy goods vehicles which bring danger and pollution throughout the country. Government has chosen to do very little to support rail freight See article: Back page**

appears in part due to weaknesses in managing locomotives and rolling stock. The introduction of new trains has been slower than expected, although this has no doubt also reflected manufacturer problems."

Issues have also arisen with the maintenance of existing trains where TfW has taken over this responsibility. Railfuture Wales is concerned about new train delivery delays, important because the trains have the potential to achieve modal shift by encouraging new passengers to use rail. Equally, existing

passengers should be treated well when there are delays and cancellations, especially when replacement buses are provided. Overall, the committee was well informed about the challenges facing Welsh rail and genuinely seemed to want the recent issues affecting the system to be resolved.

The transcript from the meeting can be read here: <https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13536>

The committee will publish its findings later.

■ Peter Kingsbury is chair of Railfuture Wales

## Railway returns to East Linton

Report by Allison Cosgrove  
Pictures by Tom Dickson

It seemed as if the whole village turned out to welcome the first ScotRail train to stop at East Linton for almost 60 years.

As the train came in, a piper from Haddington Pipe Band played *The Green Hills of Tyrol*, perhaps to reflect the broad fields of East Lothian's rich farmland.

The station opening in December marked success after a 25 year campaign by Rail Action Group East of Scotland.

RAGES has spearheaded the campaign for reopening the East Coast main line station since the group's formation in 1999.

Work started on the £15 million East Linton station after the opening of the Berwickshire station of Reston in May 2022. The construction team moved swiftly on to East Linton, 25 miles closer to Edinburgh.

The group can be justifiably proud of its hard work in achieving two reopenings in 18 months.

On the opening day, 13 December, I joined RAGES members at Dunbar for an early train to Edinburgh, to join the first train south to stop at East Linton.

The platform at Edinburgh Waverley was busy, with Transport Minister Fiona Hyslop joined by Transport Scotland officials, MSP Paul McLennan, councillors Norman Hampshire and Lyn Jardine, and many other supporters.

Ms Hyslop said: "The new East Linton station is the latest example of this Scottish Government's commitment to building and investing in Scotland's railway. Our aim is to encourage more people out of their cars and on to sustainable public transport."

As the train drew into East Linton, those on board were amazed at the



**MANY HAPPY RETURNS: All the pupils from East Linton Primary School lined up to welcome the first train to their village for almost 60 years**



**HISTORIC MOMENT: Two Highland dancers welcoming the first train, Hailes Castle, named after a nearby castle associated with a visit by Mary, Queen of Scots, with TPE managing director Chris Jackson and Rachel Sydeserff who is district visitor and community manager for Historic Environment Scotland**

number of people waiting to greet it. The bridge and platforms were full of people and the entire primary school was lined up in the park waving at the train. For our young people, the train service will be a game-changer, providing

easier access to jobs and further education in Musselburgh or Edinburgh. For all ages, it is a wonderful connection back to the national network, with a journey to London achievable in four hours



**The first train at East Linton**

47 minutes with only one change. After a brief speech, the minister performed the opening and members adjourned to the nearby Mart building for more speeches and a sandwich lunch.

The ScotRail train was swiftly followed by the first train from TransPennine Express, which also serves the station.

Barrie Forrest, chair of RAGES, said: "We could not have achieved these wonderful reopenings of Reston and East Linton without the continued support from our elected representatives – MPs, MSPs and councillors from across the political spectrum over many years. We are extremely grateful that they believed in our cause and stayed with us."

Councillor Norman Hampshire, leader of East Lothian Council, agreed with Barrie, saying that RAGES had engaged well with elected representatives.

The station is served by 10 services daily to Edinburgh Waverley and 11 return services. The average journey time to Edinburgh is 22 minutes, compared to 40 minutes by car.

## Crew training as Levenmouth prepares for reopening

Trains from Edinburgh will soon be running over the Forth Bridge to a reopened station at Leven, for the first time in 54 years.

Crew training was taking place in January, a milestone for the £116 million project to reopen the five-mile Levenmouth line with new stations at Leven and Cameron Bridge. An InterCity 125 train was also seen on the line after contractors handed the line over to Network Rail. With the

opening expected in June, Ross Bennett from the 10-year-old Levenmouth Rail Campaign told the *Fife Courier* that there is now a real sense of anticipation within the community. He said: "To witness trains on the line just adds to the build-up for the official opening." The campaign took up the reins from an earlier Leven reopening campaign in the 1990s. Levenmouth Liberal Democrat councillor Eugene Clarke, who

has been involved in the campaign to reinstate the railway, said it was "absolutely amazing" to see Cameron Bridge station taking shape. He added: "It is hard to believe it is 10 years since I got involved in the campaign." The then Scottish Nationalist transport minister Michael Matheson announced the reinstatement of the line from Thornton Junction in 2019 as a way to regenerate the entire area.



**A train at Leven railway station as driver training began in January Picture by Levenmouth Rail Campaign**

**Rail is NINE times more carbon dioxide-efficient than road transport**

## Half-built HS2 will tax minds of election victors

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

The new transport ministers after the general election will have to decide what to do about HS2. And quickly. There are two certainties – well, almost certain given the chequered history of the scheme.

The first is that the initial section between Old Oak Common and Birmingham Curzon Street will be completed, sometime in the early 2030s. There is no alternative.

Despite the fact that it needs at least another £20 billion to be completed, so much has been built and so much of the countryside devastated that to abandon the scheme is politically and physically impossible. Imagine the two mile Colne Valley Viaduct and the nearby 10 mile tunnel being abandoned, to be left as artefacts that some future civilisation would discover only to ponder about their purpose.

The second (near) certainty is that this will not be the only section of HS2 line to be completed. Leaving HS2 as an Acton-Aston shuttle is inconceivable. Jim Steer, the director of Greengauge 21, which has been one of the main

promoters of the line right from the beginning, explained this on my podcast, *Calling All Stations*. Such a line would be as useful as the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway, a remark which several respondents thought was unfair to that heritage line. But Steer is right. A line which does not reach central London and does not connect easily with Birmingham New Street will be little used. Few people will schlep out to Old Oak Common, which is notoriously difficult to reach by road, to take a train to Birmingham when there will still be services to New Street from Euston and, indeed, to Snow Hill from Marylebone. So what is to be done? There are no easy answers. Euston is a must but there

is no chance that the funding, as the government has suggested, could come from the private sector. There is zero chance that any development – even skyscrapers that reach to the heavens – would fund the construction of a station

last estimated at £4 billion – and for the line from Old Oak Common, toss in another £3 billion or so. As someone who cycles through the area, it is an utter disgrace that a good council estate, an hotel, a pub and various other buildings were torn down when there was no clear plan as to what should be built there. It is, ironically, in the constituency of our likely prime

minister, so it is an issue to which Keir Starmer is likely to pay some attention. Steer argues for the link to be built as a priority but, while it is difficult to disagree with him in terms of the usefulness of the railway, it is hard to see a newly appointed transport minister agreeing to billions of pounds of expenditure at a time of hugely competing demands. The case for reinstating the section north of Handsacre Junction, also advocated by Steer, is even stronger. Under current arrangements, it seems that the



**Christian Wolmar**

# On the alert for fare offers and dodgy deals

By Neil Middleton

Changes in available tickets and fares continue to make the news, with two recent changes both attracting headlines.

London North Eastern Railway is trialling has a new 70-minute Flex ticket trial.

This Flex allows you to change your ticket to a train 70 minutes before or after your booked train.

There are also now 53 stations in south-east England where only single fares and travelcards are available.

Before I delve into these two initiatives, I think it worthwhile taking a step back.

## Some thoughts:

**1** The turn-up-and-go choice must remain an essential element of ticketing. Individuals may be able to vary travel time, or book a travel time (or range) in advance, to save money, but being able to travel at short notice at a reasonable price is essential. To be able to travel at no notice is also essential, even if the price is high.

**2** For all but the shortest journeys (say five minutes), we would like a seat. The longer we are on the train, the more we need a seat. We will all have our personal preferences depending on circumstances. For me, 30 minutes standing is too long. Standing for 45 minutes is uncomfortable, while 75 minutes without a seat is painful.

**3** When I am travelling locally, flexibility is my preference. I want to travel at no notice, and not be locked down to specific trains. I travelled on the 0722 to work for many years because it was the last train in the morning peak on which I could usually get a seat. But I still valued on-the-day flexibility more.

**4** For many of us, travelling further afield involves a bit of planning. I am not referring to ticket booking alone, but to the

whole trip. We need to find the time, agree with friends and family in the area on the date, while possibly booking attractions and accommodation. So it becomes a natural extension to book our travel as well. There is an important “but”. Domestic and other crises can require travelling at short notice. All in all, the existing railway’s ticketing arrangements can be suited to planning, as long as there are flexible options.

**5** It would be a challenge to find one person, or one organisation, wanting to pay the full Anytime fare regularly. Yes, Anytime fares are a feature of the morning commute, but most regular travellers can save with a season ticket. Even a traveller on expenses is going to find the payer of those expenses asking questions about a £396 Newcastle-London return.

**6** With single-leg pricing, there is a need to buy two tickets rather than one. The traditional longer distance return has a lot of flexibility on the return and requires just a single purchase. Flexible singles can require multiple purchases (ie wait until travel time is known). If those purchases are via your smartphone on arrival at the station, it may not be an imposition, but asking travellers to visit ticket offices or ticket machines before each journey, rather than once at the start of the day, can be off-putting.

## What does this mean?

I think there are some key themes.

■ We talk about fares and ticket reform, and yes, we should. But first, we need to convert the thoughts above into a more systematic understanding of what travellers’ needs are and then use that to guide fares and reforms.

■ It is not one size fits all. Arrangements for longer distances and shorter distances need to be

## Some quick wins

- Introduce a standard rule that after cancellations or late arrivals causing a connection to be missed, if the wait is more than 30 minutes, you can take any UK Government-controlled operator’s service, not just the operator your ticket is valid for. Attempt to negotiate reciprocal arrangements with Transport for Wales Rail and ScotRail as well. And separately with Open Access operators.
- Abolish all train operator-only flexible fares where the difference is less than 50p.
- Have a second plus/minus 70-minute fare trial where the current off-peak ticket is retained.



different. It should be about journeys, not trains and operators. There are very few long-distance services in the UK. For the 1030 train from King’s Cross to Edinburgh, you can travel the entire length in four hours 40 minutes. You can also use it to travel between Northallerton and Darlington in 13 minutes. Fares and seating essentials are different.

## Some recent trials

■ LNER’s Flex ticketing trial is already a serious failure. The “plus or minus 70 minutes” ticket is a good one. The option of paying a premium over a single train choice is a useful feature. But making the Anytime fare the only one guaranteed to be available is a big disincentive. So the total package is very unwelcome. At least for the trial, off-peak tickets can still be obtained by buying tickets to (or from) nearby stations such as Haymarket, Manors, and Reston (and possibly, for Berwick, both a split ticket and use of the Manors option).

■ The Southeastern single fares implementation is another badly planned change. That is because the change has arrived with the

downsides in place from Day 1 – introduction of an evening peak restriction and removal of the cheapest tickets.

The upsides are postponed – for example, the convenience (for some, but not many) of using contactless payment in the near term. Even when that arrives, there will be further delays before support for railcards and for capping. At this point they may become appealing for many more.

## Our campaigning

So, our campaigning will go on. A walk-up railway (with all trains accepting walk-up passengers, even if they have to stand for some of the journey), a fares design that includes options to travel at a reasonable price and a sensible overall experience are essential.

## A couple of bonuses

Both the ScotRail trial of all-day off-peak every-day tickets, and the likely trial of off-peak Fridays in London are both to be welcomed. Sometimes, it seems, those who run the railways can get it right!

■ Neil Middleton is Railfuture’s communications director

sometimes took weekend walks with Dr Beeching to discuss policy. In the light of contemporary environmental problems, it would have been useful to have seen some discussion of logistics. Why were too many hump marshalling yards and parcels concentration depots built, while Tyneside electric services were withdrawn and proposals produced to close much of the North London line (today’s Overground)? The railways were caught between the conflicting politics of Left and Right. These issues, including the negative impacts of strikes, are fairly and impartially presented.

Given that politicians and civil servants on inheriting a new brief often read their way into a new field, one wonders whether the 1960s view of transport policy played any role in the controversial decision to curtail HS2.

The work draws heavily on secondary sources, has a comprehensive bibliography and is a worthwhile addition to any transport library.

**Ernest Marples: The Shadow Behind Beeching**  
David Brandon and Martin Upham  
Pen and Sword ISBN: 9781526760180  
274 pages £25 www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

fervour for urban motorways triggered in 1956 by the British Road Federation.

One is left with the impression that there was no alternative to Dr Beeching’s drastic prescriptions, whereas Switzerland, South Africa and Norway demonstrate that alternatives were available. The Dutch started to re-expand their system from the early 1970s, understanding that “network effects” (Wellington’s Law 1887) mean journey opportunities expand exponentially as stations are added to a system. This transport law was ignored by Beeching and missed by the authors of this biography. Further, the impression given by contemporary commentators that railways did not matter cleared the way for mass closures and unfortunately was not questioned by Mr Marples, a keen member of the Ramblers’ Association, who

# MPs join in rail project meeting



The campaign to reopen the Matlock-Buxton line attracted the attention of Ben Bradley MP, Claire Ward, Chris Emmas-Williams and Nigel Mills MP

## East Midlands

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## Matlock-Buxton initiative

The latest in a series of public meetings on the proposed restoration of the Peaks and Dales line (Matlock to Buxton and Chinley) was held at Whaley Bridge in February, organised by the Manchester and East Midlands Rail Action Partnership.

Stephen Chaytow of MEMRAP, who is also a Railfuture East Midlands committee member, said the line could help alleviate rail traffic from the overburdened West Coast main line, following cancellation of HS2.

County councillor Ruth George, representing the division of Whaley Bridge, agreed to work with the first-ever mayor for the East Midlands, who will be chosen in an election on 2 May.

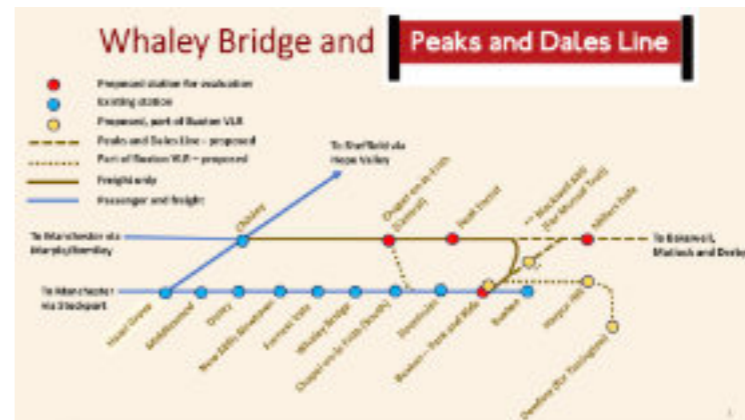
She wants the new mayor to give the go-ahead for a strategic outline business study as a priority.

More than 50 people attended the Whaley Bridge meeting but wintry weather and snow warnings prevented many people getting there, including three mayoral candidates who had agreed to attend.

After the meeting, Stephen Chaytow said: “This was a perfect demonstration of how the borough has been effectively isolated from the rest of Derbyshire since the closure of the railway in 1968.”

At an earlier meeting in Ripley, among those who attended the MEMRAP meeting were Nigel Mills, Conservative MP for Amber Valley, and Chris Emmas-Williams, Labour leader of Amber Valley District Council, as well as Ben Bradley MP and Claire Ward, two of the candidates for mayor of the new East Midlands Combined Authority. It is hoped the mayoral candidates will attend MEMRAP’s public meeting at Strutts in Belper on 8 April.

Stephen Chaytow was in action in November, as guest speaker at a Railfuture open meeting. He stressed the importance of building relationships with other stakeholders in our campaigning.



This map was created for the Whaley Bridge meeting and has been agreed with the Buxton Town Team to be a fair representation of the two combined campaigns (VLR and Peaks and Dales)

A recent development which MEMRAP and Railfuture support is a proposal by Buxton Town Team for a Very Light Rail connection along the existing freight line from Buxton to Blackwell Mill, at the western end of the Monsal Trail. This would be a pilot service for the battery-powered vehicles being developed by RevolutionVLR, and it is hoped that trials can begin in spring next year.

The line from Buxton to Hindlow quarry, connecting with the High Peak Trail, is another possible candidate for a VLR service.

## Crewe-Derby lobbying

Railfuture has been lobbying East Midlands Railway to reinstate services that were cut following the pandemic, leaving several two-hour gaps in the service between Derby and Crewe. The December 2023 timetable has reinstated two services in each direction on weekdays, although a few two-hour gaps remain, and we will continue to press for more trains to call at Peartree station, near Derby.

## Ivanhoe line

Although Network Rail’s work on reopening the Ivanhoe line is currently focussed on the section from Burton-on-Trent to Coalville, further reopening to Leicester has not been ruled out. Network Rail estimates the cost of restoring the Coalville-Leicester section as £271 million. Most of this section is currently single track, and would need doubling. A new Leicester South station could be built near

the King Power Stadium. A third phase, connecting to the Midland main line into Leicester, would be difficult, but could be accomplished as part of the urgently needed improvement to main line track capacity through Leicester.

The Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line accepts that the reopening will need to be done in phases, and CRIL spokesman Douglas McLay said: “Until it gets on to Leicester main line, we will never give up campaigning on the Leicester link”.

## Locomotive works

A new locomotive maintenance facility has opened at Colwick, on the east side of Nottingham, after possible sites at Coalville and Toton were found to be unsuitable, the former because it would be needed for a station on the Ivanhoe Line. The Colwick site was once a marshalling yard, although more recently there has been a rail-connected oil discharge facility. The planning application for the new locomotive works referred to Railway Acts of 1846 and 1871!

## Rail in the Midlands conference

Railfuture was well represented at the Modern Railways Rail in the Midlands conference at Derby. Though reflecting on current challenges, not least with a general election coming up, speakers from across the rail sector also highlighted the opportunities.

These include post-Covid recovery, longer-term forward planning, an

emphasis on collaboration and building relationships, as well as taking responsibility for addressing problems and driving improvements.

There were presentations from Network Rail, three train operators which serve the Midlands, as well as planning and coordinating bodies such as the GBR Transition Team and the West Midlands Rail Executive.

Nottingham Trams, an interesting example of vertical integration between operations and infrastructure, also gave a presentation, and there was one about the role and planned enhancement of Leicester station as a major public gateway to the city.

Railfuture East Midlands is very grateful to the conference organisers for their hospitality.

## EMR stakeholder conference

The 2024 East Midlands Railway stakeholder conference was held at Nottingham Trent Bridge in January.

It brought together EMR senior management, other industry players and a wide range of stakeholders from across the EMR network.

Again, Railfuture was well represented, along with many local user groups, community rail partnerships and station friends groups. Numerous Railfuture delegates were attending also as representatives of these other organisations. The morning saw presentations by EMR and its new parent company Transport UK Group, as well as Network Rail and the Department for Transport.

A panel question and answer session was followed by smaller group workshop sessions looking at EMR’s train fleet, timetables and performance, access and inclusion, as well as the role of Control during disruption.

As always with these events, there was a genuine willingness to discuss various topics, plus valuable opportunities for networking with rail industry and stakeholder colleagues.

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# Building railways for the future

By Ray King

It almost looks as if the car-crazy 1960s have given way to a railway-orientated future concerned about climate change and reducing energy waste and pollution.

Work is under way to build HS2 and East West Rail.

However, the government has slammed the brakes on high speed rail and local politicians seem determined to delay EWR plans to link Bedford and Cambridge.

At the moment, the East West Rail Alliance (Network Rail, Atkins, Laing O'Rourke and VolkerRail) is completing the section from Bicester to Bletchley, which should open next year.

Work is nearly complete at Winslow's new station and work continues at Bletchley's high level station. Rail minister Huw Merriman welcomed completion of the work at Calvert: "These new railway lines will transform journeys for millions. It is another example of this government delivering on its commitment to invest in infrastructure across the country to improve connectivity and grow the economy."

In Bedford, the new local mayor, Conservative Tom Wootton, commissioned a £40,000 report which will be used to persuade EWR to look at seven alternative routes to the one chosen. EWR



**CALVERT: One of the most significant locations for Britain's railways in 2024. Two new railways are being created in Buckinghamshire. The recently completed bridge will carry East West Rail over High Speed 2's London-Birmingham** Picture: East West Rail

chief executive Beth West told BBC News that EWR already had a "preferred route" and it would be trying to progress on that. She added: "Of course we will read Mayor Tom's report and we will take any new information we receive very seriously."

Bedford rail user groups are keen for EWR to serve Bedford station, providing connections with Thameslink and East Midlands Railway. They have urged the mayor to take a "realistic view" of what rail users need. Campaigning

continues to ensure that Aylesbury has a good East West Rail link, and both Buckinghamshire Council and England's Economic Heartlands support the Aylesbury link.

Sixteen years ago, London was waiting for chancellor Gordon Brown to give the go-ahead to Crossrail (Elizabeth line). It was late and over-budget but is now a tremendous success. Perhaps before cutting any more rail projects prime minister Rishi Sunak should consider Crossrail – and build on success.

## Railfuture apology

Some Railfuture members were given misleading information about their membership status with the last issue of Railwatch, because of an error by our distributors.

A number of members received reminders when they were not supposed to, while others did not receive a reminder even though they should have done so.

We have contacted all members who paid their subscription even though they need not have, and these issues have all been resolved.

However, as our policy is to ensure that members receive at least two reminders, and preferably three, before their membership is lapsed, we have decided not to lapse any members for this magazine mailing, even though this would normally have been scheduled.

Please ensure you check your membership status – noted on your cover sheet or via Self Care on the website – to avoid missing the next issue.

## Join the Lottery

### Lottery winners

**November** D Hurdle, M Savage, G Smith, R White, D Peters, A Davies

**December** D Hyland, J Ward, G Smith, R Blake (2), E James

**January** J Savage, M Robinson, S Boulding, T Gauntlett, M Groll, G Collett

Railfuture Lottery profits go towards the Fighting Fund, which supports the campaigns our members are working on. For £12 per year for 12 entries, you can take part and could win one of six 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!

## Yorkshire

[davidpennierail21@gmail.com](mailto:davidpennierail21@gmail.com)

### Sheffield to King's Cross bid

A new open access rail service between London and Sheffield is being proposed by FirstGroup.

If approved, the new service would run via Worksop, Retford and Woodhouse and aim to be faster than the East Midlands Railway Sheffield to St Pancras service.

FirstGroup, which also runs open-access trains from King's Cross to Hull and Edinburgh, has submitted its initial application to the Office of Rail and Road to run two return journeys per day from Sheffield to King's Cross.

The proposed route will give Sheffield its first regular service from King's Cross since 1968 and Worksop its first regular direct London trains in decades.

FirstGroup estimates there are 350,000 people in the Worksop and Woodhouse catchment areas who will benefit from direct rail access to London. Currently many people drive to Doncaster to pick up faster services to London rather than travelling via Sheffield.

### Stakeholder conferences

It must be the season for train operators to hold stakeholder conferences. Railfuture Yorkshire

committee members have attended those of Northern, TransPennine Express and Hull Trains. It was good to learn about their future plans, especially TPE as it emerges from a difficult period. The value of these events lies in the opportunity for informal conversations with senior management as much as in the formal presentations. It was useful, for example, to discover that TPE intends to restore the direct Hull-Liverpool service from the December 2024 timetable change, now that TPE's performance has stabilised. This service was introduced in 2022 following a public consultation. Sadly, when the TransPennine Route Upgrade is completed some years from now, it appears that the price of many improvements overall will be that this service will be discontinued.

### Honours for rail people

Two people with significant roles in rail in Yorkshire and the wider north of England were recognised in the New Year's honours list.

Edward Album has been involved with the Settle-Carlisle line since 1984, principally as legal adviser to the Friends of the line. He recently retired from the Settle and Carlisle Railway Trust and the Friends. He was active with the Friends to save the line from closure in 1989, when

the cost of repairing the Ribbleshead viaduct was cited by BR as the main reason for the closure proposal.

The Friends undertook to form a trust to raise money towards the cost of repairing the viaduct, and this was an important factor in persuading the government to save the line. The trust raised the £2.5 million needed (BR had estimated £10 million) and went on to raise funds to repair other historic structures. Mr Album, founder of the trust in 1990, was awarded an OBE for services to railway heritage and to communities in the north of England.

Also honoured was Richard Isaac, Northern's community and sustainability manager, who was awarded the British Empire Medal. Richard is based in Leeds and spearheads work with schools, community groups and station adoption schemes across Yorkshire. He has been a passionate advocate for how trains can connect communities with employment and education opportunities, as well as working to tackle social isolation and crime via the National Citizen Service.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/  
Yorkshire+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch)  
X @RailfutureYorks

# Facts about electrification – not fantasies

By Stephen Waring

It is time to invert the pyramid and tell a government seemingly obsessed by alternative "solutions" such as hydrogen that we urgently need a rolling programme of electrification to cut the railway's long-term costs.

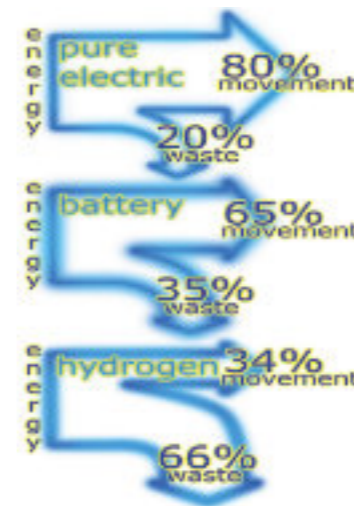
Many of us have been to those stakeholder conferences with train operating companies. Quality and styles vary. There is usually food – biscuits or croissants in the morning, and acres of stodge or (with luck) a nice hot buffet for lunch, while networking with company bosses you have just heard speak.

I like to ask what they are doing to get the go-ahead for electrification of our railway network – simply the most efficient way of operating. Efficiency means the fraction of the total energy you have to consume that becomes the work output you want, or as my old physics teacher used to put it:

### What you want divided by what you have to pay for

If an electric train is 80% efficient, for every 100kWh of energy from the overhead wires 20kWh is wasted in transformers, control circuitry, motors and gearing.

A rail diesel engine might be 45% efficient, which comes down to maybe 25% with transmission losses. Train companies should aim to waste less, not more. They should aim to cut waste of both



**Sankey diagram: Named after Irish engineer Matthew Henry Phineas Riall Sankey who used a diagram in 1866 to illustrate the efficiency of a steam engine**

energy and money. Sankey diagrams compare efficiencies. Battery trains waste maybe 35% of the initial energy, hydrogen trains maybe 66%. Every transfer involves waste.

So fast-charging "double" systems to recharge train batteries from big static batteries waste a lot more energy than charging slowly from the mains or overhead. Batteries are heavy, which also leads to cuts in efficiency. Multimode trains carry dead weight all the time.

Energy is money. Let us not be profligate.

Nine years ago, the all-party Northern Sparks task force recommended electrification of most of northern England.

Later, some of us launched the Electric Railway Charter with the objective to get the top-ranked Northern Sparks route – the full Calder Valley line between Leeds and Manchester – prioritised.

Calderdale Council passed a resolution calling for the line to be electrified, and they have just passed another one!

With little or no real action decided on, the government has however distinguished itself by setting aside (possibly even forgetting or ignoring) a series of reports, including Network Rail's traction decarbonisation network strategy.

Transport for Greater Manchester has suggested wiring from Manchester Victoria to Rochdale. The government itself has suggested Leeds-Bradford, without providing a date.

Filling the blatantly obvious gap across the Pennines would of course benefit freight as well as passenger operation.

Can we trust that the Huddersfield line upgrade involves full electrification as well as vital extra tracks? The government's much-ridiculed Network North plan calls for wiring the North

Wales main line, Hull-Leeds and the Leeds-Sheffield link. Even if this were all to happen, it feels like a random collection, not a rolling programme that would in itself cut costs of wiring, as well as future operation, maintenance and energy.

We must stop building diesel trains while, of course, battery trains, limited in range and with their own environmental problems, can only be an interim solution.

Those rail bosses at their conferences need to invert the management pyramid.

Shout at the government what the rail chiefs know is needed to cut long-term costs, and what we all need to see as environmentally grown-up travellers.

It is time for the government's approach to decision-making to grow up.

### We need a rolling plan to electrify our railways

■ All figures in this article are approximate and for comparison only. The figures for electric and diesel trains are not strictly comparable but give a rough idea. ■ Percentages in Sankey diagrams are quoted from *Why rail electrification?* – 2021 report by Railway Industry Association.

*Stephen Waring graduated with an engineering degree from Cambridge University and spent a career teaching – you may have guessed it – physics.*

By Richard Lysons

When I was a secondary school teacher I used to have a few secret weapons on my desk to make the pupils happier and my job easier. A box of paper tissues (I could never stand "sniffers"), the *Usborne Guide to the Human Body* and a large format book of aerial photographs of British football grounds. The latter with its bird's eye views of Old Trafford, Emirates Stadium, Anfield and others would captivate the most awkward, usually male, pupil. Even I – as a lifelong non-soccer fan – found the book interesting. For many decades, Aerofilms dominated the market for such books.

A new book – *Britain's Railways From The Air* – will have the same sort of fascination for anyone who uses railways. Rob Higgins is a doctor by profession but it is his interest in railway photography that concerns us here. Higgins uses a drone (an unmanned aerial vehicle) for his aerial photographs and has travelled the length of the UK taking pictures of the railway network. We see viaducts, many on the Settle and Carlisle line, cooling towers, swing bridges, oil refineries and towns. Rest assured, *Railwatch* readers, each shot includes a train passing through.

## A visual treat for rail users

The quality of Higgins' colour photographs is first class and the details that they reveal are endlessly fascinating. This is more than a coffee table book; it is a visual essay about our country, generally between 2017 and 2020, showing the state of our industries, coal-fired power stations and even agriculture. I cannot recommend it enough. A wonderful addition to any railway-lover's bookshelf.

### Going East – The Story Of East-West Rail And The Oxford-Cambridge Line

K C Close and R J Cook  
Amberley Publishing  
ISBN 978-1-3981-1273-5  
96 pages 100 illustrations £15.99  
[www.amberley-books.com](http://www.amberley-books.com)

I had read about East West Rail in previous issues of *Railwatch* and was interested in how and why the Varsity line between Oxford and Cambridge, via Bicester, Bletchley and Bedford, had been closed and



**Britain's Railways From The Air**  
Rob Higgins Amberley Publishing  
ISBN 978-1-3981-0846-2 164X  
128 pages 125 illustrations £17.99  
[www.amberley-books.com](http://www.amberley-books.com)

is now being reopened. The authors of *Going East* are admirably NOT impartial in their approach to this subject and their book will definitely appeal to us rail campaigners.

The introduction's very first line sets the tone: "This is the story of England's most important cross-country rail link, foolishly closed

on 31 December 1967 to passengers by order of Labour Transport Minister Barbara Castle – not Dr Beeching, who noted the line's strategic importance."

Unusually and refreshingly for a rail book, the authors start with the present reopening campaign and then go backwards to fill out the history of the line. It makes fascinating reading.

The book is just under 100 pages and I read it in one go on a cold afternoon in the New Year lull. It is pretty close to my ideal railway book – a clever and attractive mix of history, opinion, personalities and optimism. Clearly, this book will be instructive to colleagues in various reopening campaigns around the UK. East West Rail aims to re-establish the entire line by the start of the next decade. I wish them well and look forward to my first trip on the Varsity line.

**Also received:** *British Rail Through The 1980s* by Stephen Dance; *Roaming The West Coast Rails* by Derek Cross; *Railways Of The Eastern Counties Since 1970* by John Law; *Modern Traction In The North Of England* by John Whiteley. All Amberley Publishing.

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

If you would like one of the books mentioned in this column for free, email [editor@railwatch.org.uk](mailto:editor@railwatch.org.uk) with your idea for boosting the number of Railfuture members.

The best five suggestions will win one book each. Please say which book you would prefer. The editor's decision is final.

## Ticket offices

I have read your article on the subject of ticket offices in *Railwatch* 178 and how Railfuture will still campaign to bring staff "out from behind the glass".

I could not disagree more with this proposition.

With staff "behind glass" you know where to find them!

Divested of the comfort of ticket office conditions "behind glass", staff will understandably seek sanctuary during cold weather behind a closed door somewhere (undoubtedly without glass), leaving the hapless would-be passenger clueless as to their erstwhile booking office clerk's whereabouts. Moreover, many transactions, particularly rail card applications and renewals, would be a nightmare without the benefit of the ticket office counter shelf.

To suggest that ticket office staff currently do not pursue other duties, such as providing platform-side assistance for disabled passengers, is a calumny.

Defenestrating railway staff out into the cold and on to a draughty platform is a surefire way to lose existing experienced and valued staff. These staff are not well paid as it is.

If it ain't broke, don't tamper with this cherished facility.

**Peter Desmond-Thomas (retired central government senior civil servant), Alton, Hampshire**

## Drawbacks of buses

I can understand members of Railfuture Wales being concerned when Lee Waters, Assembly deputy minister for climate change, thinks buses provide best value in enabling people to use alternative transport to their cars (*Railwatch* 178). Buses, you see, are too slow, and the disappearance of conductors over the years has meant lengthy stops en route as drivers have to deal with the sale and issue of tickets.

When I lived in Hebden Bridge, people used to leave their cars at the railway station before commuting to work in Leeds, Bradford and Manchester. They would not have abandoned their private motors if the alternative was a slow service bus stopping every few minutes.

So while buses might offer a cheaper option, it would be a false economy if they did not attract passengers out of their cars.

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

## Haverhill memories

I read with enthusiasm about the possibility of the line from Shelford to Haverhill being opened again

## Train winner in snow and scenery



**This dramatic shot was one of four winning pictures in an amateur photography contest organised by ScotRail. The "Scenic" picture was taken by Sam Bilner but ScotRail did not reveal where the picture was taken. Could it be a Glasgow-Mallaig service near the top of the 1 in 53 climb over Rannoch moor? One of the prizes was a free ticket to travel anywhere by rail in Scotland**

(*Railwatch* 178). As someone who lived at Shelford up to 1970, I remember how devastating it was when it was all taken away in 1969-70. It would mean the world to me now if it was put back and reopened, starting with Shelford, then Sawston, Granta Park, Linton and Haverhill. One station not shown on the *Railwatch* map is Bartlow, where there was a branch line to Saffron Walden. Of course the line continued from Haverhill to Sudbury.

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

## Way ahead for HS2

I read your reports of the government's decision to scrap the northern leg of HS2 in *Railwatch* 178 with interest. Railfuture should now be looking for a way forward for high speed rail in Britain.

I believe extensions to HS2 could be built for average global costs. Extending HS2 to the Norton Bridge junction, just north of Stafford, would cost around £1.35 billion in today's money adjusted for general inflation. Global average costs taken from: <https://transitcosts.com/high-speed-rail/>

Then I have converted to pounds at purchasing power parity using data from the World Bank and adjusted for inflation using the Bank of England inflation calculator.

Beyond this, I think a good question to ask *Railwatch* readers and writers is: What would be their priorities if the political parties were to offer to spend £5 billion on rail capital projects?

**Matthew Hutton  
matthew@matthewhutton.com**

## Sparking debate

Catching up with recent issues of *Railwatch*, I noticed how frequently the word "decarbonisation" occurred.

However, those following current affairs will have seen how things like net zero and the route to it are increasingly challenged. A buzzword risks becoming a dirty word.

An electrified railway has had an extremely strong justification in its own right since the late 19th century. The main problem is how to find the capital to invest in it.

Superior acceleration, shorter journey times, and cleaner, quieter and smoother travel are all attractive to passengers and so the "sparks" effect increases revenue for the operator at the same time as reducing costs.

Oh, and of course it contributes to decarbonisation!

**John Wall, Railfuture life member Farnborough, Hampshire  
john@johnjwall.com**

## Positive connection

Finally, there is positive news about the campaign to reopen the Gobowen-Oswestry railway. A letter has been received from the Department for Transport confirming it will be "funded to completion" subject to satisfactory inputs at the various outline business case and feasibility study stages. I believe that should be reasonably straightforward.

Also, ten miles further south on the Shrewsbury-Chester line, the Baschurch Station reopening campaign has convinced Baschurch Parish Council to commit £10,000 to commission SLC Rail Consultancy of Birmingham to examine the business case.

Shropshire Council's previous very negative attitude towards this project has softened significantly, so there is optimism that this can be moved forward without further delay. The campaign has been running in one form or another for about 45 years.

**Steve Boulding, Baschurch SY4 2HB  
Chair, Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association  
steve.boulding@phonecoop.coop**

## Taxiiing passengers

After my article about Stone station in *Railwatch* 178, I have been asking people on the platform at Stone about their opinions. One young woman called Jess, who has

been playing viola in the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra concert on BBC Radio 3 (I listened to it at 9.25pm, on 7 December) tells me that she can no longer get home by train after playing in a concert at Symphony Hall, Birmingham. She needs to pay for a taxi from Stafford.

The original Abellio franchise specified a last train to North Staffs not before 2215, allowing an evening in Brum. Sadly sensible timetabling seem to be a thing of the past. I was at a meeting at West Midlands Trains in February and we had forwarded a petition of 1,560 names, asking for improvements.

I was told quite decisively that they knew our opinion and they had made their decision. They were not going to engage in any more discussion with us. It's a brick wall!

**Jonathan Heal, chair, North Staffs Rail Promotion Group ST15 8HD  
jhnorthstaffsrail@hotmail.co.uk**

## Rail library initiative

Following the government U-turn on ticket office closures, it is a good time for creative ideas on what to do with our stations that helps them become community hubs.

Kents Bank, on the Furness Line between Carnforth and Barrow, is an example of what can be done. It is now home to a library devoted to railways and transport, with an emphasis on the social aspects of railways.

It is run by me, the owner of the Station House, and is based on my extensive collection of railway books, numbering over 3,000 titles. Over the past few months, it has expanded thanks to several donations, including some from railway staff delivering books from trains!

We are in the process of setting up a not-for-profit community interest company to develop the library.

Once the company is established, the collection will be vested in the company, which may become a charity.

All the collection is now shelved and categorised. A longer-term project is to get every item catalogued. The collection includes a full set of the *Railway Magazine* from 1897 to 1980, and some rare bound volumes of railway trade union journals going back to the 1890s.

The library is primarily for reference though there is a small lending section. Visits are by appointment (or pot luck!) but there will also be a monthly open day, on the first Saturday of each month. A preview

**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](mailto:editor@railwatch.org.uk)**



**BLOOMING NORFOLK: Cantley station on the Greater Anglia route that runs beside the river Yare**

## Volunteers boost the railway and wildlife

Volunteers are helping to convert many forgotten rail stations into welcoming havens. Greater Anglia reports that more railway land is being converted into gardens and wildlife areas.

There are now 66 station gardens across the operator's area. New areas of garden have been created at Acle, Braintree Freeport, Burnham-on-Crouch, Halesworth and Ware. Station adopters reported a wide range of creatures visiting stations including many different types of butterflies as well as bees, slow worms, bats, toads, foxes, deer and many varieties of birds, recording over 200 different species. Greater Anglia's customer and community engagement manager Alan Neville said: "Thanks to the care and attention of our team of station

adopters, we have thousands upon thousands of plants thriving at our rail stations. Many of these gardens have been designed to be wildlife friendly, enhancing biodiversity and providing food, shelter and breeding places for many different types of wildlife, helping to improve the local environment, and helping our stations to exist more harmoniously with their local, often rural, surroundings."

Greater Anglia are looking for people to adopt Brimsdown, Cheshunt, Enfield Lock, Harlow Town, Kelvedon, Lea Bridge, Meridian Water, Northumberland Park, Shenfield, Thorpe-le-Soken and Tottenham Hale. Anyone interested in adopting one of those stations should contact Alan Neville at [alan.neville@greateranglia.co.uk](mailto:alan.neville@greateranglia.co.uk).

open day was held in October and attracted over 60 visitors.

We held a pre-Christmas event in December, jointly with The Beach Hut Gallery next door, with mince pies, mulled wine and soup.

Our first talk in the Reading Room was about Irish Railways in the 1950s, by Michael Davies.

Admission was free but had to be pre-booked by phone or email (see below). Although use of the library is free and open to all, it is intended to develop a subscription offer where members receive a newsletter, notice of events and talks, and discounts on book sales. The individual subscription will be £25 a year, with a higher corporate

subscription. Donations of books are very welcome.

**Paul Salvesson MBE, Station House, Kents Bank LA11 7BB  
07795 008691 or  
info@stationlibrary.org.uk  
www.stationlibrary.org.uk**

Railfuture has donated a copy of *Britain's Growing Railway – An A-Z guide to more than 400 new and reopened stations* to the library. The book is available for only £5 (including postage) at [www.railfuture.org.uk/shop/books.php](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/shop/books.php)

## Enroute to future

I am joint chief executive of Enroute, which was launched in December to promote sustainable transport.

Along with David Frankal, I intend Enroute to be at the forefront of promoting sustainable forms of

transport across Great Britain, including active travel and public transport. Enroute exists to encourage investment and innovation in transport, with a people-focused approach. We want sustainable modes of transport in England, Wales, and Scotland to become the norm for daily use.

We have a bold *Vision for 2050*, with a new proposal for high speed rail in Great Britain, and the introduction of national active travel corridors.

We invite individuals to join us as volunteer transport analysts. If you share our commitment to shaping a sustainable future for transport in Great Britain, you can learn more at [enroute.org.uk](http://enroute.org.uk)

**Harry Burr  
Daventry, Northants  
[Harry.Burr@enroute.org.uk](mailto:Harry.Burr@enroute.org.uk)**

tony.smale@railfuture.org.uk

### Worthy words but we need action

Network Rail's *Wessex Main Line Strategy*, published in November, looks at passenger growth estimates up to the year 2050 and identifies capacity constraints that need addressing on the line from Waterloo to Woking, and on to Salisbury, Alton, Southampton and Portsmouth. It recognises the need for a flyover at Woking where Portsmouth line services divert from the main line, and suggests some innovative solutions to the lack of platform capacity at Woking station. Among the many other interventions earmarked for further design work are the provision of a freight regulating loop at Basingstoke and track remodelling around Haslemere.

Addressing the various pinch points on the network is only part of the story. NR says that full line potential can be achieved only once lineside signalling is replaced by digital train control. Furthermore, DC power supplies would need a wholesale upgrade to cope with electrified freight haulage and additional passenger services, together with an end to diesel operation on both West of England and CrossCountry services.

It is encouraging to know there is a published strategy for main line enhancements taking us up to the middle of this century. But a start needs to be made very soon on some of these projects if we are to have any hope of meeting growth forecasts while achieving net zero carbon emissions. Meanwhile, Railfuture continues to lobby about service and rolling stock reductions on South Western Railway's main line services.

One of our members has experienced repeated train cancellations on his regular commute, and is convinced that reliance on rest day working is to blame. He says that this issue needs to be resolved regardless of whether a pay settlement can be reached with the rail unions.

### Landslip rekindles call for Ventnor rail

When a serious landslip led to closure of one of the main roads into Ventnor last December, it re-kindled the debate on the Isle of Wight about the merits of extending the Island line so that it once again serves the island's southernmost town. In the *Restoring Your Railway* bid of 2021, the well-supported proposal for an extension to Ventnor became subsumed into a wider study aimed at reconnecting other towns with the railway, most notably Newport. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the bid failed. Residents affected by the landslip now want to see the Ventnor railway extension developed as a stand-alone project for consideration in any future funding round.

### Railway fails Boxing Day test

After seeing bus services in the Southampton area full and standing on Boxing Day, Wessex members argue that the time has come for train operators to address the lack of services over the Christmas period. Since the largest item on the railway's balance sheet is its fixed assets, it would surely improve overall profitability if services ran for one additional day each year.

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

julian.langston@railfuturewales.org.uk

**Farewell to campaigner Peter**  
Railfuture Wales was saddened to learn that Railfuture stalwart Peter Clark passed away in December 2023.

Peter managed *Rail Wales*, the branch newsletter, until April 2016, although with his usual modesty he referred to himself as compiler, rather than editor. At different times he was also chairman and treasurer of what was then the South Wales branch.

He was actively involved with a number of campaigns, including those to reopen the Vale of Glamorgan and Ebbw Vale lines. He also took an interest in the introduction of light rail to Cardiff, a development which is happening only now.

Peter had retired from taking active part in branch activities some years ago when his wife fell ill (she later died), but he looked after the branch membership records until as recently as 2022.

Our thoughts and condolences go out to his family, including Vanessa, Nick and Rhodri.

### Railfuture Wales AGM

Railfuture Wales' AGM will take place at 1400 on Saturday 27 April at Shrewsbury station. For further details, including the guest speaker and directions, please keep an eye on [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)

### Alternative to road building

Following the autumn announcement that Transport for Wales intended to build five new stations between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction (*Railwatch* 178), two Railfuture members attended a drop-in session for the proposed Cardiff East (Newport Road) station. Railfuture was told by the scheme's programme manager Alison Walker that the £250 million cost of the stations would be met by the Westminster government's union connectivity fund, designed to improve links between the home nations. Up to four trains per hour would stop at the new stations, which would have platforms on the existing slow lines. These would provide services from Cardiff to Cheltenham and Bristol Temple Meads. The services were suggested in the Burns report of 2019 as part of a plan to provide public transport alternatives to building a duplicate M4 motorway around Newport.

We asked several probing questions including whether:

■ There is sufficient capacity at Cardiff Central to support the proposed services

■ The slow lines would be upgraded to provide higher speeds (significant sections are currently restricted to 40mph)

■ Other local services such as the existing Cardiff-Ebbw Vale service could use the two planned stations between Cardiff and Newport as trains would need to cross the fast tracks to gain access to the Ebbw Vale branch.

Alison told us that there would be adequate capacity and the necessary speed upgrades, and that it might be possible to stop Ebbw Vale services.

Railfuture has submitted a formal response to the consultation in addition to individuals' responses.

### Visit to operating centre

Back in 2018, Railfuture members visited the largest signal box controlling traditional semaphore signals in the world – Shrewsbury's Severn Bridge Junction.

Fast track to autumn 2023, and we were able to tour another signalling facility, this time at the forefront of technology.

Railfuture members were welcomed to the Wales Rail Operating Centre in Cardiff by Stephen Thomas, Network Rail's head of control at the site. Much of the Welsh network is controlled from this building.

The signalling floor has nine workstations, each with multiple screens, as well as a supervisory station and one for level crossing control. Gone was the mechanical control system on the equipment floor: instead there are banks of computers and IT network systems.

Transport for Wales also has a presence in the building with its own control room. Here TfW looks after the day-to-day operation of the railway, dealing with any problems. As this is just down the corridor from the Network Rail signalling floor, liaison is easy when there are problems.

Other members of Network Rail and TfW guided us around areas of expertise. None had heard of Railfuture, and one thought we were a rail preservation group. We have work to do to raise the profile of Railfuture as professionals in the rail industry have not heard of us. Railfuture is grateful to Stephen and the staff who took time to show us around.

### New electric bus service

Transport for Wales has launched a new electric bus service aimed at filling some of the gaps created by ill-considered rail closures in



**Railfuture members visiting the Wales Rail Operating Centre in Cardiff**

Picture: Julian Langston

Gwynedd in the 1960s. TrawsCymru's T22 hourly bus started in February and links Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

"This is the culmination of a lot of close collaboration between Cyngor Gwynedd [Gwynedd Council] and Transport for Wales, with financial support from the Welsh Government as well, and is an example of what can be achieved by working together despite the difficult financial climate," said Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cyngor Gwynedd's environment member.

Gethin George of TrawsCymru said: "Our vision is for better integration between bus and other modes of transport, and encouraging people to leave their cars behind and take the bus whenever possible."

Railfuture supports improvements to bus services but sees reopening the Bangor-Caernarfon rail line as a priority. Reopening Carmarthen-Aberystwyth is also supported.

### Train for a Welsh walk

Walkers are being encouraged to use the rail network in a new joint initiative between Transport for Wales and Go Jauntly. More than 30 Welsh walks were launched for the February half-term holidays.

Details of the walks in Welsh and English, as well as maps and photographs are available at:

<https://walks.gojauntly.com/users/transportforwales>

A downloadable app is also available.

### Inquiry into rail reliability

The Office of Rail and Road launched an inquiry in November into poor train punctuality and reliability in the Network Rail Wales and Western region. Stakeholder views are invited.

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

# Stockport needs end to neglect

By Navendu Mishra  
MP for Stockport

Network Rail's recent decision to invest in repairs for Stockport's iconic viaduct was a victory for our town and the nation's railways.

One of the largest brick structures in Europe, the viaduct is a major feat of British engineering, and a symbol of what our railways can be at their best.

But in my constituency of Stockport, I can also see that our railways are under threat from Conservative government mismanagement and private rail operators' prioritisation of dividend payments over real investment in staff and infrastructure.

I commend rail workers for their tireless hard work and commitment. But they, like passengers, have been badly let down by senior management at Avanti West Coast and other operators.

Like so many Stopfordians (inhabitants of Stockport), I am appalled by Avanti's neglect of Stockport railway station. One of the two doors at the main entrance to the station was left faulty for several weeks. Damp has spread throughout, leading paint to peel over large sections of the walls. The lifts are also frequently out of order, creating severe accessibility issues.

Constituents have written to me after having to carry family members up the stairs. Others have even been forced to abandon their journeys because they could not get to the platform. Poor accessibility resulting from a lack of step-free access also plagues Brinnington and Heaton Chapel stations in my constituency, and many more throughout Greater Manchester. What's more, it was revealed that senior managers at



**Network Rail is seeking planning permission to repair the 27-span Stockport viaduct over the river Mersey because some of its estimated 11 million bricks are crumbling and other safety measures are needed. Nearby, work is continuing on a new transport interchange to replace the old bus station and to create "improved links to the rail station". The interchange is scheduled to open in March**

Picture: @every\_station

Avanti described their contracts with the government as "free money" and boasted of continuing to receive bonuses despite providing a poor service. The contempt and disregard Avanti has for the taxpayer is astounding.

Poor rail infrastructure is holding back economic growth and putting commuters off rail. This managed decline of our rail infrastructure is having dire consequences for our capacity to tackle congestion on our roads and climate change.

Nowhere is this clearer than on the issue of rail electrification between Stockport and Sheffield, which has been long delayed and still appears no closer to completion. While dealing with this shocking fall in standards, passengers have also faced a steep rise in ticket prices. It

is Avanti's job to provide a safe, working railway station for the people of Stockport, and it is the government's job to ensure Avanti provides a reliable, good quality service for all. Both are failing. I continue to raise these issues with Avanti, and the inaccessibility of other stations with the Department for Transport.

Sadly, the Government has shown little interest in scrutinising private operators' stewardship of our stations.

The Department for Transport even authorised a £65 million payout for shareholders of FirstGroup, the parent company of Avanti and TransPennine, before bringing TransPennine into public ownership because of its catastrophic performance.

FirstGroup is also responsible for running other poorly performing franchises in other regions, Great Western Railway and South Western. Rather than ensuring value for money, the government is rewarding failure.

Avanti is planning several improvements to Stockport station, but progress has been frustratingly slow. The scheduled refurbishment of Stockport viaduct reminds us that our railways can be something of which we can be proud.

The issues plaguing Stockport station demonstrate how far the failure of privatisation and franchising has taken us from that ideal. We need to take the railways back into public ownership and restore pride and dignity to the network again.

## Politics and rail projects

By Roger Blake

Across the country, Railfuture branches lobbied train operators as they put together their bids to their Network Rail route directors for Access for All projects to be included in control period 7 (2024-29).

Railfuture branches in England have the opportunity to lobby candidates in the local elections on 2 May, which will also choose 10 directly elected mayors.

There are no local authority elections in Scotland or Wales this year.

Railfuture is a non-party-political organisation but finds ways to influence, such

as calling for the funding of studies to develop a business case for a new station.

In campaigning for a bigger, better railway, Railfuture's infrastructure and networks group is always on the lookout for new opportunities, particularly in communities of over 25,000 population without rail access.

We look forward to a fourth round of the government's new stations fund being announced later this year. Candidates could include Welborne, Hampshire, as well as Wantage and Grove, Oxfordshire.

In Wales, the reopened Ebbw Valley line celebrated the

return of Newport services in February. Railfuture Wales responded positively to the recent consultation by Transport for Wales on five new stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction.

Stay in touch with Railfuture's national infrastructure and network group, as well as the freight and logistics group, via Railfuture's dedicated campaign webpage [www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Restoring+Your+Railway)

Also on X:  
@RailfutureNetws and @RailfutureFret  
■ Roger Blake is director of Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks group



**This is your final call for nominations for Railfuture's 10th Awards for Rail User Groups. Nominations in six categories will be accepted up to Saturday, 30 March 2024, writes Roger Blake.**

**The awards and commendations for rail user groups and similar organisations, such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships, are expected to be presented as usual by Railfuture president Christian Wolmar after the AGM in Edinburgh on 13 July.**

**Details of all the 2023 awards and commendations and rules of entry for 2024 are at [www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards)**

# An ideal time to invest wisely in our railway

By Ian Brown

It is easy to forget that investment in the UK rail sector is at record levels.

The Office of Rail and Road has just announced its determination for Network Rail's next five year investment cycle.

This is called control period 7 (CP7) and it runs from April 2024 to March 2029.

The ORR's figure is £44.4 billion for England and Wales and £4.8 billion for Scotland.

The England and Wales figure was £35 billion for the previous CP6 and £4.6 billion for Scotland.

Remember that inflation must be taken into account.

Even so, this is a lot of money – £663 for each of us. But is it enough? If our railways were just for the minority of people who actually travel on them, many would say more than enough.

If we address the question: "What are our railways for?" the answer is quite different.

The case for the major Crossrail project in London was all about addressing the question:

**"What is the most cost-effective way of achieving a set of defined national and regional objectives, only one of which is transport related?"**

Railways are a national undertaking that can bring benefits to us all. These benefits are not evenly distributed and are highly skewed towards London and the South East, where investment in rail has been focused and where more people use our railways.

Railway investment can, and should, address nationwide issues including health, employment, the economy, social inclusion and the environment.

We should define the railway industry to include the supply chain, large suppliers such as infrastructure construction companies and rolling stock



**America is catching up with the rest of the world. Florida's Brightline will be followed by high speed rail projects in Texas and California**

facilities. Importantly this definition should also apply to smaller suppliers, referred to as Tier 2 suppliers. All these are critical and represent a significant part of our economy and the number of jobs.

So, far from vying for investment against these priorities, we should be realising and quantifying how investment in railways can contribute to the economic health of the nation, rather than the simplistic and largely outdated "narrow business case" approach so beloved by some planners.

In the Crossrail example, investing

nearly £20 billion (yes, nearly half a total control period investment for Network Rail) was justified as the most cost-effective way of growing and improving London in all these respects, particularly the economy. Massively improving London's transport system and a 10% increase in system capacity was a means to this end, not the end in itself.

Cities, as a way of living, are back in business, and are starting to see investment in transport in this wider context all over the world. The most successful ones go for

integrated systems of main line rail, metros and light rail, in combinations matching their size and catchment areas. Most cities worldwide, and certainly all our cities, depend on wide catchment areas, so a national rail system is essential in a city economy context as well as a national context.

Integration tends to be thought of as connecting services together. Integration also requires a move away from antiquated ticketing towards systems that provide travel on all modes, such as London's Oyster Card.

Even this is now being superseded by the use of personal debit cards directly. Very few people use a train route in isolation.

The trains themselves are changing too, albeit too slowly. Roads take all-comers, railways do not. Infrastructure is expensive to provide and needs to challenge roads by becoming far more flexible and embracing different rail services including light rail around our cities. Developing technology now facilitates this opportunity.

Transport investment has to compete against the "stop doing things" concept. Not travelling at all does not work in economic terms for either passengers or freight. We have to invest in transport in an environmentally sustainable way which inflicts the least damage on the nation's health.

Railways were invented because they could move people and goods faster using far less energy than other means. This led to the railway mania of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

But railways declined after the Second World War when other transport modes started to catch up.

**Railways are now in a second phase of rebirth worldwide.**

We tend to think of France and Japan as big investors in rail, including high speed rail, but this is now everywhere, with the United States joining the high speed rail club with Brightline in Florida and more to come soon in Texas and California.

For the railway renaissance to continue, our railways must be sustainable and have sufficient capacity to achieve modal transfer from both road and air, both of which are investing hugely in future technology.

We desperately need electrification of the whole railway network together with a significant programme of railway research on a par with other modes.

Growing tomatoes in sunny Spain is far more sustainable than growing tomatoes in rainy Britain.



**The message is clear: An Avanti Pendolino train at Manchester Piccadilly. The same slogan was carried on a special Climate Train which ran from Amsterdam to Scotland carrying passengers to COP26 in Glasgow in 2020, thanks to a partnership between Avanti West Coast, Eurostar, NS, ProRail and Youth for Sustainable Travel. One flight between Amsterdam and London creates as much carbon as seven Eurostar journeys**

Bringing tomatoes by truck alters the balance to a choice between high fuel consumption for trucking or for heating greenhouses in Britain.

**We could stop eating tomatoes of course, or we could transport tomatoes by electric train throughout.**

We need to be part of a world-wide transport system, particularly for freight.

Less than half of the funds released from closing down the HS2 project announced, ironically, at the former Manchester Central Station, is being earmarked for rail, so we are largely back to the starting gate on high speed rail and on the capacity benefits it can provide if developed intelligently.

Major schemes take time to develop. Constructing a private sector rail alignment from Handsacre Junction to Manchester is a wasteful diversion and would simply consign the project to the very long grass.

However, it is imperative that extra rail capacity is provided from Birmingham as far as Crewe.

**Otherwise HS2 brings little new capacity and will be an enormous white elephant.**

Investing in infrastructure is important, particularly electrification, signalling control

systems and station capacity schemes, but investment in rolling stock needs to go with it.

We now have a very good train fabrication capability in Britain with Alstom at Derby, the new Hitachi facility at Newton Aycliffe, county Durham and CAF in Newport, Gwent. To see this investment scaled back because of lack of new orders is economic and political suicide when, at the same time,

there is an urgent need for more new rolling stock. The north-south divide is reinforced by soldiering on with 40-year-old diesel multiple unit "bangers". Northern, the train operator, needs to be allowed to procure replacement trains – preferably bimotoes. Similarly, now HS2 has been chopped off at Old Oak Common, 10 more train sets are essential for the Elizabeth line before it is too late. They must be



**BRANCH LINE MAGIC: Passenger numbers at Sudbury, Suffolk, are booming on a line politicians saved from closure in the 1960s and which is now served by modern Flirt bimode trains which Greater Anglia uses on all its non-electrified branch lines. One can only guess how many people would have benefitted and what economic benefit would have accrued if the railway lines from Sudbury to Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge had survived**

compatible with the existing Derby-built fleet. Inter-city bimodes are also needed to replace old British Rail "high speed train" sets in Scotland.

In addition, the Voyager diesels running throughout Britain on CrossCountry need replacing by trains with a much larger passenger payload.

In all these areas, bimodes can increase use of the electrified network, replacing under-the-wire diesel operation over huge distances such as Scotland-York and Manchester-Coventry.

**No more diesel-only trains, thank you.**

Greater Anglia realised this and ordered bimodes for all the diesel-worked branch lines in East Anglia. Elections are on the near horizon and Railfuture has not been slow in putting forward our case for investment in our railways.

**The briefing presented to the Labour shadow transport minister is now on the Railfuture website.**

[www.railfuture.org.uk/article1911](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1911)  
**Well worth a read. It is also available to all potential political candidates and stakeholders who want to improve the railway.**

We have received great feedback from industry players but the overwhelming plea is for the government to set objectives and to give the go-ahead for major investment schemes.

Please, please, for sanity's sake, empower the rail industry to get on and deliver. Great British Railways (minus the stupid name), must go ahead to allow the industry to come together in a coherent way and lead from within. Its headquarters in Derby must not be a temporary building.

Collectively (including the government) we need to shape up and invest wisely in our railways, focusing on where this can benefit passengers and freight customers with an environmentally sustainable railway.

To combat climate change as part of its remit, the railway must facilitate modal shift to rail, supported by a coherent fares system and continuous service free from regular strikes. All this needs sustained leadership to ensure that investment is not wasted.

Let us collectively move away from "stop start" policies which we have witnessed with electrification, high speed rail and rolling stock orders.

■ Ian Brown CBE is Railfuture's policy director

■ Photos by the author



**FLEXIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE: A light rail tram train is followed by a heavy freight train within five minutes on the same track at Rotherham. Infrastructure is expensive and its economic benefit needs to be fully exploited**

# The railway needs some quick wins

By Nina Smith

Railway development in England is not in a good place at the moment. At a time when the climate emergency demands a continuing and major shift from lorry and private car use to trains, the government favours car drivers and fails to invest sufficiently in the railways.

The situation, however, is very different in Scotland and Wales.

Many rail campaigners view the cancellation of the Birmingham to Crewe leg of HS2 as a kick in the teeth.

It is certainly a blow for plans to release capacity for more freight and local trains on the West Coast main line.

In what seems like adding insult to injury, transport secretary Mark Harper has authorised the sale of land earmarked for that HS2 section.

To make matters worse, likely next prime minister Keir Starmer feels unable to reverse the Tory decision.

This may change now that the impressive mayors of the West Midlands (Andy Street) and Greater Manchester (Andy Burnham) are seeking government and private finance for an alternative solution to the capacity problems. Nevertheless, that will take time and we need a few quick wins for the railway.

## Railfuture can spot quick wins

Railfuture campaigns for a bigger and better railway over the long term, but we can also identify plenty of ways to improve the railway in the short term.

Quick wins can mean different things to different people.

I have restricted this article to passenger services. Ticketing, station facilities and quality of service warrant a separate article, as does freight.

For passenger services, the quickest wins are those that require only additional rolling stock and train crews, although in the current financial climate, even achieving these is not easy.

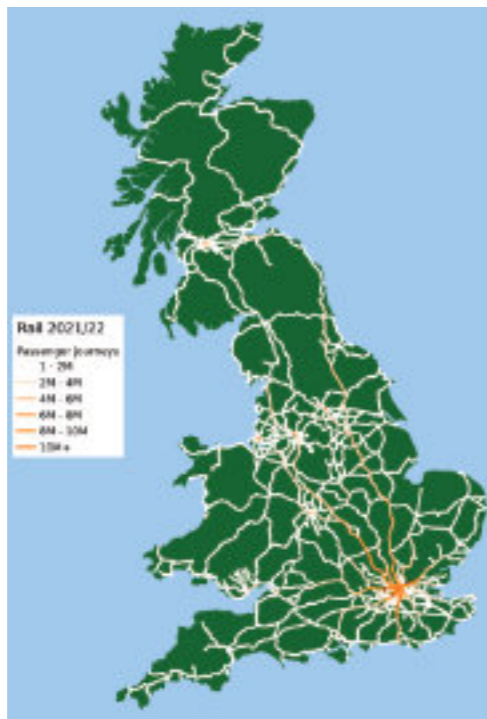
There is, however, a considerable volume of good rolling stock in store, and this should be put into revenue-earning service rather than being scrapped.

Great British Railways when it is finally set up needs to take control of this, but in the meantime, we all need a better railway with these quick wins:

**Connectivity** This involves tweaking timetables to improve connections in both directions between local services and long distance trains, and between different local services. There are examples at most stations that handle two or more routes.

**Sunday service** Most lines have an inferior service on Sundays, but Sundays are now as important a day for travel as other days, and in some areas more important. Inferior Sunday services must be improved. In fact, we now need a seven-day timetable on all routes.

**Additional station stops** Some stations have a service which is inadequate for their needs, even though trains frequently pass through. An example is Thirsk, which currently has no direct services to or from Darlington, Durham and Newcastle. This would be easily rectified by the TransPennine Express Liverpool-Newcastle trains calling at Thirsk. A second example is for Grand Central Sunderland trains to stop at Stockton-on-Tees. There also needs to be an



**COULD DO BETTER:** This map, by Will Deakin, shows every passenger train journey made in Great Britain in 2021-22. The London-centric focus on infrastructure is clear, with routes to and from the south-east dominating train journeys. Nearly one billion passengers journeys were mapped but there is enormous potential for a much bigger and better railway to tackle the climate crisis, reduce social isolation and enhance social mobility

hourly service on the East Coast main line calling at all stations from Doncaster to Peterborough.

**Longer trains** Extending the length of some trains where necessary to combat overcrowding.

**Extended service** There are a number of existing services that need significant improvements. Routes with too few trains include:

Leeds-Glasshoughton (a significant leisure and shopping complex)-Knottingley

Manchester-Knutsford-Northwich-Chester

Ipswich-Peterborough

Services with irregular timetables include: Leeds-Settle-Carlisle and Leeds-Skipton-Lancaster

Services with minimal parliamentary timetables include:

Goole to Leeds  
Sheffield to York via Pontefract Baghill  
Stockport to Stalybridge.

**Restored timetable** Services that have been dropped from the timetable in recent years include Newcastle-Southampton and Birmingham-Stansted CrossCountry routes, Great Western's Brighton-Cardiff and South Western's Waterloo-Basingstoke-Bristol.

**New services** New passenger services can easily be introduced on routes already used by other passenger trains. Examples include

Pontefract-Doncaster via Askern (whose station needs reopening); Todmorden or Blackburn to Huddersfield; Clitheroe-Hellifield (extension of Manchester-Clitheroe service); Morpeth-Bedlington (extension of trains from Carlisle and Hexham).

The proposed Edinburgh-Cardiff CrossCountry service should be hourly, not daily, and the new Manchester-Castleford-York services should also be hourly. The proposed GWR Oxford-Bristol service is most welcome.

## Not so quick wins

It is also worth looking at the easiest enhancements with great potential but which require a limited amount of infrastructure work, although Railfuture believes that even though infrastructure improvements currently take too long in England.

**Upgraded freight routes** The third category involves upgrading freight-only lines to enable passenger services to run, as will shortly happen with the Northumberland line.

Other potential examples are Stocksbridge-Sheffield; Sheffield-Chesterfield via Barrow Hill; Ivanhoe line (Leicester-Burton-Derby); Shirebrook-Ollerton; Tees-Tyne Connect (Middlesbrough-Stockton-Durham-Newcastle via Stillington); and Southampton-Fawley.

**Reopening short chords** Short sections of line can be joined up to create new routes.

Examples:  
Crigglestone curve to enable Sheffield-Barnsley-Halifax-Bradford through trains  
Burscough West curve to enable Preston-Southport services  
Yeovil Junction west to south chord to enable Exeter to Dorchester and Weymouth journeys.

Although not a chord, simply improving the points at Bourne End would allow two Maidenhead-Marlow trains per hour.

**Heritage line upgrades** Heritage railways can be upgraded to enable normal service trains to share track. Together with the signalling, the track may need some upgrading to allow higher speeds.

This suggestion is controversial so it must be done in a way that benefits the heritage operation. There are opportunities for battery powered tram-trains, light rail and very light rail vehicles on some heritage lines. Examples include Oxenhope-Keighley; Rawtenstall-Bury; Taunton-Bishops Lydeard-Minehead; Swanage-Wareham.

The last two could enable long distance services to be operated.

I have deliberately excluded both new stations and full line reopenings, as it seems impossible for these to be done quickly in England.

However, it is clear that there are a fair number of these on which work should start within the next five years.

Railfuture will be campaigning to ensure that the next government recognises the importance of railways in tackling the climate crisis, reducing social isolation and enhancing social mobility.

Prime examples of line reopenings include Colne-Skipton, and the Leamside line in county Durham.

■ *Nina Smith is chair of Railfuture Yorkshire Branch and of the Upper Calder Valley Sustainable Transport Group. The author acknowledges help with this article from a number of Railfuture colleagues, but opinions are her own*

# A tight squeeze on rail's South TransPennine route

Chris Morgan takes a critical look at his Sheffield-Manchester rail service in the 21st century

No, this is not all about reopening Woodhead tunnels – although it would be great to build a brand new base tunnel from beneath Sheffield Midland to under Manchester Piccadilly. No gradients, no twists and turns, no weather, no trespassers, no under or over bridges. About 33 miles with city-centre-to-city-centre journey times of under 20 minutes every quarter of an hour. Revolutionary and expensive. But it is not under London so best park that idea right now. Maybe we can hope it might happen in the 22nd century.

Back in the 19th century, the Pennines were a barrier to railways but canals had already pioneered tunnelling through them.

Coal was needed in Lancashire and there was plenty in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Both the Woodhead and Hope Valley lines were built to carry coal. That trade paid for them and passengers were a sideline.

The story of the Woodhead line's demise from the 1970s has been told many times. What is all but forgotten is what happened to the Hope Valley line. It became the only direct connection between Sheffield and Manchester as coal traffic there was also declining.

All the forward projections were showing declining freight and passenger traffic. There was an air of panic to reduce track mileages, simplify junctions and sell off surplus land. In the 1970s the normal passenger service on this route was hourly with a stopping service generally going to New Mills or Chinley only every two or three hours, less frequently in winter and on Sundays. Only three trains an hour passed through Dore & Topley at that time, plus occasional freights.

It seemed a good idea to reduce from four tracks to two along the Sheaf valley, slewed to get better speeds. Reducing to only one track and platform at Dore was a good idea too, far less to maintain. Planned in the dark early 1980s, a major bottleneck was created in 1985 – at the point we now know the decline in passenger numbers had started to turn. Oh dear! The mistake was recognised and within 10 years redoubling was proposed.

Since then, more and more rail traffic has been squeezed through the restricted layout, not helped by its close proximity to Topley Tunnel with its six-minute block. Today there are two fast paths an hour, plus an hourly stopping service across that single track. There are many more loads of limestone products, including cement, coming from Hope and the Buxton



**BIG DIG:** The cutting near Dore is widened for an extra track



**ACCESSIBLE FUTURE:** Lifts are installed at Dore & Topley station

## FORTY YEARS OF DELAY AND CONFUSION

The following timeline has been produced by local Dore & Topley residents

**1985** Three platforms at Dore & Topley removed, plus one track into the Hope Valley, creating a major bottleneck

**Late 1990s** Plans for redoubling at Dore drawn up by Railtrack

**2002** Strategic Rail Authority suggests new platform and footbridge at Dore for 2003-4

**2002** Railtrack replaced by state-controlled non-profit Network Rail. Our scheme delayed

**2013** First public consultation for scheme allowing four fast passenger paths per hour, loops at Chinley, Grindleford and Dore

**2013** 129 space car park opened, funded by South Yorkshire passenger transport executive in anticipation of this work being completed. Full within 6 months!

**2014** Friends of Dore & Topley Station, FoDaTS, formed

**2015** Second public consultation for three fast paths an hour, Chinley loop dropped

**2015** Third public consultation, Grindleford loop replaced by loop at Bamford

**2016** Public inquiry – Joint submission by Dore Village Society, Bradway Action Group and FoDaTS

**2018** Feb Transport and Works Act Order granted

**2019** Oct Invitations to tender for work invited

**2021** Volker/Story joint venture wins the contract

**2022** 1st April work finally starts

**2023/4** Improvements might not be operational until April 2024. That would be 20 years after Railtrack were supposed to be delivering it

quarries. It is now 40 years since that bottleneck was planned.

Coming right up to date, the new second platform at Dore may open in March, part of a £145 million plus project to upgrade the Hope Valley line, which may or may not be complete by August.

There are no timetable changes planned in June. Fair enough, it is too early to be sure it will be ready by then. There are not any planned for December either. The third path

through the Hope Valley will be fine, but there is now no capacity through Stockport into Manchester and probably too little down the Sheaf valley from Dore into Sheffield. So, increased capacity is not coming from a third fast train. It can come from running longer trains.

However, there is very little chance of anything longer than six cars because that is longer than many of the stations being served.

Currently TransPennine Express cannot run six cars on all their trains because they do not have the rolling stock. TPE's class 185 trains are the most powerful on the route but they are too heavy to use their full speed potential.

East Midlands Railway is trialling six-car trains on a few services west of Nottingham but that is a nightmare route from Norwich, which often means delays. Currently EMR does not have enough stock available to run more than two cars on many trains over the Nottingham-Norwich section.

Surprisingly, the current fastest journey time between Sheffield and Manchester is provided by EMR's ageing class 158s, taking 50 minutes compared to TPE's best of 51 minutes.

Northern is running the most reliable, and often cheapest, three-car services. It has tried six cars, but most of the stations it serves can only accommodate four cars, which Northern can provide at weekends. Leisure travel is doing very well. Northern might be able to extend its Manchester Piccadilly-New Mills Central service into Sheffield.

Even with skip stopping along the Hope Valley, a three or four car train would not fit into two-car Platform 2c in Sheffield, assuming Northern had a spare unit to do it.

New six-carriage platforms at Dore & Topley will accommodate fast services to Manchester in the mornings and back from Manchester in the evenings, together with the stopping service making three trains an hour at peak times.

That is becoming increasingly popular as residents to the south and west sides of Sheffield discover it is easier to drive to Dore & Topley station where there is currently free parking while in Sheffield it can cost £20 a day. The journey to Manchester is shorter too but there are no current plans to stop more trains.

What was it all for? Slightly faster journey times and better punctuality in the short term.

But more track and signalling work, more modern rolling stock, lots more patience and more money will be needed to get more services and significant cuts in journey times.

## What about electrification of the Hope Valley route?

Not before the 2040s, by which time the Hope Valley cement works will have closed and limestone quarries within the Peak District National Park will too.

Thinking ahead, it may be worth going back to that base tunnel idea.

■ *Chris Morgan is chair of FoDaTS, Friends of Dore & Topley Station*  
■ *Photos by the author*



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## SLATTOCKS

## Backing for Slattocks station

A campaign to open a station called Slattocks to serve the 200-acre industrial estate at Stakehill, north Manchester, is being promoted by Transport for Greater Manchester and STORM – Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester rail line. STORM member Richard Lysons had a positive meeting with Alan Johnson, manager of the Stakehill Business Improvement District.

Mr Johnson was supportive of the campaign to have a railway station there and arranged a business breakfast to showcase the station.

Railfuture encourages all members to support the campaign with social media, emails and letters. More information can be found at [www.stakehillbid.com](http://www.stakehillbid.com)

Businesses at Stakehill employ hundreds of workers and they deserve a railway station near their workplace.

## 'DalesRail' from Manchester

Northern plans to run two return Manchester Victoria to Ribbleshead via Clitheroe services on Saturdays from the 1 June timetable change, though the service will not be branded DalesRail.

Railfuture welcomes a report on possible improvements to rail services in East Lancashire, which was commissioned from Northern Trains by Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Burnley Borough Council, Ribbles Valley Borough Council and Community Rail Lancashire.

The report looked at three routes; York-Blackpool North, Kirkby-Blackburn and Clitheroe-Rochdale, with the potential to extend Clitheroe-Rochdale to Hellfield

and North Yorkshire. Each of these would have an increase to two trains an hour and the report had identified costs and benefits for each.

## New Golborne station plan

Transport for Greater Manchester ran a public consultation in January and February on plans for a new West Coast main line station at Golborne, six miles south of Wigan. Individual Railfuture members responded to the "survey of local residents". The station could have an hourly service between Wigan and Stalybridge via Manchester Victoria. TfGM believes there is a strong business case for the station, which would be heavily used as soon as it opens.

<https://tfgm.com/projects/golborne-rail-station>

The Golborne link was a part of the HS2 route north of Manchester which was axed by the government in October.

## Mid Cheshire improvements

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association reports that there have been some improvements in train service performance on the Chester-Stockport line, with fewer cancellations than last year. MCRUA continues to be concerned at the poor passenger experience during disruptions. MCRUA is calling for customer information screens to be installed at Mouldsworth and Plumley, which would be very helpful to passengers during disruptions.

With the weekday service being only hourly (two-hourly on Sundays), cancellations leave a customer waiting at the station for an hour minimum. MCRUA sees frequent cases where disruption results in successive cancellations and gaps in service of three or four hours.

## Wrexham-Bidston progress

A 45-minute interval Monday-Saturday service was introduced on the Wrexham-Bidston line from December, and timekeeping has



Keiran with his mum Lauryn at St Helens Junction Picture: Northern

## Northern's youngest station adopter

**A 12-year-old enthusiast has become the youngest person to adopt one of Northern's Merseyside stations. Keiran Glover is volunteering at St Helen's Junction after contacting Northern's community team when he read about station adoption on the train operator's website.**

**He has plans to improve the station by putting up artwork, litter picking and planting biodiverse flowers to encourage wildlife. Keiran said: "I can't wait to see my ideas come to life. I have a couple of friends that are going to help too."**

**Mum Lauryn Glover said: "Keiran is really looking forward to making St Helens Junction a great place for people to catch the train. At the moment we will be litter picking at the station and then when spring comes, we plan to start planting."**

**Hundreds of adopters are already active across the network, working in partnership with Northern to keep stations tidy and well presented.**

**Craig Harrop, regional director at Northern, said: "We are so pleased to have Keiran on board and that someone so young is interested in being a station adopter. Our community partners are the heartbeat of the railway, and we are extremely proud to work closely with them to deliver such a wide-ranging positive impact for the North of England."**

**As well as receiving funding from Northern, Keiran has set up an Amazon Wishlist that the community can purchase items from to support his plans: [amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/1GWK0ODG4A4SQ](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/1GWK0ODG4A4SQ)**

significantly improved. The new timetable has lengthened end-to-end journey times which had been extremely tight. The Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users' Association believes that the temporary sacrifice of the clock-face timetable has been worthwhile to obtain a reliable service. It is calling for a clock-face timetable to be restored with the promised, but overdue, 30-minute interval service in the not-too-distant future. WBRUA continues to push Network Rail and Transport for Wales for line speed improvements. These will underpin the introduction of a robust 30-minute interval clockface timetable.

The performance of some TfW trains and train crew shortages continue to cause problems.

WBRUA is dubious about TfW's "Five Point Plan" for the Wrexham-Bidston line but welcomes some progress being made. WBRUA is calling on TfW to improve reliability but also to improve passenger communication and revenue protection.

WBRUA will continue to work with Railfuture and other user groups to seek improvements in these areas.

The report to the Welsh Government from the North Wales Transport Commission published in December 2023 gives endorsement to the improvements the WBRUA has, for many years, been seeking for the Wrexham-Bidston line, including a more frequent service, through trains to Liverpool and a station to serve the Deeside Industrial Park.

## Metrolink bike trial

Transport for Greater Manchester launched a trial in February with volunteers to allow bikes to be carried on off-peak Metrolink services. Dame Sarah Storey, active travel commissioner for Greater Manchester, said: "Like many others, I have experienced the disappointment of being forced to travel by car with my bike when I would rather not, because the choice to travel by tram is not currently available."

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

## New railway – new line on accessibility

East West Rail is Britain's newest railway, albeit created from the former Oxford-Cambridge line.

Last year the EWR company, which is building the line, launched its accessibility advisory panel.

Its purpose is to understand the potential impacts of the project on disabled people and to develop ways to ensure the railway is inclusive.

Mary Doyle is the panel's co-chair and explains her aims for EWR to lead the way for accessibility and inclusion.

One in five people in the UK is disabled – and the variety of disabilities means that different people gain access to the railway in different ways.

Mary said: "At East West Rail we subscribe to the social model of disability, which does not use medical diagnosis as a basis but instead believes that people are disabled by the barriers that society creates which exclude them."

She added: "When I was asked to join the panel, I said of course, as the opportunity to build a new railway in our lifetime is exciting."

Mary retrained in 2016 and founded her business, Rocket Girl Coaching, to improve inclusion and



Keen rail user: Mary Doyle Picture: East West Rail

understanding. She uses her lived experience, as well as 20-plus years of professional work in the corporate world, through consultancy and disability equality

training. She added: "I am a rail user and it is also in my family. My dad and brother spent 40 years with the London Underground, so getting to work with a rail project felt like a chance to follow in their footsteps."

"There are 14 million disabled people in the UK, yet just 250,000 disabled railcard holders. That is a big difference. We want to encourage more disabled people to use rail. Together, the accessibility advisory panel and EWR aim to find solutions."

"I would like EWR to be a pioneer in accessibility, to set out the goals for what a railway should look like – a template for the future – to become an industry leader, and others will have to rise to our inclusion standards, going way beyond the traditional compliance in rail."

"Disability has always existed and will always continue to exist, it is a part of the human experience. It could be a long-term condition, but it can also be situational. The disadvantages disabled people face can also be experienced by someone using one arm, to buy a ticket for example, because they are holding a child. Or perhaps someone whose mobility is limited due to a leg injury. It affects everyone. The great thing about



1 in 5 people in the UK is disabled

the panel is we have people who are so committed. Solidarity and action are critical. If we keep that respect going we will do amazing work.

"We look forward to sharing further updates from the accessibility advisory panel as the project progresses." More info:

<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/planning/accessibility-and-inclusion>

Ian Cook successfully campaigned for step-free access at Flitwick station in Bedfordshire.

He said: "I am also a member of the EWR accessibility advisory panel and have been from the start. It is encouraging to find that people both disabled and non-disabled are actually thinking of making the network accessible for all."

EWR says it is actively looking for ways to make stations, trains and digital services inclusive for all and ensure that East West Rail is a railway for everyone.

## Passengers now expect level boarding

By Owen O'Neill

New Derby-built trains are a welcome sight as they come into service in Walsall, Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

The Avenra class 730s are replacing 30-year-old Hunslet-built class 323s in the West Midlands.

But for wheelchair users and people with reduced mobility, or fully mobile passengers with prams or luggage, the new trains do not provide level boarding.

Alstom's Avenra is unlike the new trains Stadler supplied to East Anglia, Merseyrail, Transport for Wales and the Tyne and Wear Metro, all of which provide level boarding at standard platforms.

The Stadler trains are a game-changer for wheelchair users' ability to travel spontaneously.

Alstom does not currently offer level-boarding vehicles to the UK market, but this may be about to change in upcoming tenders.

If so, it will provide welcome competition and will hopefully mean that the 730s are the last new commuter rolling stock in the UK to deny wheelchair users safe and easy access from platform to train.

## West Midlands

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## Lighter look at New Street after renovations

Network Rail has now completed renovations to the roof of New Street Station platforms, which had been showing serious stress fractures. This means all 12 platforms are now back in use and train services curtailed by the need to close two platforms at a time have now been restored. The Birmingham to Nottingham service was the worst affected, but the two trains per hour now run between these cities again. The renovations have resulted in a lighter, brighter environment at platform level.

## University station upgrade benefits millions

After a lengthy gestation period, the new concourse and footbridge at University station opened at the end of January. This provides wider entrances/exits and stairways, and lifts to the platforms. The original station, serving Queen Elizabeth Hospital as well as Birmingham University, was designed for 500,000 journeys per year but is now recording 3.5 million annual journeys. The new facilities have been designed for more than seven million passengers per year.

## CrossCountry insists on inter-city status

Railfuture was well represented at a *Modern Railways* First Friday event (on a Wednesday!) at Derby with several members of Railfuture West and East Midlands branches. Speakers relevant to the West Midlands included Denise Wetton, director of Network Rail's Central area, Toby Rackcliff, rail policy lead for West Midlands Rail Executive and Tom Joyner, MD of CrossCountry Trains, expounding his view that XCT should be first and last an inter-city train company.

## Progress on Camp Hill stations

The new stations on the Camp Hill line, Moseley, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road, are now

**Railfuture AGM: Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh 13 July 2024**



BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET Photo Network Rail



UNIVERSITY STATION Photo West Midlands Rail Executive

progressing well. Unexpected issues with wildlife and ancient walls have now been overcome. Services are expected to commence with the December 2024 timetable.

## New trains help West Midlands and Northern

The long-awaited WMT class 730 EMUs have at last entered service in the West Midlands, initially on the Walsall-Birmingham-Wolverhampton service. These are to replace the ageing, but much liked, class 323s operating on several routes in the West Midlands, but principally on the CrossCity line between Redditch/Bromsgrove and Lichfield. The 730s are planned to start replacing 323s on this route in the spring. The latter will then be transferred to Northern to strengthen local services around Manchester.

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



**The traditional station tearoom is seeing a boom across Northern stations with seven new venues opening over the past few months, including artisan coffee shops and a bakery. The latest include Fursty Fox at Birchwood, Cheshire, and Smiths at Wilmslow, pictured above**

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**Cambridge South construction**

The new station under construction at Cambridge South was the subject of a talk by Martin Seiffarth, Network Rail's public affairs manager for the Anglia route, at a Railfuture East Anglia meeting in Cambridge in December.

The station, for which Railfuture has been campaigning for many years and which has enjoyed widespread support, will serve the various hospitals, the new biomedical campus with 27,000 jobs and around 4,000 new homes being built on the southern side of Cambridge.

It will be operated by Greater Anglia and have four platforms served by new loops on the main line. The existing track needs to be slewed to allow for the extra track, which has resulted in weekend route closures. Work is also being carried out at Shepreth branch junction to increase line speeds from 30 to 50mph. The additional speed means that the time taken to stop at the station will have less impact.

Other aspects of the station include dual lifts to the platforms and an increase in biodiversity thanks to the green roof and planting around the site. The station will not have car parking but will have plenty of space for cycles and will be served by local buses and be connected to the Cambridge cycle network. The station is expected to open next year and it is intended that all trains that currently pass the site will call there. In the longer term, further changes to the track will be required to accommodate services on East West Rail from Bedford and Oxford. In response to questions about potential passengers, Martin Seiffarth said that passenger numbers had to be calculated according to Department for Transport rules, but the station had



**CAMBRIDGE SOUTH:** Track work for the station which will open next year

Picture: Peter Wakefield

been designed to allow for growth in passengers.

**Farewell to campaigner John**

Lifelong rail campaigner John Drake died in December, aged 82. He was honorary chair of the Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association, and was its secretary for years. Longstanding Railfuture members knew John from Railway Development Society days.

A Cambridgeshire boy to his core, John lived in the village of Cheveley near Newmarket for his entire life. After attending Soham Grammar School, he trained as an accountant. John was treasurer for the Ffestiniog Railway East Anglian group for over 50 years. He was also honorary auditor for Railfuture East Anglia's accounts.

His principal contribution to the promotion of railways and rail travel was undoubtedly his involvement with the Mid Anglia campaign. One of its founder



John Drake

members in 1990 under the aegis of Railfuture, when it was known as the Mid Suffolk Travellers' Association, John devoted many hours to the sometimes frustrating work of lobbying for better services and passenger facilities on the route connecting Ipswich with Cambridge and Ely. While lobbying

ambitions still remain to be fulfilled – notably an hourly service between Ipswich, Ely, March and Peterborough, as well as the establishment of a Mid Anglia Community Rail Partnership – the improved quality of the service available in 2024 reflects John's industry and diligence over many years. Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association members will miss his knowledge and wisdom. He leaves two sisters, Jean and Sylvia, and four nephews, to whom we offer our condolences and best wishes.

**Tables turned**

Greater Anglia plans to fit tables in the four-seat bays of its Stansted Express trains because, for operational reasons, the units are also increasingly used on its long-distance London-Norwich inter-city services

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**Portishead reopening progress**

The Portishead line reopening moved a step closer to reality after North Somerset Council voted unanimously in January to submit the detailed business case to the Department for Transport in March. James Willcock, MetroWest Phase 1 Project Manager, met Railfuture-affiliated Portishead Railway Group on 30 January and gave a very positive update on progress. If the DfT agrees that the numbers stack up (expected in July 2024), it will be up to the council to release funding which has already been set aside for the scheme. Construction work

should start in October. Trains should start running in December 2026, when passengers from Portishead and Pill will have a much quicker alternative to driving on the clogged A369 to get to Bristol, as well as being able to connect to the wider rail network. The journey time from Portishead to Temple Meads will be just 23 minutes. Portishead was a victim of the Beeching axe. The 60th anniversary of the line's closure will be 7 September 2024, but it is mostly intact and still used as a freight line to Portbury dock. The section between Pill and Portishead will have to be rebuilt, and signalling upgraded. It is part of the wider MetroWest programme, which includes new stations and

improved rail services in the Bristol area. Portway Park & Ride opened last year, and work is progressing on a new station at Ashley Down. The West of England Combined Authority is looking into further reopenings at St Anne's, Ashton Gate, Saltford and Lockleaze.

**Bristol area electrification**

West of England Combined Authority mayor Dan Norris wants to complete the business of electrifying the Great Western main line to Bristol Temple Meads, which stalled in 2016. He has ordered a study into electrifying the five-mile stretch between Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway, known as the Filton Bank. This would allow fully electric services from Bristol to both

London and Cardiff. The study will not initially look at wiring the line through Bath and Chippenham, which is the more common route between Bristol and London, although this remains an aspiration. Mayor Norris wants to find a way to reduce the cost of electrification, the main reason the project was abandoned. Apart from electrification's obvious environmental advantages, it would bring significant journey time improvements. Railfuture Severnside believes there is a case for continuing electrification as far as Weston-super-Mare.

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**Around the regional branch area**

Cornwall has the final (or first) 81 miles of the Great Western main line between Plymouth and Penzance, and half of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership's nine community rail branch lines (the Tamar Valley Line is in both counties). However, there is no escaping the reality of Cornwall's lower level of rail development activity and associated campaigning. There are just two known campaign groups in Cornwall: Connect Bude which is affiliated to Railfuture and a new one led by Launceston Town Council, both towns being recently connected to the rail network at Okehampton by diverting existing bus services to the station. However, bus frequency is disappointingly lower than the hourly rail service to Exeter. That difference between the counties continues to be reflected in regional branch and affiliated group activities. Almost all of the rail user groups in the regional branch area which are affiliated to Railfuture are in Devon.

Across both counties, and including Somerset too, the sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport is getting into its stride with publication in November of its Rail Strategy – which "outlines how rail underpins the region's future economic growth while helping to meet climate goals". It was followed by a consultation from December to February on its draft *Peninsula Transport Strategy – Strategic Priorities to 2050*. After three webinars by the organisation in January, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall led our response jointly with Severnside branch, highlighting the central role of rail in accelerating all-important modal shift.

Devon and Torbay already have a joint local transport plan (2011-26) and, while new Department for Transport guidance is still awaited for a successor LTP to be developed, 2024 brings the prospect of a new combined county authority for the two councils, which will include Devon's eight districts. A new devolution deal with central government should bring fresh opportunities for Railfuture to exert its influence on official decisions relating to transport as part of a package of newly-devolved powers and funding.

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall welcomes Cornwall Council cabinet's agreement in December to a levelling-up fund package for the Mid-Cornwall Metro project. We note with appreciation the approval by Torbay Council's planning committee in November of Network Rail's planning



**BARNSTAPLE:** Great Western managing director Mark Hopwood, centre, visited Barnstaple station in October for the third time in 12 months. On the left is Marcus Jones, Network Rail western route director and on the right is Tim Steer, Tarka Rail Association's co-vice-chair who is also responsible for liaison with the Barnstaple in Bloom team of volunteers  
Picture: Mike Day



**Neil Bromley, left, and Michael Cooke of Heathfield Rail Link Association at Newton Abbot railway show in December**  
Picture: HRLA Facebook

application for the new station at Edginswell (also known as Torquay Gateway) on the Riviera line between Newton Abbot and Torre. There remains, however, the vexed question of bridging a significant funding gap identified last summer.

In December, the Heathfield Rail Link Association, advocating restoration of services over the mothballed freight-only line from Newton Abbot to Heathfield and Bovey Tracey, was among a number of groups at the annual Railway Studies and Modellers Show in Newton Abbot.

**Devon developments**

Elsewhere in the regional branch's area, the rail development campaigning news from Railfuture comes from north Devon. Three particular spheres of influence can be highlighted.

The first has been from some individual members in their personal responses to a planning application considered to adversely affect the last remaining station building at the former Bideford station, now the home of the Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. As a result, a total of 65 objections were submitted from members of the public, along with those from

feasibility study: "Bideford railway study (to work alongside other key stakeholders)". This is an admittedly unexpectedly early campaign success.

Whether you call them "relevant partner organisations" or "other key stakeholders", the third sphere of influence is in the creation of the new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance. A new stakeholder organisation alliance modelled on other successful lobby groups up and down the country was initiated by Bideford Town Council in December, inspiring the hashtag #Reconnection2040. Railfuture, the Tarka Rail Association and most recently Barnstaple Town Council have signed up. The alliance's opening declaration of intent is: "To secure a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and upgrade of the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple, championing their transformational benefits for communities and businesses and advocating to decision makers the economic, social and environmental case for developing and investing in the project".

An inaugural event in Bideford was scheduled for March.

Finally, in a surprise follow-on from the report in the previous issue (*Railwatch* 178), the Tarka Rail Association with Barnstaple in Bloom was announced in mid-December as shortlisted in the national Community Rail Awards for "It's Your Station" – with the awards ceremony in Swansea on 18 March.

**Tavistock rail link promised**

The government has promised funds to work with Devon County Council to reopen a station at Cullompton as part of the Devon Metro plan. The government and the council will also join forces to reconnect Tavistock to the network by rebuilding five miles of track to Bere Alston. It would give Tavistock a rail service to Plymouth.

**Mid Cornwall Metro planned**

The government has published its £58 million plans for a Mid Cornwall Metro, which involves upgrading lines to provide an hourly Newquay-Par-St Austell-Truro-Penryn-Falmouth service. The plan includes a reinstated platform at Newquay and a loop at Tregoss Moor to clear the way for doubling the frequency of some services. Funding is £49 million from levelling-up, £6 million match funding, £1.5 million Restoring Your Railway and £1 million active travel. £500,000 could be provided for digitalisation of ticketing. Public consultation started in February at Newquay.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch)

# No more stop-start on this vital upgrade

By Alan Whitehouse

To many *Railwatch* readers, the Pennines will be a far-off land of which they know little. But few supporters of rail travel will be unaware of the huge upgrade programme currently in progress on the North Trans-Pennine route.

The what? North Trans-Pennine is a term coined by British Rail about 50 years ago to describe the route linking Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Scarborough and Hull in the east with York, Leeds, Huddersfield, Manchester (and its airport) and Liverpool.

North Trans-Pennine differentiates it from the Tyne Valley, Calder Valley and Hope Valley routes.

It is also a route that has seen a mixture of half-hearted investment and benign neglect for about the same length of time.

So a concerted effort to rebuild, upgrade and electrify it has to be good news. And it is, with an £11 billion plus price tag – and that is before the inevitable cost overruns and delays before everything is complete.

In many ways, the aim of the programme is to put back a lot of infrastructure – track and signals – that was taken out as part of cost-cutting exercises in the 1960s and 70s.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a lot of the effort is concentrated in the central section of the route, the key 40 miles or so linking Leeds and Manchester, through which all trains have to be funnelled.

The promise is 70 miles of new and overhauled railway, electrified and with in-cab signalling on a fleet of electric trains that will operate six fast and two slow trains per hour over the core Leeds-Manchester section.

So, the section between Huddersfield and Dewsbury is to be restored to quadruple track. Back in the day this was to allow passenger trains to overtake slow moving coal trains and the like.

Today it is to allow much more frequent high speed inter-regional trains to overtake slower local services.

It is an indication of how seriously all this is now being taken that the plans include a new grade separated junction at Thornhill LNW where the lines from Huddersfield to Leeds and Wakefield diverge. A replacement station at Ravensthorpe will serve both routes, offering greater flexibility and – hopefully – greater passenger appeal.

West from Huddersfield, a third track will provide paths for freight trains. A few operate already but there is pent-up demand for more. The total upgrade package will allow for 15 freights per day, which



2021 map showing cities and towns that desperately need their railway links upgraded to modern standards



TRANSFORMATION: Work is under way in 2024 at Huddersfield, Deighton, Mirfield and Ravensthorpe, where there will be a new relocated station



FUTURE: Design for a new four-track viaduct over the river Calder at Ravensthorpe, near Dewsbury, where lines to Leeds and Wakefield diverge

have the capacity to take 1,000 lorries per day off the roads. Similarly, over the hills in the Manchester area are schemes to increase capacity and line speed. These include completing the electrification to Stalybridge. This should have happened around a decade ago, which gives a feeling for the stop-start nature of the whole Trans-Pennine programme: first it would be electrified and upgraded. Then it was paused. Then it was abandoned. Then revived.

Then, the Department for Transport began looking at cutting costs and some truly wacky ideas began to surface, such as electrifying only the “climbing” tracks on each side of the Pennines, using bimode trains to coast down the other side. Yes, you really could not make some of this stuff up. It is on a par with the hydrogen-fuelled trains that the Department for Transport was convinced we would all be travelling in by now, so no need for electrification.

But electrification is firmly on the agenda this time around. Like the link to Stalybridge, a few short sections are already complete, such as between York and Church Fenton, where the wiring continues

to crawl slowly towards Leeds – another gap in the electrified network that in a sane world would have been closed years ago. But there are still some worrying gaps. Look for information on the 18-mile section between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, and you will find virtually none, other than that surveys are taking place to assess the impact on communities and wildlife.

This will be the most challenging section to electrify, including as it does three tunnels, including the three-mile Standedge Tunnel. Given the on-off nature of the programme over the past decade it is difficult not to come away with a feeling that this would be an easy section to abandon, with some public relations fluff about bimode trains and less passenger disruption as a fig-leaf to cover a lack of commitment to spending money on railways in the north of England.

Rail minister Huw Merriman gave a guarantee that the central section would be electrified as recently as June last year – although he also insisted that HS2 would definitely be coming to Manchester.

We trust the electrification decision will stick! This niggling worry is



LOOKING AHEAD: Rail minister Huw Merriman, left, and Neil Holm, managing director of the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade, at Dewsbury in December when Mr Merriman confirmed £3.9 billion of funding

reinforced by the yawn-inducing timescale of the whole project. It will be into the 2030s before all is completed and so far only £6.9 billion of the total cost has been fully committed by the government. Looking at what has just happened to HS2, it is difficult not to conclude that it will not be finished until it is finished and that there is a lot to go wrong in terms of de-scoping and funding cuts in the meantime. It is vital that that does not happen.

Alan Whitehouse is president of Railfuture Yorkshire and a former Yorkshire Post and BBC transport correspondent.

Map: Rcsprinter123

Image: Network Rail

Picture: Network Rail

## North East



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Blyth and Tyne progress

The long-awaited return of passenger services to the Northumberland line is now approaching, but only in stages. There is a great deal of preparatory work still to do, especially on signalling, but once work is completed, Ashington, Newsham and Seaton Delaval will once more have a regular passenger service to and from Newcastle. August is a possible opening date. See map (above).

The other stations, Bedlington, Bebside and Northumberland Park, should follow by the end of the year. Preparations have been slowed down by the discovery of mine workings. The Metro interchange station at Northumberland Park is expected to be the last to open.

**East Coast main line alert**  
The South East Northumberland Rail User Group has warned that timetable changes planned for December this year will reduce services disastrously along Northumberland's coast. “Morpeth will lose all its off-peak LNER services, and local services from Northern will terminate at Newcastle instead of running

on to Hexham and Carlisle,” said Dennis Fancett, SENRUG chair.

He added: “We support the government’s objective of increasing London-Edinburgh rail capacity but this can be done so as not to reduce services here in Northumberland.

“Rather than investing in rail infrastructure in Northumberland to allow more trains to run, we understand Network Rail is cutting back on planned infrastructure investments such as power upgrades, which makes it more difficult to run more electric trains or longer trains.

“It will also make it harder to introduce the hourly all-stations local service between Newcastle and Berwick, desperately needed for communities such as Widdrington and Chathill.”

SENRUG is urging people to alert their local councillors, MPs, Rail North and Transport for the North.

**Metro developments**  
The first three months of 2024 have seen work on installing over two kilometres of new track, new track junctions and 1.4 kilometres of new overhead wiring at Metro’s

Gosforth depot. The new rolling stock from Switzerland will provide better accessibility and more room on board, and the first of the 46 units on order should be in service by the time you read this. Numerous tests for reliability have already been carried out successfully on Tyneside. The full fleet should have arrived by the end of next year.

**Mayor visits Coastliners**  
Tees Valley Mayor, Lord (Ben) Houchen, will attend the Coastliners’ meeting in June to talk about rail schemes.

**Wish list for Teesside**  
In January, the Tees Valley Mayor announced nearly a billion pounds worth of schemes to improve road and rail, based on expected grants from the money saved by the government abandoning HS2’s northern extensions. Railfuture members are pleased to see that the extension of TransPennine electrification towards Middlesbrough, Redcar and Saltburn is among these schemes, but all that Mayor Houchen has said so far is that money will be spent on an estimate of its cost. This electrification has been talked about for years, and discussion has included the need for modernising the route northwards from Northallerton towards Eaglescliffe to make it compliant with W12 gauge. The tunnel just north of Yarm station is a problem.

This scheme, including a modernised approach to Teesport, the deep-water port between Redcar and Middlesbrough, should not be seen as enough to serve Teesside’s needs. The most conspicuous shortcoming is the lack of a plan to continue electrification towards Tyneside, by wiring Eaglescliffe-Stockton-Ferryhill-Tursdale Junction (on the East Coast main line) to provide a fuller alternative to the route via Darlington. Railfuture North East will continue to lobby for plans to electrify and modernise the entire route, Northallerton-Eaglescliffe-Stockton-Ferryhill-Durham plus Eaglescliffe-Middlesbrough-Redcar-Saltburn (and even on to Boulby), as vital links for Teesside, not just to London.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/NorthEastBranch)  
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## Thames Valley

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Railfuture at Oxford Green Fair



Railfuture Thames Valley had a stand at the Oxford Green Fair in November, as it does every year, and we were pleased that it was very busy, as in pre-pandemic years. We had many useful and engaging conversations with visitors, with Cowley and Cambridge much talked about. We recruited some new members. Richard Stow’s picture shows Railfuture’s Nigel Rose and Andrew McCallum engaging with the public.

**Local transport plan consultation**  
Railfuture Thames Valley has submitted responses to Oxfordshire County Council’s budget consultation and Cherwell District Council’s local plan consultation, focusing on Banbury station and more frequent trains for Oxford. Railfuture Thames Valley is currently working on the joint South Oxfordshire & Vale District’s local plan, aiming to protect the Wantage/Grove station site and planning for more growth at Culham.

**Tackley step towards more trains**  
Railfuture Thames Valley supports Network Rail’s Transport and Works Act Order application to replace permanently the level crossing at Tackley with a bridge which, combined with two others north of Oxford, will allow for increased capacity on the Thames Valley-Midlands route.

**Better rail service for future homes**  
Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the changes to Great Western Railway’s local Didcot-Oxford-Banbury services introduced in December, especially the increase in calls at Culham, which gains an additional 10 trains a day each way resulting in a half hourly service in the peaks. This is good news for Culham Science Centre and planned housing growth.

**Bristol-Oxford service welcomed**  
Railfuture Thames Valley also welcomes GWR’s plans for a Bristol-Swindon-Oxford service, albeit initially only for a trial period. Through trains on this route avoid changes at Didcot, and it enhances the case for Wantage/Grove station.

**Long wait for rails to Witney**  
Our affiliate, Witney Oxford Transport Group, has appointed a new chairman, Stuart McDonald. The group welcomes the 3.4 cost-benefit ratio of the Windrush line, but is concerned that the media are too focused on the total costs of £900 million rather than its now-obvious benefits. The group is planning to send a summary of the report to all elected councillors. Reaching Eynsham by 2031 is seen as essential to avoid adverse effects on Oxford’s economy.

**Progress is slow on Cowley rail link**  
Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the news that SLC Rail has won the contract for the next stage of development work on the Cowley line reopening, but we feel frustrated by the slow progress of the scheme.

**GWR consults on Cotswold plans**  
Railfuture Thames Valley was represented at a GWR online consultation session over plans for rail replacement services during a Cotswold line closure. It is encouraging that GWR is taking views of local stakeholders into account.  
[www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/ThamesValleyBranch)  
X @RailfutureTV





**BACK IN ACTION:** Pont Abermaw (Barmouth bridge) has been renovated after a major £30 million upgrade. The rail service was suspended for three months in autumn 2023 but resumed in December. Network Rail's picture shows a Machynlleth to Pwllheli train, Afon Mawddach and snow-covered Cadair Idris in the background

# Loads of delay over rail freight

The government boasted in December that it was setting ambitious targets to increase rail freight by 75% by 2050.

Transport secretary Mark Harper fell in line with what the majority of the British public has known for years: *Freight belongs on rail.*

He said: "Not only is rail freight the most efficient and environmentally friendly way of transporting many goods, but it helps grow the economy across the country."

Everyone in Railfuture would agree with him.

Maggie Simpson, director general of the Rail Freight Group, said: "We are delighted that government has recognised the economic and environmental benefits of growing rail freight."

The government announcement came just over a week after Freightliner called on the government to be much bolder – and set a long-term target to treble rail freight volumes by 2050. In the Climate Show on Sky News, Freightliner explained how increasing the amount of freight carried on rail would support the delivery of the UK's net zero greenhouse gas obligations.

Freightliner's "treble it" suggestion would mean over 20 million heavy goods vehicle journeys would be removed from busy motorways each year, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 2.5 million tonnes. That is equivalent to the emissions

**Spot the difference**  
**Government wants to increase rail freight by 75% by 2050**  
**Freightliner wants to increase rail freight by 300% by 2050**

of someone flying around the world 300,000 times.

Freightliner said setting such an ambitious target would be a clear statement of intent from government and give confidence to the private sector to make significant investments in long-term assets that deliver growth.

Freightliner explained that today around 9% of freight is moved by rail in Great Britain, with rail transporting all kinds of essential goods and supplies - from containers to and from the deep-sea ports and inland terminals to bulk freight, such as construction materials, aggregates, and cement.

Growing the amount of freight transported by rail is vital to meet our net zero greenhouse gas target. Each freight train can remove up to 129 HGVs from Britain's roads.

For each tonne of freight moved by rail instead of road, carbon emissions are reduced by 76%. Using an electric locomotive provides a clear route to net zero emissions as the national grid is decarbonised.

Tim Shoveller, chief executive of Freightliner's parent company, said:

"There is an increasing desire for businesses to become more sustainable and meet their ambitious sustainability targets. Rail freight is a critical part of the solution, but to make rail the mode of choice for trunk haulage and bulk movements, the economics must work for customers. That means that rail must be able to compete with road haulage.

"The economics of rail freight have been getting more challenging in recent years. As an example, fuel duty, which is one of the largest costs for road hauliers, has been effectively frozen for 14 years. When you compare this to track access charges, the charges we pay to run our trains on the network, these have increased by over 35% through inflationary increases alone for the same time period."

He called on government to support the rail freight industry with some key initiatives and policies.

Freightliner wants the government to support the rail freight industry in three key areas:

- 1 Halve track access charges that freight operators pay to run trains on the network
- 2 Double the modal shift grant that businesses can access to support using rail
- 3 Keep investing in the rail network to ensure that there is sufficient capacity on busy rail corridors, enabling more freight



trains to be timetabled. During the Climate Show, Freightliner also highlighted many other opportunities and challenges facing the rail freight sector, including the impact of climate change on the resilience of the rail network, the challenges of keeping electric traction running when electricity prices are so high, and the need for increased capacity across the UK rail network, especially after the recent HS2 announcement.

Freightliner's safety and sustainability director Louise Ward said: "As the largest freight operator of electric trains in the UK, we want to increase the number of electric services, but to do so requires electricity costs to be affordable and some of today's gaps on the rail network to be electrified."

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