railwatch

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Picture: WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

Camp Hill reborn after 85 years

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Camp Hill line reopens after 85 years

PAGE ONE PICTURE

Our page one picture of Moseley Village shows just one of the three reopened stations in south Birmingham which welcomed their new passengers on 7 April. The new station forecourt, drop-off point and cycle parking can be seen above the mouth of Moseley tunnel.

Moseley Village, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road are on the Camp Hill line, which was reopened for regular passenger trains to the city centre for the first time in 85 years.

The line was closed in 1941 during the Second World War due to coal shortages but penny-pinching attitudes to rail are changing.

Railfuture's Roger Blake said: "The West Midlands has been the torch-bearer, with local services resumed in March between Wolverhampton and Walsall, including the bonus of two new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston. Four miles north from Moseley Village, West Midlands Metro has completed its first phase of extending eastwards from Birmingham city centre with two new tram stops."

The Metro's new Millenium Point temporary eastside terminus is near the gradually emerging HS2 terminus at Curzon Street.

The Camp Hill stations are operated by West Midlands Railway and connect passengers to Birmingham New Street and Kings Norton, using WMR's newest diesel fleet, the class 196s, which entered service in 2022. Ten years ago, the newly created West Midlands Combined Authority revived plans to restore local passenger services to the line and declared it one of their priority



Map: Railwatch/West Midlands CA

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT: The "new" loop line

transport schemes. Sandeep Shingadia, executive director of Transport for West Midlands, said: "Restoring passenger services to the Camp Hill line is not just about shorter journey times. It is about easing congestion on our roads, cutting carbon emissions and opening up new economic opportunities across the region."

WMR's Jonny Wiseman said: "We are so excited to officially open these transformative new stations in South Birmingham. We know this will be a real gamechanger for local residents, whether they are commuting, visiting family and friends, or travelling for leisure."

Network Rail route director Denise Wetton said: "The railway has a unique role in connecting communities to places and opportunities, supports regeneration, and drives economic growth. Delivered in partnership, this is another important step as part of a wider programme of transformative projects that are improving the railway across the West Midlands."

I would have spent HS2 cash on electrification

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Christian Wolmar

HS2 could cost up to £102.7bn and may not open until 2039, transport secretary says

BBC News report on 19 May 2026 after HS2 'reset' by government

An interesting idea was suggested to me by *The Times* on the day that the latest report on the HS2 debacle came out. What, the man from *The Times* asked, could have been done with £100 billion as opposed to spending it on HS2?

That touched a nerve. As a long-term opponent of HS2, I argued that there was much else that should get priority on the railway but also on transport as a whole.

I remember being told by supporters of HS2 that it would not detract from other projects. It would just be a billion or so a year that would not even come out of the existing transport budget.

They were wrong. HS2 is costing £7 billion per year and the Treasury's reluctance to give the go-ahead to other projects is definitely the result of that huge bottomless pit.

In my hastily compiled wish list of what to do with £100 billion, I would put electrification of the network at the heart of railway improvement. I would also support the idea of a freight line from the North to the Channel Tunnel, as was put forward in the 1990s but never acted on. Add in reviving suburban rail networks in various towns and cities across the UK, creating the 20 tram schemes that John Prescott set out in his Transport 2010 document, and a whole host of improvements to make the travel experience better – whether it is toilets at stations, more platform staff, easier ticketing, guaranteed wifi and much more.



Christian Wolmar

Incidentally, I can no longer remain an opponent of HS2. It is far too late to scrap it. I have long argued that the government could not simply leave the assortment of major structures dotting the heart of England to rot and present future generations with a conundrum about their purpose, perhaps musing that it was homage to some mysterious god. Now according to the *Financial Times*, a study examining whether the whole HS2 project should be ditched found that it would have cost as much to end the project as to continue with it. That is because the land would need to be reinstated, given that the legislation under which it was purchased was specifically to build a railway. Therefore tunnels would have to be filled in, viaducts taken down, and embankments flattened. I am not sure whether all that would be legally necessary but court cases would go on for years and meanwhile, all that money would have been spent for nothing. At least we will get a railway out of it, even if it is not until 2039, the latest date suggested in the "reset". The reason for such a further lengthy delay is difficult to explain unless one looks at the malign role of the Treasury. The cheapest way to complete the scheme would be to ensure work was carried out as quickly as possible but the Treasury, which does not trust the railways (understandably perhaps), would not allow that. Stretching out the construction process costs more money and delays any revenue coming in, but in the short term it looks cheaper. The most depressing aspect of all this is the success of high speed rail in so many other countries. My new book, *Fast Track*, due to be published at the end of July, highlights these achievements which, to be fair, have often come at a price. As I document, high speed projects across the world have not been immune to controversy, protests, overspends and errors, but for the most part they have been hugely popular once completed.

The key behind the success stories has been cross-party consensus, a coherent strategy, good delivery mechanisms and a clear sense of what is needed. Sadly, we have lacked all those. Sadly too, the United Kingdom and the United States are exceptions, both burdened with uncompleted and very expensive schemes, with dates that seem ever more distant.

■ *Christian Wolmar's new book, Fast Track, will be published on 23 July. Email him at* ***christian.wolmar@gmail.com*** *for a discounted signed copy.*

■ *Christian Wolmar is also producing a weekly substack. Sign up for free or go for premium and get lots of extra features at* ***https://transportnews.substack.com/***

How to give Heathrow a rail boost

By Steve Costello

Heathrow Southern Railway Ltd director

Even without a proposed third runway, we believe Heathrow is the biggest inadequately served rail market in Europe. Working with Aecom and Egis, we have developed an integrated proposal for new southern and western rail connections to transform access to the UK's only hub airport and its largest single employment site.

The scheme meets all of the Department for Transport's *2019 Strategic Objectives for Southern Access to Heathrow* and has secured wide stakeholder support, including the Heathrow Area Transport Forum, Heathrow Strategic Planning Group, Transport for the South East, Transport for London and Heathrow Airport itself.

Our proposed infrastructure allows flexible rail service patterns, but our demand modelling and business case assume:

■ Four trains per hour from London Paddington to Heathrow central terminal area and Terminal 5 via Old Oak Common (using the existing Heathrow Express train paths on the Great Western main line) with services extended to Woking where two trains per hour continue to each of Guildford/Portsmouth and Basingstoke/Southampton.

■ Four trains per hour from Waterloo to Reading via Clapham Junction, Heathrow Terminal 5 and central terminal area, and Slough.

■ Two to six trains per hour (dependent on Terminal 4 service frequency and Great Western main line capacity) Elizabeth Line service extension from Heathrow central terminal area and Terminal 5 to Staines.

These services are designed to meet both airport and non-airport demand, maximising farebox revenue and making optimum use of scarce rail network capacity. For example, non-airport passengers from Hampshire and Surrey will have the option of services to Paddington instead of currently only Waterloo.

As well as connecting with High Speed Two at Old Oak Common, the interchange with the Elizabeth line means end-to-end journey times can be cut for many passengers.

The infrastructure also increases the resilience of the south-east rail network, providing alternative routes in the event of disruption to the Great Western or South Western main lines.

The combination of multiple markets with a cost-effective design results in a compelling business case, which would allow the scheme to be privately financed.

While viable and deliverable with Heathrow's current capacity, a third runway would further improve the business case without requiring any increase in capital cost.

Demand for surface access to Heathrow is increasing, partly as a result of declining numbers of passengers changing planes there.

In developing our proposals, we have learnt from the failure of previous rail access schemes, including BAA's (as was) Airtrack.

The Heathrow Southern Railway scheme therefore avoids running any additional services over level crossings. Largely in tunnels, the new infrastructure would minimise or avoid adverse environmental and community impacts. The proposed train services will provide airport access journey times competitive with road, operating at high frequencies and directly serving all Heathrow's main terminals to avoid the interchange penalties that are a particular deterrent to air passengers.

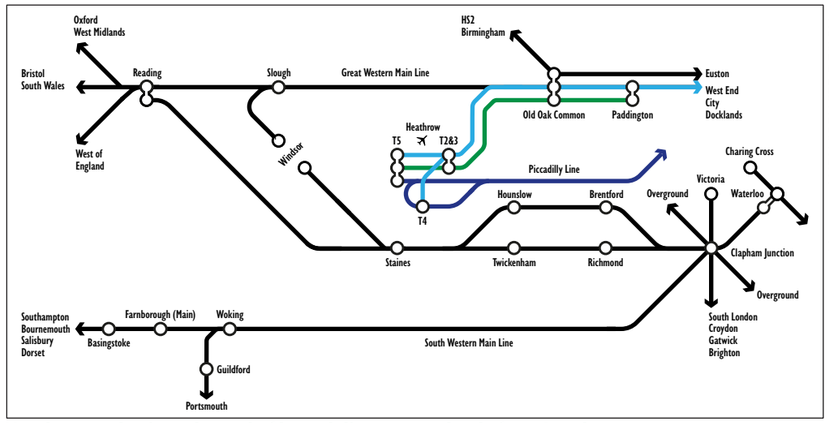
Heathrow Southern Railway is compatible with Network Rail's Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH), which was paused in 2020.

However, our alternative Heathrow Western Railway proposal provides an integrated solution at lower cost, making optimum use of the constrained rail network capacity, both within Heathrow and on the national network. The scheme has two critical dependencies on government:

■ A usage undertaking, guaranteeing a minimum number of trains operating over the new infrastructure for a minimum period.

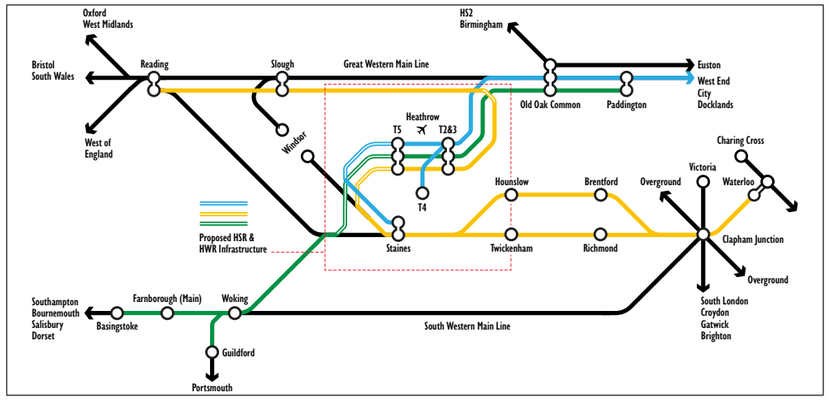
■ A commitment to maintaining the existing Heathrow Express train paths between Paddington and Heathrow for a period contiguous with the usage undertaking.

Heathrow Southern Railway believes these commitments are justified by the scheme's wider benefits, demonstrated by Heathrow Strategic Planning Group's analysis, which confirms a benefit to cost ratio between 6.82 (assuming Heathrow's 2015 passenger numbers) and 15.44 (with a third runway).



Maps by ANDY SPENCER DESIGN

Heathrow today is at the end of branch lines, served only from London



A combination of the Heathrow Southern Railway and the Heathrow Western Railway instead place Heathrow at the centre of the south-east rail network

The Tube was first on track to airport

Few people travelled to what became London's main international airport by train because rail connections were so bad in the 1950s and 1960s.

The first rail link came in 1977 – more than 30 years after the airport opened – when London Underground's Piccadilly line was extended to the airport.

About 20 years later, a new line from the Great Western main line near Hayes and Harlington to the airport was built and from 1998 onwards, Heathrow Express trains took 15 minutes from Paddington station to Heathrow.

The great leap forward for rail came in 2022 with Crossrail (the Elizabeth line) which has transformed journeys to the airport.

The line provides direct trains from many stations in London, but because of the railway's network effect, it is the best option for many people in and far beyond London. The journey from central London takes 30 minutes.



Rail and bus adds up to multimode magic

By Paul Hollinghurst



The UK does not generally excel at multimode public transport, unlike Switzerland, which is famed for co-located rail and bus stations, integrated multimode ticketing, planning and real time information stretching across the country. There are examples of all of this in the UK – but it is generally poor and inconsistent.

As an example of particular interest to Railfuture East Anglia, Cambridge station is busy to a level well beyond a city of its size, with an annual footfall of over 10 million. Cambridge North contributes an additional 1.5 million and a new station opening at Cambridge South in summer 2026 will serve the Biomedical Campus and significant new housing developments in the south of the city.

The station is not in the city centre so onward travel arrangements are important. It is a 20 minute walk to the city centre and there is also significant employment to the west, along with many other destinations across the city.

Some passengers will walk, some will cycle, with Cambridge station having a 3,000 space multistorey cycle park – the largest in the UK.

Public transport is provided by a network of bus routes centred around Drummer Street bus station and the surrounding streets in the city centre. Some of these routes also serve the main rail station.

The interchange experience

Getting people from train to bus is important, so what is the experience?

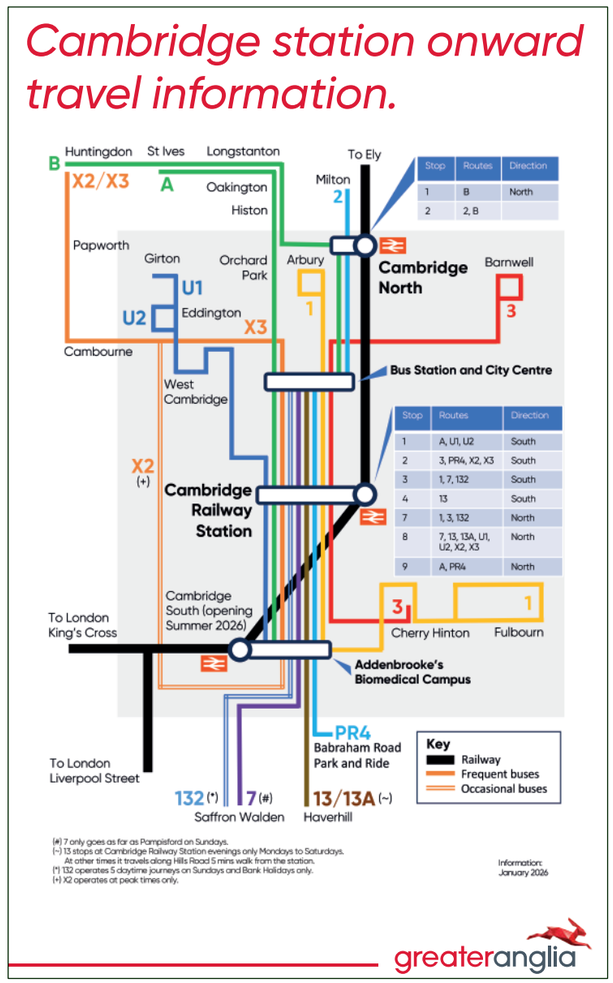
Bus stops are sited along a road running south from the station entrance. They are spaced out with the furthest stop 200 metres away.

Some destinations are served by multiple routes, but these routes do not all leave from the same stop. This is not ideal, particularly for passengers with luggage.

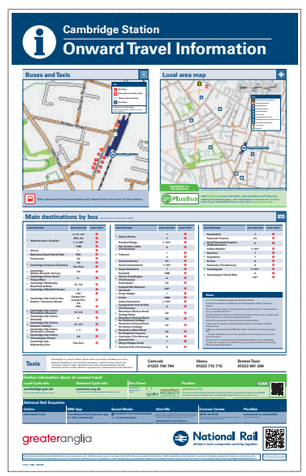
By contrast, when you walk out of the station you are faced by the taxi rank. It is easy and tempting to use.

Current information provision

So what information is provided to help passengers make onward journeys by bus? At the station itself there are a couple of posters. One is the standard National Rail *Onward Connections* poster, which shows a local map with the bus stops. Below are listed a set of common destinations and which bus serves them. However, if your destination is not listed it is of no help.



Greater Anglia has adopted Railfuture's inspired Cambridge bus map





Onward Connections poster and the electronic pillar

The second poster is *Cambridge Station Catch the bus* provided by Stagecoach. This lists every Stagecoach route but has a limited number of stops shown, and misleadingly includes some places called at earlier on the bus's journey.

Just outside the station there is an electronic information pillar giving live information. At the top is a display showing *Next Bus to the City Centre* and *Next Bus to Addenbrooke's hospital*. There is a risk of passengers missing the bus, because the display is so far away from some of the stops.

This consolidated information is not available at the stops themselves. Also, only the route destination is displayed, which is confusing for people unfamiliar with the city.

There is also an interactive journey planner, an option which is available to many people who can use their own smart phone. The bus stops themselves have information only for services from that stop, so once you are there it is difficult to reassess your options.

A multimode Network Map

What is missing is a complete picture of the bus service. There is no bus network map – for either Cambridge or routes from the station. Network maps are a really clear way of showing the geographical coverage of routes – without having to puzzle whether a bus to "Fison Road" is of any interest.

The bus network map is one of the best adverts for local bus services. It provides a clear and reassuring display of what is possible, to draw people into using the bus even if they then go on to use mobile phone journey planners.

Transport for London has grasped this with its excellent spider maps showing the routes radiating from a cluster of stops – an interchange zone.

Railfuture East Anglia used this as an inspiration for its prototype display. A map with the quality of the London offerings is Railfuture's eventual aim.

The map instantly shows the direction and geographical spread of the routes, so at a glance you can see the large number of routes linking Cambridge station to both the historic city centre and the Biomedical Campus.

It also shows which routes serve each area of the city, and also those which go beyond Cambridge to serve places with no railway stations such as Cambourne and St Ives.

Greater Anglia liked the idea and has added its branding for a station poster which will hopefully encourage people to continue their journey by public transport and make that experience more positive. If it proves to be popular, then it can be refined both graphically and in content.

The map shows that Cambridge station is already well served by bus routes. The problem lies not in the level of service provided but in how that information is presented to passengers making onward journey decisions.

Any feedback would be welcome:

Paul.hollinghurst @railfuture.org.uk

Hope Valley trial for 'mini Switzerland'

By Anthony Kay

Several years ago while visiting Switzerland, I witnessed a sequence of events that occurs every hour on a clockface timetable at rural stations all over the country.

Buses arriving at the station of Heerbrugg, a small town in the Rhine valley, transferred passengers to and from trains that arrived from both directions. Then the buses departed.

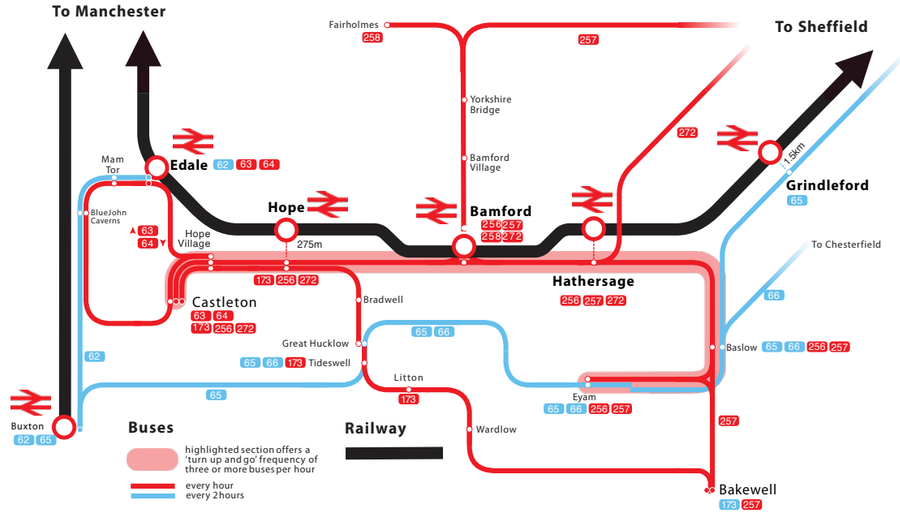
We now have a chance to implement this model of integrated transport in the Peak District national park. A "mini Switzerland" plan has been developed for Derbyshire's Hope Valley by public transport expert Thomas Ableman, in collaboration with Hope Valley Climate Action.

The Hope Valley suffers from many of the transport problems typical of rural areas in Britain, but it has the essential ingredient of a Swiss-style solution – an hourly train service at all the village stations in the valley.

Rural bus services are infrequent and irregular – and are rarely coordinated with local rail services. As cuts make them even less convenient, the taxpayer has to foot the bill to keep the remaining services running.

As a result, potential visitors without a car do not have easy access to rural recreation. That is the case for a third of households in Sheffield and Manchester, the cities at either end of the Hope Valley line.

The basic requirements for an integrated public transport system that would attract residents and visitors include:



Map: RAILWATCH/FREEWHEELING

- An easy-to-remember clockface timetable serving all significant settlements, work places, schools and visitor attractions
- Seamless connections between trains and buses operating as a single, coherent network
- A joined-up ticketing system, with one fair-priced ticket covering services provided by all operators
- Reliable and punctual services
- Clear information online and in printed timetables and maps
- Signs at bus stops and stations, and as much real-time information as possible

Mini Switzerland in the Hope Valley has to fulfil these requirements if it is to succeed as a demonstration project.

Existing bus services are infrequent and poorly timed to connect with trains.

So the project designates three rail stations as hubs where hourly bus services meet trains. The eastern hub at Bamford station will be the main link for buses to Eyam and Castleton and also north through Bamford village to the popular Derwent reservoirs.

The western hub at Edale station will be served by new bus routes linking to several important visitor attractions in the area.

The central hub at Hope station, where east and west-bound trains cross, will link to southbound bus services to Bakewell via Tideswell.

Access needs to be improved at Hope, because buses cannot turn at the station forecourt. The nearest bus stop is on the main road 275 metres away.

A single ticket will be valid on all operators' bus services in the area, while travellers arriving by train will be able to buy a PlusBus ticket valid throughout the Hope Valley area. The Department for Transport has allocated £6 million to East Midlands Combined County Authority to help deliver the project.

The five-year project has the support of Northern Trains, High Peak Buses and Stagecoach.

It is hoped the Hope Valley project will serve as a model for integrated transport systems in many other rural areas.

Railfuture supports using the railway as the basis of an integrated transport system and we hope it can begin to reverse the decline in rural public transport.

There are several more railway stations around the periphery of the Peak District that have potential as integrated transport hubs.

The project report is available at:

www.freewheeling.info/mini-switzerland

East Midlands

anthony.kay@railfuture.org.uk

Webinar with Climate Coalition

Railfuture East Midlands held a joint webinar in March with *EMCCA Climate Coalition*, an alliance of environmental organisations. Ian Clark and Stephen Chaytow of Railfuture gave presentations, with Ian covering Railfuture's priorities for the East Midlands Combined County Authority area, while Stephen gave a detailed account of the campaigns to rebuild the Peaks and Dales line (Matlock to Buxton and Chinley) and to restore passenger services to the Barrow Hill line (Sheffield to Chesterfield via Killamarsh).

Trams for Derby conference

Members of Railfuture East Midlands attended the Trams for Derby conference in April, organised by the Light Rail Transit Association. The proposals are for a network in Derby, but with links to the existing Nottingham NET system.

Belper survey results

The survey of Belper residents by Friends of the Derwent Valley Line showed resounding support for improved connectivity between Belper, Chesterfield and Sheffield, to be provided by more stops by Midland main line trains. East Midlands Railway will take the findings into account for the December 2027 timetable review, although there is no commitment. CrossCountry Trains are planning selected timetable improvements for Willington. A survey could demonstrate support for hourly services for the village.

Peaks and Dales feasibility study

A new feasibility study for the proposal to reinstate the railway from Matlock to Buxton and Chinley has been submitted to the Department for Transport by Peaks and Dales Line Ltd. The study finds that the railway would remove between one and four million visitor car journeys from the roads each year, saving 15,000 to 60,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions and significantly reducing road congestion in the sensitive environment of the Peak District. It would also secure a £2-£8 billion uplift for the local economy by 2040. Objections to the project have centred on the loss of the Monsal Trail, the cycling and walking route along the old trackbed. The study proposes a new Monsal Trail Network of cycling and walking routes accessible from rail stations. The railway would provide sustainable access to the Peak District for at least 13 million visitors annually, of whom 85% currently arrive by car. A letter to the rail minister expressing support for the project has been signed by 26 MPs. The next step will be to develop a strategic outline business case.

Maid Marian reopening

Railfuture supports plans to reopen the freight-only Maid Marian line (from Pye Bridge in the Erewash Valley to Kirkby-in-Ashfield on the Robin Hood line) and the £500,000 grant from the combined authority to develop a business case.

Network Rail is also carrying out a study to identify passenger opportunities on the freight line from Shirebrook to Warsop, Edwinstowe and Ollerton.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Midlands+Branch

X @RailfutureEMids

Waiting for change on fares and tickets

By Neil Middleton

Everywhere you go on Britain's rail network, passengers will find signs reminding them that the government has frozen rail fares for a year as it "rebuilds a better, more reliable railway".

The government says passengers using regulated fares, including season tickets, will save £600 million, thus helping them with the rising cost of living.

It says it avoids what would have been the "normal" 5.8% fare rise.

In Scotland, the Greens promised a £35 railcard to give all passengers a third off fares, not just the people who qualify for current railcards.

In Germany, the government froze rail long-distance fares for a year to help people cope with rising prices caused by the Hormuz oil crisis.

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander said: "We are freezing rail fares as we bring the train operating companies into public ownership, and set up Great British Railways. We are determined to build an affordable railway that the public can be proud of and rely on."

The government has nothing to say but platitudes and vague promises about changing the whole rail fare system, which many commentators demand.

That is not good news, as I think the current fares structure is rotten at the core, no longer fit for the railway we use today where so much travel is optional.

Maybe it is time to start afresh with a brand new design for fares and ticketing, fit for a world where travel has new choices: leisure (travel or not), business (be there in person or be there on Teams or Zoom) or commuting (now split between "must be there" and "could be there").



Picture: RAILWATCH

Neil Middleton

Railfuture will keep on thinking how we would change LNER's *Simpler Fares* trial, for example, and of times when off-peak came in all day on a Friday to encourage business travel.

Operators must take note of the growing volume of weekend leisure travel.

Railfuture needs to think again from basics, from questions such as: How important is a seat, to how and why we travel for differing distances.

What I want from my personal journey to London (29 minutes) is totally different from what I want if I go to Perth (around 290 minutes).

Join me in this design journey and let me know if you have ideas to take forward to our industry and political contacts.

■ *Neil Middleton is Railfuture vice-chair*

Neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture vacancy

Railfuture needs a volunteer with IT skills to help Jerry Alderson after July 2026

The Railfuture membership system and the website are key challenges

Interested? Please contact

jerry.alderson@railfuture.org.uk
or
chris.page@railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture celebrates reopenings



Picture: PHIL SMART

Phil Smart, pictured above, is guest speaker at Railfuture's AGM. Phil is regional policy manager for the Rail Freight Group

Railfuture's AGM is on 4 July in Birmingham, partly to celebrate the Camp Hill line reopening.

Members can also celebrate Railfuture's success in having played a part in this and many other reopenings.

As board member Jerry Alderson points out: "Railfuture is a respected campaigning organisation that successfully influences parliamentarians, governments (to maintain and increase funding), local authorities (to take a pro-rail stance), rail companies (to improve their service and focus on rail users) and other stakeholders.

"We need to ensure that Railfuture adapts in a changing world. Our finances are closely linked to the size of our membership base, and we must attract more rail users today and in future to ensure Railfuture can continue to campaign for a growing and successful railway."

Jerry Alderson is retiring after more than 20 years from his positions as Railfuture finance director at the Railfuture annual general meeting on 4 July in Birmingham.



Picture: RAILWATCH

Jerry Alderson

The board has already confirmed that volunteer David Buchan will replace Jerry as finance director. Railfuture is seeking another volunteer to help Railfuture modernise its membership system and website.

Yorkshire

davidpennierail21@gmail.com

South Humber Rail User Group

The campaign to restore Scunthorpe-Doncaster services has been helped by talks between MP Lee Pitcher and train operator Northern.

Yorkshire Coast success

The Yorkshire Coast Community Rail Partnership won the "outstanding contribution" award at the 21st Community Rail Awards in Derby in March for its work on the Hull-Scarborough and Hull-Brough lines.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Yorkshire+Branch

Railfuture Yorkshire Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/3116771821782626/

Lottery winners

February A McFie, W Thorne S Hyland, E James, C Fribbins G Smith

March A McFie, J Ward, C Fribbins P Fox, D Brady, M Edgell

April R Blake, M Adams, G Smith A McFie, E James, M Savage

Join the Lottery

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** 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!

www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/

A love affair with the railway

BOOK REVIEWS BY RICHARD LYSONS

For the Love of Trains – 200 Years of the Great British Railway
By Paul Routledge
Mirror Books £12.99
ISBN 9781917439503 304pp

Many *Railwatch* readers will recognise Paul Routledge's name and connect it with the book publisher's parent daily newspaper. He is a veteran journalist and is renowned for his political commentary in the *Daily Mirror*.

I must confess that I had no idea that he was also a train lover. If you have a partner, family member, work colleague or friend who just does not "get" your interest in the rail world, this is probably the best general book to convince them.

At its best, the *Mirror* has tackled – and still does – important matters in an accessible way without insulting its readers' intelligence. Paul Routledge has been a major player in this type of quality popular journalism and his book is written in the same no nonsense style. I read it in two days flat, attracted not only by the subject matter but also by Routledge's punchy writing. This is a high quality, good value hardback with eight pages of fascinating photographs.

The son of a railwayman, Routledge traces the history of railways in Britain from Stockton and Darlington right up to High Speed Two. In 29 shortish chapters, the author casts his net wide from the more likely topics such as Beeching, trainspotting and the end of steam, to less predictable ones such as railway literature which includes some titles unknown to me. I knew about Robert Adley's writings but had no idea that fellow MP Sir Gerald Nabarro was involved in the Severn Valley Railway. Nabarro was famous for his collection of cars with personalised number plates.



Picture: MIRROR BOOKS

Paul Routledge at Ingrow on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway

Born into the railway

Paul Routledge was born in Yorkshire and is the son of a railway clerk. Most of his male relatives were miners.

He went to Normanton Grammar School and read English at Nottingham University where he worked on the university newspaper.

He became Labour editor at *The Times* but left after Rupert Murdoch set up a non-union print works at Wapping in east London to produce *The Sun* and *The Times*. He had a long spell as a columnist at the *Daily Mirror*.

In 1985, he was involved in controversy when he discussed the miners' strike with Queen Elizabeth II, which is "against the convention of royal visits".

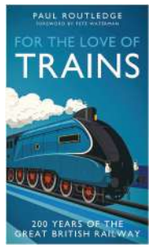
He has written biographies of Gordon Brown, Peter Mandelson, Arthur Scargill and Airey Neave.

The foreword to *For the Love of Trains* is by Pete Waterman, better known these days as a train enthusiast than a record producer. In his introduction, Routledge states that "more than twice as many books have been written about the railway than there are track miles in Britain – 25,000 and counting".

This book has the detail of a specialist title but the accessibility of a general one. The author avoids jargon, and his ability to convey historical events in a concise and accessible style is enviable. He uses statistics but these do not overwhelm the reader. Happily, he avoids using the three digit class numbers of modern day trains – something that I have had to endure (and not always understand) at many a meeting.

Routledge's book is especially good on summarising railway history, explaining the role of the network in the years before, during and after the Second World War. The role of women in the railways is included and it is encouraging to see a mention of Karen Harrison, Britain's first female train driver.

The author – like the *Daily Mirror* – is unafraid of tackling sensitive issues such as the problems with privatisation, the role of the trade unions in the rail industry and the level of crime on our trains nowadays. He quotes worrying statistics about violent assaults on the network, which include a disturbingly high percentage of a sexual nature. Attacks on staff are also mentioned. Routledge does not shy away from the grim statistics of railway deaths – from that of William Huskisson in 1830 to the Clapham disaster of 1988.



In contrast, most of the book is, as the author confesses, "a love letter" to railways including a chapter for the Settle and Carlisle railway.

Routledge looks to the future with the Northumbrian Line and reopened stations. The author is good when writing about railway stations, from the decline of his local one at Normanton to shortlists of his top and bottom stations.

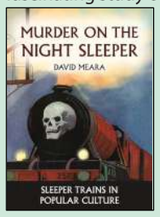
Spoiler alert: Routledge's favourite is York (a view shared by Sir Simon Jenkins in his *100 Best Stations* book) and least favourite is Birmingham New Street. I wonder how many of us would agree.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would definitely recommend it to *Railwatch* readers and their loved ones. If you do purchase a copy for someone else, you may end up keeping it for yourself.

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

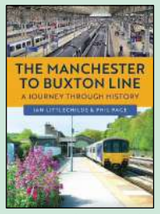
Murder on the Night Sleeper – Sleeper Trains in Popular Culture
By David Meara
Amberley £15.99
ISBN 978-1-3981-2087-7

David Meara's book on sleeper trains in popular culture is a fascinating study of this archetypal setting for murder mysteries on the Continent, between England and Scotland, and in USA. The author's twin interests in railways and detective fiction make him an ideal person to write such a book. The illustrations include wonderful vintage book covers, advertisements, diagrams, maps and photographs, which complement Meara's informative and engaging text. Novelists such as Agatha Christie, Graham Greene and Ian Fleming are included, along with less familiar names such as Josephine Tey and Arthur Griffiths. There is a very useful select bibliography that will undoubtedly encourage further reading. This book will deservedly have a wide appeal and comes highly recommended.



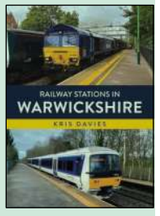
The Manchester to Buxton Line – A Journey Through History
By Ian Littlechilds and Phil Page
Amberley £15.99
ISBN 978-1-3981-2623-7

I know the Manchester (Piccadilly) to Buxton line well, and this book by university colleagues Phil Page and Ian Littlechilds would be a useful companion when travelling on it. Seventeen chapters take the reader to each station along the route. The illustrations include historic and modern photographs along with maps, tickets and railway memorabilia. There are chapters on Stockport viaduct and the now-closed Heaton Norris station. This will be popular with visitors as well as the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership and their station friends groups.



Railway Stations in Warwickshire
By Kris Davies
Amberley £15.99
ISBN 978-1-3981-2575-9

Kris Davies's book on the two dozen Warwickshire railway stations is a photographic survey, very much in the high quality style that we are used to from Amberley. The focus on the actual railway stations as well as rolling stock appeals to me. I had visited Nuneaton several times while researching a tourism booklet and was pleased to learn more about this busy station. I remember sitting next to a freight train enthusiast in the waiting room and admiring the way that he was using his extraordinary spreadsheet. In contrast, the forlorn halt at Polesworth shows another side to the stations. This is a book that is tempting me to revisit another part of the network.





Your views

Our achievements

I always enjoy *Railwatch*, including the Your Views page. I feel many of the concerns raised by P F Smith in the letter published in *Railwatch* 187 (April). We all know that the railway in Britain should and could be better. However, leaving Railfuture will not address the problem.

Railfuture has achieved much in the past decades, a lot of it quietly behind the scenes, with new stations, reinstated lines and train services, and support for critical campaigns such as resisting ticket office closures.

We would all like to see more success, but Railfuture has no executive authority to do anything. We can only influence and persuade through logic, facts and frankly dogged persistence.

We desperately need members who will "do stuff" and support our organisation's aims. Leaving Railfuture will not make the railway any bigger or better, it will just weaken the influence we have.

Stewart Palmer
Railfuture vice-president
Poundbury, Dorset DT1 3AU

Real campaigning

Unlike P F Smith (*Railwatch* 187 Your views) we are not disillusioned. He is "mildly interested" in the current campaign to reopen the line from Barnstaple to Bideford.

Let us hope that interest progresses from mild to something warmer.

We take issue with the assertion that "25 or 30 years of patient campaigning has so far achieved nothing".

The past five years have achieved a great deal and there is going to be much more to come.

Tim Steer, chair of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall

Brighton line option

A lot has beeen written lately in *Railwatch* about Brighton line capacity and it seems that the two-track section between Haywards Heath and Brighton is a problem area.

I wonder if a four-track passing loop could be installed to the north of Hassocks station, more or less half-way between the two places?

If the points at the London end of the loop were high speed, a down stopping train could enter the loop, allowing a down fast train to overtake the stopping train before it enters Hassocks station.

Similarly an up train could call at Hassocks station and then enter the passing loop, allowing an up fast train to overtake it.

There is also the Arriva/Grand Central proposal for a service between Newcastle and Brighton with a reversal at Redhill. Surely it would be better to route this train via Clapham Junction, Olympia, Mitre Bridge Junction and Acton Wells Junction to join the Western main line to Reading?

I accept this service would need capacity all the way to Clapham Junction but surely this is better than yet another reversal at Redhill?

The only stations to miss out would be Redhill and Guildford.

Martin James, Egham, Surrey
thejamesfamily18rr@gmail.com



Picture: GEOFF STAINTHORPE

Dennis at home with reopening success

Rail campaigning came home for Dennis Fancett in March when his local station at Bedlington opened for business as the culmination of the Northumberland Line project to reopen the Newcastle-Ashington line. The day after the "first train" at Bedlington, Dennis (pictured above) attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony with a brass band and local primary schoolchildren.

"This time, I was invited to say a few words myself, which was much appreciated," said Dennis, chair of SENUG (formerly the South East Northumberland Rail User Group). "I was not offered that opportunity when the line first opened, nor at any of the intermediate station openings as they came on stream.

"But today was special, with Bedlington being the last station to open, meaning the project is now fully complete, though SENRUG's ongoing campaign is for extensions and additions."

Leader of Northumberland County Council Glen Sanderson invited former rail minister Huw Merriman to the event. Huw is no longer in office, but he was in post when the government financial sign-off was achieved. Huw was also chair of the Commons transport select committee before that.

Dennis said: "It was greatly appreciated that after the speeches and ribbon cutting, Huw took the time to come over and shake my hand and congratulate us at SENRUG for running a good campaign. Thank you, Huw."

He said the obvious next step is to extend the line to a new station at Woodhorn and to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

Bedlington has an important place in the history of railways, as the Bedlington Ironworks patented malleable iron rails used to construct the early network in Britain and across the globe.

Progress on HS2

In response to the articles on HS2 phase 2a and Northern Powerhouse Rail, I strongly agree that it is a great shame that HS2 is currently planned to finish at Handsacre near Lichfield, as there are pinch points on the existing West Coast main line at Stafford station, Colwich and the two-track section in between.

However, merely doing the bottom half or perhaps three quarters of phase 2a would tackle those pinch points. The advantage of doing three quarters rather than half is that you can add a parkway station at Stoke by the M6 motorway and where the Stafford-Stoke railway crosses as well. The bottom of the three quarters takes you to the point where the existing planned HS2 route crosses the West Coast main line without having to pick a new route for part of it.

We should also definitely be looking to build it to LGV Sud Est standards to get costs down, so phase 2a costs a similar amount per kilometre to high speed rail projects in continental Europe and Asia.

In terms of Northern Powerhouse Rail we should also make sure costs do not get out of control. Especially for underground platforms at Manchester Piccadilly, we should make sure we learn the lessons of projects such as the new underground platforms at Antwerpen Centraal in Belgium, the Stockholm Citybanan project in Sweden and the new underground platforms at Osaka station in Japan that were all very good value, under £2 billion in today's money. Do not forget that the cheaper a project is, the stronger the benefits and the less likely it is to be cancelled by politicians in tough times.

Matthew Hutton, Buckinghamshire
matthew@matthewhutton.com

LNER fares

After reading Neil Middleton's articles on the LNER so-called "Simpler Fares" trial, I discovered that the traditional super off-peak fares are still available on LNER routes between London and Newcastle/Edinburgh if you are careful how you book.

The fare still exists for LNER-controlled fares to and from most stations outside London Zone 3, as well as to and from anywhere in Scotland beyond Edinburgh.

This perhaps shows the difficulty of trying to shoehorn an all-book-ahead fare model on to a small part of the rail network when the rest of it is still based on turn up and travel.

It certainly does not make fares "simpler", whatever LNER marketing gurus might say. I can buy a super off-peak ticket to Edinburgh from my nearest station (Norbiton) but not from New Malden, one station up the line.

"Simpler Fares" may be a trial for making all high-speed long-distance (HSLD) trains book-ahead-only under Great British Railways.

However, for this to work, the HSLD services would have to have completely separate ticketing from other trains.

This is done in France where TGV trains have a separate ticketing system from classic trains, but it would not work very well in the UK where HSLD services are also used for commuter and regional travel (for which turn up and travel is essential), and for some shorter journeys.

Ironically, the LNER 70-minute flex fare is a good idea, but it should be in addition to off-peak walk-up fares, not a replacement.

Alternatively, considering that Anytime fares are widely viewed as exorbitant, perhaps these should be abolished and the (super) off-peak fare should be the normal fully flexible one, as in Scotland.

Alex Macfie, Kingston upon Thames
lex@cgce.net

'Well-off' Wales

I would beg to differ over the argument that Wales has been deprived of £1.5 billion in rail investment (*Railwatch* 187).

For not only is public spending per head higher in Wales (£14,424 per head) compared to England (£12,635 – 2023\4 figures) thanks to the Barnett formula, but Wales of course has its own parliament.

So if those representing the principality want to see more spent on railways, then it is up to them to act accordingly, not blame the UK parliament.

Tim Mickleburgh, Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby DN31 2JP

Period return tickets

Before the freezing of rail fares, if I wished to travel to London and return at a later date I could purchase a period return.

This is no longer available and one has to purchase two separate single journey tickets, which is more costly. It is good to see that Oxfordshire has a plan for rail. No such scheme seems to exist here in Essex. There are a number of towns and villages that once had railways, but no longer do, that are experiencing considerable population growth and could do with being connected to the rail network again.

Some places I can think of are Maldon, Tiptree and Great Dunmow. Beaulieu Park, on the Great Eastern main line on the northern outskirts of Chelmsford, is the first new station built on this line for over 100 years.

Roger Smith,3 Station Mews, Station Road, Witham CM8 2FP
roger.smithrs67@gmail.com.

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

Postal and email addresses may be published unless writers specifically ask to exclude them

Railwatch wrapping

As I open the latest edition of *Railwatch* and look forward to reading it, I note that there is no indication on the outer wrapping of what materials it is made from and, therefore, if and how it can be recycled. I am sure other members must be asking the same question. Perhaps you would consider having this information printed on it in future.

Neil Gaskin, Wellington
neilgaskin@yahoo.co.uk

Editor's note: Railfuture has had problems since our long-term despatcher Intercity Communications ceased trading in 2025. Railfuture's Jerry Alderson and *Railwatch* editor Ray King visited First Mailing in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, in April. First Mailing despatched *Railwatch* 187 and will also despatch this *Railwatch*, which should arrive in a paper wrapping.

Speller's regret

Richard Spencer's question (*Railwatch* 187 Your Views) reminded me that the Speller Act achieved a great deal but failed on one count. The 2025 book by Chris Austin *Disconnected! - Broken Links in Britain's Rail Policy* included a list of lines that benefited from the Speller Act but adds: "The sad irony for Speller is that the one service he wanted to see restored in his lifetime (and mentioned in his initial speech on his Bill) – that from Barnstaple to Bideford – has not been, and indeed in 2010 Devon County Council indicated that it did not believe a case existed for reinstating the line." The "experimental" status of those in the list is now of largely historical interest. They all have regular train services.

Chris Austin adds: "Speller deserves immense credit for spotting a legislative opportunity to help satisfy the public's growing demand for rail travel."

Roger Blake, Stoke Newington, London
Roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk



Picture: ANNA JACKSON

Lazonby schoolchildren in costume on Settle station, singing a special song they had composed about working on the Settle-Carlisle railway line, which is 150 years old this year

On song for the S&C's 150 party

Well, what a day we had on 1 May, *writes Anna Jackson*, commercial manager of the Settle-Carlisle Railway Trust. Exactly 150 years to the day when that first train pulled away from Settle station, we pulled out all the stops and celebrated in style.

We had almost 100 children visit from local schools in Settle and Giggleswick, plus from along the line at Lazonby and Kirkoswald, who spent the day learning about the line, the people who built it and how they lived and how important the role of the railway has been, including a wonderful interactive theatre piece from Settle Graveyard Project. Volunteers in fabulous costumes adorned the station, we enjoyed marvellous cake from one of the Friends Volunteers and everybody had a jolly good day out … just as it would have been back then amid all the excitement.

Finally, Settle Wheelers cycled from Carlisle to Settle to help launch our new "passport" for the line, which contains information and stories about each station and also a "rubbings trail" to collect and build into a poster showcasing your journey on the railway. Celebration events continue though the year. There will be a formal launch for the fabulous new Ribblehead Station Tearoom, followed by a flowerpot event as part of the Settle and Appleby Flowerpot Festival.

www.foscl.org.uk

Wessex

tony.smale
@railfuture.org.uk



Tony Smale

Combined authority

Railfuture Wessex is preparing for a new round of campaigning to ensure that rail receives its fair share of the cash available when a new combined authority is set up. Work is proceeding apace to establish the Hampshire and Solent Combined County Authority before the end of 2026. The authority will bring together Hampshire County Council, the Isle of Wight Council and the city councils of Portsmouth and Southampton. It will begin to receive transport funding from central government during the transition period before the mayoral election.

A bigger, better railway is essential

Railfuture will be arguing that top priority for the new authority's area should be a new station between Fareham and Botley to support major housing development already taking shape at Welborne. Next should be reintroduction of passenger services on the Waterside line to connect Marchwood and Hythe to the rail network to the west of Southampton, although the the Alliance Rail proposal was rejected by the Office of Rail and Road in May.

Incremental infrastructure improvements are needed to solve transport congestion across the South Hampshire conurbation. Closer signal spacing would enable a second all-stations service to run each hour between Portsmouth and Southampton. The single-track line between Fareham tunnel and Botley should be re-doubled to cater for more frequent services. Also the current terminating platform at Fareham station could be transformed into a third through platform to give more flexibility, although costly remodelling of the road bridge just south of the station would be needed.

Authority must be rail champion

The design and funding of rail projects in future will fall to Great British Railways, although mayoral authorities will have a role, such as publishing transport strategies. The new authority should champion better station access and regional multi-mode tickets.

Unblock the pipeline for rail

The Department for Transport published its Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline back in 2019 to inform contractors about upgrades it intended to pursue. Annual updates were promised but no further editions appeared. Now NISTA, the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority, will provide an indication of major schemes which the government intends to take forwards. NISTA projects range from new reservoirs to hospitals, and include rail infrastructure upgrades such as East West Rail. Its infrastructure pipeline published earlier this year runs to over 700 schemes. There are no rail projects at all earmarked for funding in the new authority's area. The new Mayor must highlight this glaring omission and champion rail development.

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Julian Langston

Signal box visit

The Railfuture Wales AGM, held in Shrewsbury on 11 April, was preceded by a visit to Severn Bridge Junction signal box - the largest operational mechanical signal box in the world. We are grateful to Network Rail for this opportunity.

Following the business part of the meeting, members discussed issues of concern. There was a worry that the Railways Bill might hamper future Transport for Wales operations in England, especially for new services. This could mean that proposed Cardiff-Bristol services calling at new stations in Wales may not be able to proceed to Bristol, despite investment from Westminster. We will seek clarification about this.

The proposed station at Carno on the Cambrian line does not appear in TfW's recent aspirational document, *Today, Tomorrow, Together,* but Carno Station Action Group continued their campaign by urging Gwynedd Maldwyn candidates for the Senedd election to push for more support from the Welsh Government for reopening Carno station.

Plaid Cymru in control

Railfuture promoted rail prior to the Welsh government elections in May by publishing a 13-point manifesto highlighting what is needed for rail in Wales. The manifesto was sent to the six main parties and the media. This followed a series of meetings with several parties within the past few months.

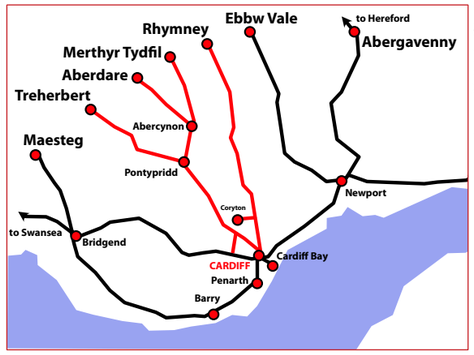
Following the elections, Plaid Cymru is now the largest party and its leader Rhun ap Iorwerth is First Minister of Wales. The previous administration (Labour) was not idle on rail, progressing the South Wales Metro, starting development work in other parts of Wales and overseeing an almost entire replacement of the Wales and the Borders fleet. Not all its policies were perfect, but more has been achieved in Wales and the Borders than in many parts of the UK. Plaid Cymru's policies as stated in its manifesto are similar, albeit with a greater focus on a North-South rail link wholly in Wales. We will ensure rail progress continues as Plaid Cymru takes charge.

Rail in Wales and the West

Railfuture members attended the *Rail in Wales and the West* conference in Cardiff in March, organised by *Modern Railways* magazine.

TfW said that services on Cardiff's core valley lines will be ramped up gradually, with a full service at the end of next year. The new trains can operate to faster times, but the existing timetable will be retained until the service beds down. Work at Cardiff Queen Street station will raise speed limits but we are concerned that the infrastructure may not cope with the intensive service planned.

Railfuture asked for details of the upgrades planned for the relief lines between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction (needed to accommodate the proposed new services and stations between Cardiff and Bristol Temple Meads/Cheltenham). It seems there are no plans to upgrade the numerous crossovers between the four lines, most of which are 25mph or less. This could lead to slow turn-out speeds and reduced capacity. The conference ended with a guided tour of Cardiff Central station showing what upgrades are planned. Work should have started by the time this *Railwatch* is published.



Map: *RAILWATCH*

SOUTH WALES METRO: Electrification work on the core valley lines in South Wales has cleared the way for electric tram-trains (class 398) to start services between Pontypridd and Cardiff Bay. Even now, after six years of work, the network is only partially electrified so bimode and trimode trains are needed to operate services. Transport for Wales says £1 billion has been invested in transforming the 170-kilometre core valley lines, part of the overall plan of creating "South Wales Metro", which also includes bus services



Picture: JESSIKA VENN

THINK BIG: Railfuture members visit the world's largest operational mechanical signal box at Shrewsbury

Come and meet us

Railfuture will be holding stalls at:

- Prestatyn Model Railway Exhibition on 20 June
- Penarth Model Railway Exhibition on 11-12 July
- Corris Railway Society Model Railway Exhibition at Machynlleth on 29-30 August
- Swansea Model Railway Exhibition on 19-20 September
- Chester Model Railway Exhibition on 10-11 October

We would be delighted to see you, so if you are in the area pop in and see us. Further details will be at railfuturewales.org.uk nearer the time.

TRACS launches business case

Railfuture member group *Towards Restoring a Caerleon Station* has produced a useful draft business case to further its campaign. Railfuture has helped fine-tune the document.

100 year wait for access to the railway

By Paul Tattam



It will be 100 years before all stations are accessible to all, following the new policy announced in November. The government's *Our Roadmap to an Accessible Railway* set out fine aspirations with a rolling programme, investing £70 million per year. Ignoring the irony of a roadmap for a railway, it pledged £373 million over the next five years. The 70-page document stated: "The long-term vision for the railway is one where all passengers can travel independently, safely and with dignity. We want everyone to have the ability to travel confidently by train, regardless of their accessibility needs, which means removing barriers that make rail travel difficult."



The plans, however, will increase the number of step-free stations across Britain from 56% to only 58%. At that rate of progress, it will take over 100 years to bring access improvements to the 1,137 currently inaccessible stations.

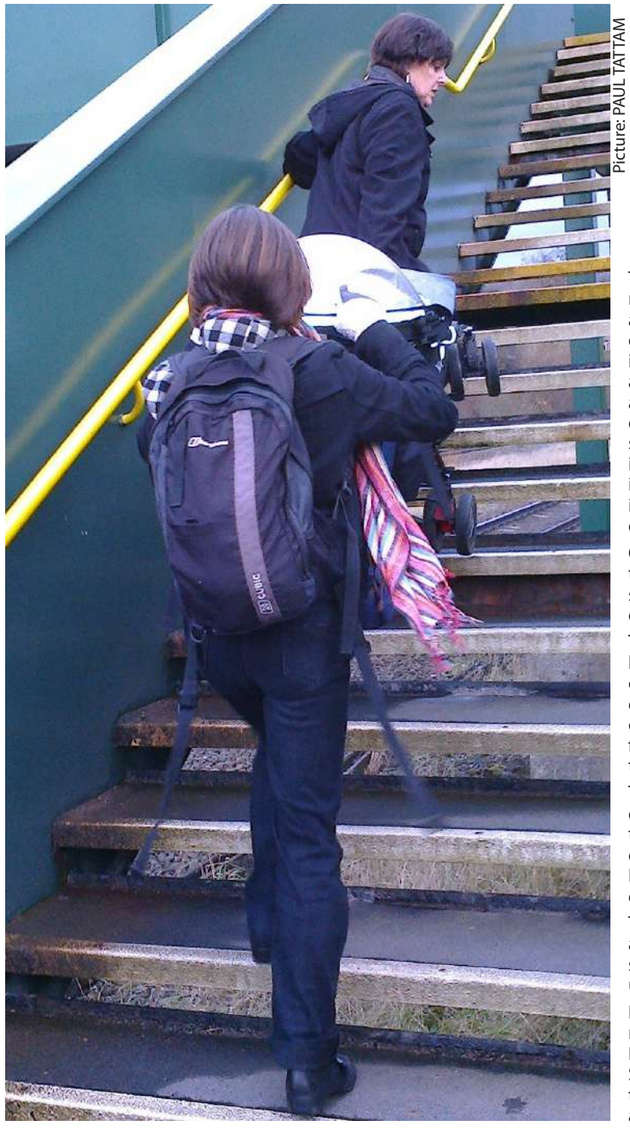
Progress has been made on Britain's railway but it has been extremely slow. The previous government announced in May 2024 that 50 stations had made the grade for *Access for All* funding using the following criteria:

- Targeting busier stations gives better value for money
- Train operating companies were asked to consult with MPs, disability groups and local authorities before ranking their nominations
- Availability of third-party funding helps to improve business cases
- Local factors such as the proximity to a hospital or a station with a high proportion of interchange passengers
- Geographical location to ensure a fair spread across the country
- Confirmed support of the local MP

The current government has slimmed down the above criteria and given more prominence to pre-existing technical work and the presence of third party funding, resulting in:

8 progressing direct to delivery

Ash Vale, Colchester, Port Sunlight, Thirsk, Walton (Merseyside), Bellgrove, Aigburth (already in delivery), Rock Ferry (already in delivery)



Picture: PAUL TATTAM

CHINLEY: The station footbridge can be a formidable challenge for passengers. Many other stations in Britain have similar hurdles

23 progressing to detailed design

Battle, Bodmin Parkway, Bredbury, Castle Cary, Dalston Kingsland, Dorchester South, Esher, Falkirk Grahamston, Flowery Field, Gunnersbury, Hedge End, High Brooms, Kew Bridge, Kidbrooke, Marden, Newton for Hyde, Raynes Park, Ruabon, Shotton, Swanwick, Ulverston, Wymondham, Yeovil Junction

19 "not progressing at this point"

Bushey, Chinley, Church and Oswaldtwistle, Dudley Port, Dumbarton Central, Inverurie, Leagrave, Ledbury, Maidstone West, Neath, Sileby, Sleaford, Small Heath, South Croydon, Stamford, Stroud (Gloucestershire), Upminster, Whitchurch (Shropshire), Wivelsfield

Deferred

Beaconsfield and Brondesbury were deferred, while Cricklewood, Ockenden and Palmers Green were deferred indefinitely

We are concerned that the DfT's criteria are too narrow, put a premium on third party funds, and unlike in 2019 and 2024 make no mention of "incidence of disability".

We wonder how it has come about that there is not a single station in the North East region on the list, and that every nominated station in the East Midlands was rejected.

■ *Paul Tattam is a member of Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group, which has campaigned for more than a decade to make Chinley station accessible*

Government view

Roadmap is a step forward

By Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill

Minister of State (Minister for Rail)



The rail network must be accessible by design. GBR's integrated approach will allow for better coordination of services, investments and innovations, ensuring that improvements reach every corner of the network.

GBR will embed accessibility into the heart of the railway – making sure everyone can travel confidently and with dignity.

This Accessibility Roadmap sets out how we are accelerating that change. It is a practical, transitional document – focused on what we can deliver now, while laying the foundations for the longer-term transformation that GBR will lead.

The Roadmap is not the final word on accessibility, nor does it attempt to solve every challenge, but it is a clear signal of intent: we are getting Britain moving now and we are doing so inclusively.

The Roadmap also does not stand alone. It is one part of a coherent set of strategy plans that will move us to where we need to be.

Improved accessibility on the network is a key element of the Integrated National Transport Strategy, which will set the long-term transport vision for England and set commitments for this parliament. We will also develop an Accessible Travel Charter, which will be co-designed with disabled travellers and the transport sector and will complement modal accessibility plans, bringing together best practice.

The long-term outcomes that the Secretary of State requires for rail, including the approach to accessibility, will be set out in her Long-Term Rail Strategy. Taken together with this Roadmap, these strategies will guide the rail industry on the path towards an accessible railway.

I am proud to lead this work. I know that an accessible railway works better for everyone.

This Roadmap is a step forward. GBR will take us further.

Together, we will build a railway that is inclusive, accountable, and fit for the future.

Rail at heart of a new world rising in the east



Picture: *RAILWATCH*

***CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION:** The curved roof of the under-construction four-track station is being given its environment-friendly sedum roof in March, just months before the official opening in June. To the right is Astra Zeneca's global headquarters and its research and development centre, one of the buildings forming the biomedical campus which employs more than 23,000 people. The campus will be home to six regional hospitals, as well as world-famous Addenbrooke's and the Royal Papworth, the Heart and Lung Institute, the Laboratory of Molecular Biology, the Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute, the Cambridge Academy for Science and Technology, the Early Cancer Institute, the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, Cambridge Institute for Medical Research and the Institute of Metabolic Science*

By Peter Wakefield

By the time you read this article, another new railway station in East Anglia will have opened – on 28 June – and it will be unique.

Four-platform Cambridge South has been in gestation for 64 years and has finally been built after some of the old pre-climate-change awareness planning assumptions were dumped.

For a start, the station has zero car parking spaces and 1,000 cycle storage places.

There are 344 trains a day serving the station and virtually everyone who travels on them will be expected to arrive on foot, cycle or bus. A few may arrive by taxi or be dropped off by car at the small "kiss and ride" area with capacity for about 20 cars near the station.

By contrast, Cambridge North station, which opened nine years ago with 1,000 cycle spaces, has 450 car parking spaces.

With more than 33,000 people living within a two-kilometre radius, Cambridge South is expected to be a sure-fire engine for economic growth.

Substantial new housing within walking and cycling distance is already being developed close to a large public park next to the station.

More than 60 stations are served at least once every hour by a direct train from Cambridge South.

The station sits at the heart of the Cambridge biomedical campus, where 23,000 people already work. That workforce is expected to grow to 30,000 by 2030, with plans for further expansion, up to 44,000. Three major regional hospitals are adjacent to the station and two more are under construction.

Even before the station opened, there were more than 18,000 visitors a day to the campus, many of them patients needing treatment.

The station itself has been built using the best sustainable standards, and this enlightened approach is expected to be adopted for other new stations. Advice from Cambridge City Council led to the station being built to conform to the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method, which includes a sustainable urban drainage system. It is understood that Network Rail will adopt the BREEAM standards for all new stations.

Leading architect Jan Kroes of Fereday Pollard & Partners, has collaborated with Arcadia as the design manager and landscape architect.

Cambridge South has been built with Access for All thinking. There are lifts from the overbridge to each platform as well as to the east and west entrances.



Picture: Fereday Pollard & Partners

***SWEEPING AHEAD:** Cambridge South station during construction*

How it all started

Since 1766, Addenbrooke's hospital had been housed in old buildings in the centre of Cambridge. In 1962, the Queen opened the hospital building when it relocated to land purchased for it in 1951 on the southern outskirts of the town, at the end of the cross-town bus route. Little thought was given in the 1960s to the main line railway close by the new hospital.

The Queen was back in 2007 to open the Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute and in 2019 to open the Royal Papworth Hospital's new home on the campus.

In any event, the railway was busy with an endless procession of coal and other goods trains between Whitemoor, the Lea Valley and Temple Mills in east London.

The freight trains' days were numbered, however, once the Trent Valley power stations came on stream and their power could be transmitted to London via a new 400kV line being quietly constructed just to the east of Cambridge at the same time.

As the goods trains melted away, passenger train services on both the line from King's Cross and Liverpool Street to Ely were able to develop dramatically, leading to a surge in passenger use.

The key to this surge was the completion of the electrification of the network from the London stations to Cambridge, Ely and King's Lynn in 1992.

The King's Cross route gradually took over as the main route south of Cambridge after the initial "toe in water" non-stop Cambridge-King's Cross Saturday services, introduced by the enterprising Cambridge-based BR passenger managers, were a resounding success.

The timing of 45 minutes for the 57 miles was revolutionary, leading to a six-day-a-week fast service every half hour. The growth along the route all the way from King's Lynn to Hitchin, Stevenage and King's Cross has been astounding, created by a frequent, fast electric train service, initially operated by four-car units, and led to more investment in longer platforms and longer trains.

Along with the university and the NHS researchers, these trains enabled the economic growth we are now witnessing.

Nowadays, all trains run with a minimum of eight cars on the King's Lynn route and minimum of five on the Liverpool Street route.

Cambridge is now the number one destination of travellers passing through King's Cross station.

In about 2000, and during WAGN's tenure as train operator, growth at the biomedical campus led to calls for a station to serve it.

WAGN said no, claiming that adding a two-minute stop to the timetable would make the rail service less appealing.

Commuters disagree

However, many of the people commuting to the campus found that having to travel to Cambridge station and then 1.3 miles by bus to the campus added up to half an hour to their journey from London King's Cross. By 2017, growth was such that there were around 20 passenger trains an hour passing the campus, while the prospect of East West Rail was firming up.

That year Cambridgeshire elected its first mayor for the new Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority.

The aim of the first mayor, James Palmer, was to boost economic growth, and he believed that the present railway and the future East West Rail line would do it.

He also recognised that Cambridge could not wait for EWR.

He and the authority persuaded the government to decouple Cambridge South station from EWR and get the station built quickly, contributing, along with Astra Zeneca, some initial funding to get it going. The Department for Transport has subsequently paid the bulk of the £211 million cost. Eight years later, here we are, and Cambridge South Station is open in June 2026.

Every one of the 20 trains an hour which passed through the under-construction station are now stopping. The many who commute via Cambridge station to the campus now have "up to half an hour" cut from their daily journey each way! It is expected that many thousands will join them as the good news spreads.

To compensate for those additional two minutes in every train's journey, Shepreth branch junction, just south of the new station, has been remodelled to allow the speed limit for the trains from King's Cross/St Pancras to go through at 50 mph rather than the previous 30.



Picture: PETER WAKEFIELD

***INSIDER VIEW:** Cambridge South station under construction, looking out from the eastern concourse to the Cambridge biomedical campus*

Railfuture has been told that when EWR comes to Cambridge in a few years time, at least another eight trains an hour will boost the current 20 an hour train service at Cambridge South.

To accommodate the extra trains on EWR, the track from Shepreth branch junction to the north of Cambridge station will be quadrupled. At present, there are four tracks very close to the new station.

In the 64 years since 1962, the railway has adapted to its changing circumstances and is keeping pace with the continual growth alongside it.

From just passing by, it has become essential to the growth of the biomedical campus, which has recently been expanded by another 68 acres.

More to come

Much of the industrial and population growth in and around Cambridge is, by good fortune, next to railway stations – Cambridge South, Cambridge, Cambridge North and Waterbeach. With the coming of EWR, there will also be Cambridge East (on the city outskirts) and at Cambourne new town (eight miles west of Cambridge).

■ *Peter Wakefield is vice-chair of Railfuture East Anglia*

Seven new stations in seven weeks and Universal boosts East West Rail

By Ian Brown

Railfuture has notched up considerable successes in its campaigning for a bigger, better railway.

Working with and supporting local campaign groups, we can celebrate major achievements in the West Midlands, where two freight lines and five stations reopened in March and April to passenger services.

In addition, the light rail Metro has been extended, with two new stations.

That adds up to seven new stations in seven weeks, all sponsored by the devolved authority Transport for the West Midlands.

Two hundred miles north from Birmingham is another reopening success – the Northumberland Line.

Strongly campaigned for by South East Northumberland Rail User Group, supported by Railfuture and sponsored by Northumberland County Council, the line opened in December 2024.

It has now carried over a million passengers, an unqualified success with demands for longer trains to alleviate overcrowding. All the stations on the new line are now open, including a new interchange at Northumberland Park giving direct access to the Nexus Metro.

Another successful campaign, sponsored by Transport Scotland, the Levenmouth Rail Link, opened in June 2024 and carried 300,000 passengers in one year, in a far more rural and post-industrial setting, to and from new stations at Leven and Cameron Bridge. Leven now has through trains on two routes, via the nearest town of Dunfermline and to Edinburgh.



Map: NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

Northumberland Line: Map of the new route showing the stations, including integration with the Nexus Metro at Northumberland Park, providing services to the whole of the Tyne and Wear Region, including Newcastle Airport as well as the national network at Newcastle station



Picture: WEST MIDLANDS TRAINS

DAY ONE AT MOSELEY VILLAGE: These class 196 diesel trains run services on both the reopened Camp Hill and Wolverhampton-Walsall lines. The new Willenhall and Darlaston stations on the Wolverhampton-Walsall line are now served by hourly trains running from Birmingham to Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury. The route via Willenhall to Wolverhampton is electrified but the service is a through service to Shrewsbury which is not electrified. The newly reopened Camp Hill route is not electrified

The common factors for success are a sound business case argument, a deliverable scheme and an "informed, committed client", together with consistent and effective campaigning.

The leaderships in these reopening examples represent three different levels of government – the West Midlands Combined Authority, non-metropolitan Northumberland County Council and the Scottish Government.

East West Rail
Oxford to Bletchley,
Bedford and Cambridge

By contrast, there is frustration among campaigners and potential users that they have waited too long for East West Rail services between Oxford and Milton Keynes, a scheme which was sponsored by the UK government in 2016.

The new Labour government, elected in 2024 to "bring change", is trying to accelerate progress on the scheme.

It wants to speed up delivery of the Bedford-Cambridge section by five years.

It has designated the proposed new section of railway between Bedford and Cambridge as a nationally significant infrastructure project.

The Oxford-Milton Keynes section was completed in June 2025 and the previous government (and the East-West Alliance) said it was to be specifically for local passenger trains. There was to be no freight, no long-distance passenger services and it was not to be used as a diversionary route. Chris Grayling, transport minister at the time of conception of this scheme (July 2016-July 2019) saw it as an experiment in funding for new passenger services and effective delivery.

A dedicated client was set up to deliver the project, albeit with little thought on how to operate the service, nor consideration of the route's wider significance as part of the national network.

It is ironic that the Scottish Government and devolved authorities in England developed their projects as integrated national projects and yet the UK government did not.

Even so, the Department for Transport is reluctant to allow real rail devolution when it has the opportunity – with the creation of Great British Railways.

Transport for London has proved that regional sponsorship for rail service provision is not a threat to the national network.

In fact the reverse is true, with projects such as Crossrail providing significant benefits to the national network with a huge modal shift to rail.

A key component for East West Rail's plan for an Oxford-Cambridge service was Bletchley flyover.

The 1960s concrete structure over the four-track West Coast main line was rebuilt. It opened in 2021, winning national rail awards for project design and delivery.

With the flyover in place, East West Rail can be used by freight trains, particularly the new regular intermodal train carrying containers from Southampton western docks to the new Northampton Gateway freight depot.

The reversal of policy was implemented when the newly rebuilt Oxford-Milton Keynes section of EWR was transferred to Network Rail.

Railfuture had campaigned for the route to be used by freight, and Network Rail rightly sees the route as part of the national network.

In fact the route has huge potential as a key section of railway, potentially linking five mixed traffic main line railways when completed to Cambridge.

No scheduled passenger trains have yet operated on the route since it was competed almost a year ago.

This is an appalling situation which demands inquiry, given that £1 billion has been invested in the project.

London's Crossrail (now the Elizabeth line) was built by a special purpose company set up for the purpose. Operation of the service was transferred to Transport for London as soon as construction was complete, as envisaged at the outset.

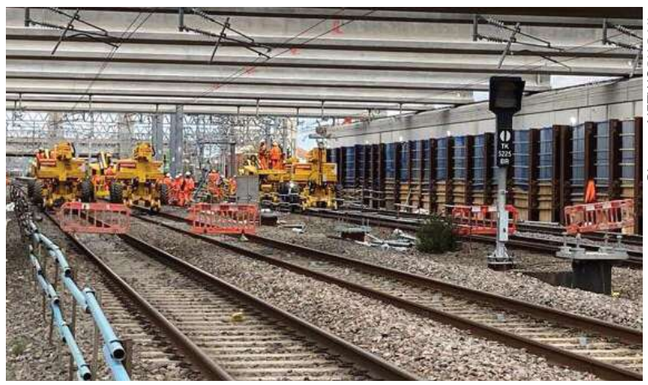
Nobody was stupid enough to think that the special purpose company should operate the line.

The new Oxford to Bletchley track and signalling has now rightly been transferred to Network Rail.

Special purpose organisations should be confined to the special purpose they were created for.

Similarly, those authorities benefitting from rail services and responsible for other transport modes should be directly involved with rail service provision, including integrating rail with other transport modes.

Britain needs a sustainable integrated transport solution, not simply a rail solution. Rail becomes the backbone of such an approach, particularly if use of rail for passengers and freight can be at least doubled. It is significant that Irish Rail, in a country where railways are much thinner on the ground than in Great Britain, have just published their 2050 Strategy to double passenger numbers using the all-Ireland rail network.



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

WEST COAST MAIN LINE BLOCKED: This 2021 picture shows Bletchley flyover being rebuilt to carry East West Rail over the main line

The strategy also includes Northern Ireland, a network largely forgotten about by the UK government.

East West Rail acceleration

By the time this *Railwatch* is published, East West Rail will have completed public consultation on its accelerated and updated plans.

The consultation includes information about how the existing Bedford-Bletchley branch line will be modernised and the additions to the Oxford-Bletchley section, particularly a new much-needed eastern entrance at Bletchley station.

East West Rail has been supercharged by the Universal Studios plan to build a theme park near Bedford.

The upgraded plan involves nine existing branch line stations being "rationalised" to four. There will be stations at Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Lidlington and Stewartby, plus a new Bedford St Johns station. The main station at Bedford, the interchange with the Midland main line, will be rebuilt.



Picture: Universal Studios

Universal Studios are planning to build a giant new theme park on the approach to Bedford. Universal's Gidon Freeman said the "excellent transport links" were a key to Universal's choice of location. The park will be served by a relocated Stewartby station

That will open the way to all manner of journeys to and from East Midlands cities via the new link, avoiding changes at Birmingham New Street or Tube journeys across London.

It will be fascinating to see how the rail industry's ticket revenue allocation system will treat the route, potentially allocating huge revenue steams to it.

Revenue allocation would probably have provoked major disputes between train operating companies, but that will be avoided because they are all destined to be owned by the government. This might explain why the Department for Transport initially wanted to keep this as a local initiative!

The Bedford-Cambridge section includes a revised location plan for a station at Cambourne together with a new station at Tempsford, potentially the largest new town in Britain, plus a new Cambridge East station.

Particular areas of interest to Railfuture members include the potential alignment north of Bedford station before branching off eastwards towards Cambridge, interchange with the East Coast main line route and significantly a proposed new station at Cambridge East. EWR will also of course serve the new Cambridge South station which opened in June.

Cambridge

In its new rail future, Cambridge station will have moved on from its cramped passenger facilities to a larger, improved station with a new eastern access. Its out-of-centre drawbacks will be offset by Cambridge North station (opened in 2017) and Cambridge South (opened June 2026). Cambridge is really shaping up as a strategic rail-served city but with the key omission of a comprehensive light rail system integrating these stations, including Cambridge station itself.

Cambridge has seen changes in political leadership since 2023 and it is hoped that current politicians may be less beguiled by the bus lobby with its guided busway approach never knowingly undersold.

Cambridge has a very strong economy and massive dispersed university and medical research facilities which make it the largest technology cluster in Europe.

It also has the population to justify provision of a modern integrated light rail system as applied to many sensitive historic cities in Europe.

Great British Railways

Railfuture wants to ensure that Great British Railways will make a real difference and actively promote a developing railway designed to promote modal shift from road to rail, delivering the environmental, social and economic benefits necessary to justify investment in rail.

Rail minister Lord Hendy said in November when introducing the long-awaited Railways Bill to Parliament that rail reform will bring "more reliability, higher revenue and reduced cost".

I contend that a restructured Network Rail, together with a state-run operator, should have been branded British or Britain's Railways, without the cringeworthy "Great".

At least it seems to be recognised that the myriad rail organisations need to morph into the new structure without "bleeding" money.

Time has been wasted but it is becoming clear that the rail industry is moving steadily towards its revised structure.

Lord Hendy recently acknowledged that the industry is coming together and cooperating to the benefit of its customers.

The leadership of various component elements within the rail industry is actually very good. Management and staff are focused on project and service delivery to the benefit of passengers and freight customers.

This should bring benefits in terms of service quality within the physical constraints of a system that still requires investment to attract new passengers and deliver significant modal shift to rail, including freight.

The trade unions should also join in this endeavour bringing benefits to rail staff who deliver our rail services. I prefer the cooperative model of rail ownership, but this is not to be.

All that Railfuture campaigns for – investment in growth, more and better services and station facilities, electrification, credible fares, modal transfer to rail – remain as campaign objectives.

Devolution has the potential to bring more sponsor organisations "into the tent" investing in a growing rail system and integrated services. GBR is potentially an enabler. It is not the solution in itself.

Enjoy your campaigning. There is more scope than ever and loads to go for!

■ *Ian Brown CBE FCILT is Railfuture policy director*



BBC

Cambridge busway with its now-perceived requirement to fence off the routes to keep pedestrians and cars off the tracks. Is this the right solution for a city which needs to share much of its road space with pedestrians, cyclists, cars and delivery vehicles?

Angry protesters demand: Why won't you let us use our brand new railway?

By Chris Wright



It is now nearly two years since the Oxford to Milton Keynes railway was rebuilt as part of the East West Rail scheme, but no passenger trains have yet operated on it. Angry protesters are asking relevant questions and are not getting satisfactory answers, just as they were not nearly 60 years ago when the line was closed.

The closure of the Oxford-Cambridge (Varsity) line in 1967 was condemned by the National Union of Railwaymen as a "national fraud".

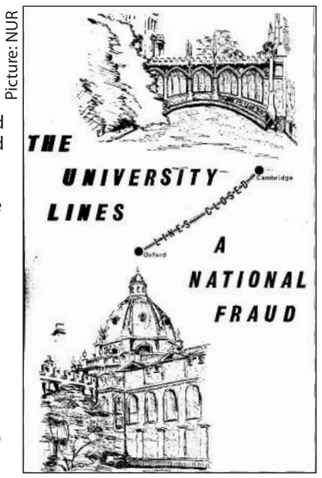
At the time, the magazine *Modern Railways* ran an article headlined *A Curious Case for Closure,* and all the MPs and councils along the line opposed closure. Milton Keynes had been designated a new town, major population increases were planned and Dr Beeching recommended that the 77-mile Oxford-Cambridge line be retained. But there was no real effort to reduce operating costs even though the NUR proposed cost saving measures, such as de-staffing stations, on-train ticketing, modernising signalling and automating the large number of level crossings to reduce the number of staff.

The union, now known as the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), suggested improved timetabling could transform the line's potential. In spite of its sensible suggestions, the line was closed to passengers although, against all the odds, the Bletchley-Bedford section survived.

At that time, the line was losing £100,000 per annum but the current rebuild is costing several billions, far in excess of the cost of retaining the route. Railfuture has long campaigned for reopening, and in 1986 helped form the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee to unite local groups to campaign for the route. OBRAC persuaded Milton Keynes Council, working with Buckinghamshire, Aylesbury Vale, Oxfordshire county and city councils, to set up a feasibility study. British Rail even proposed a Peterborough to Swindon service, The government chose not to support the idea.

Entrepreneurial Network South East reopened the Bicester-Oxford section in 1987, and 11 years later in 1996, Ipswich Council proposed the formation of the East West Rail

Picture: NUR



Consortium to develop proposals for services to Norwich and Ipswich.

Numerous feasibility studies and funding bids were developed before the Department for Transport agreed in 2017 to develop EWR. It had taken the government 30 years to take our sensible suggestions seriously.

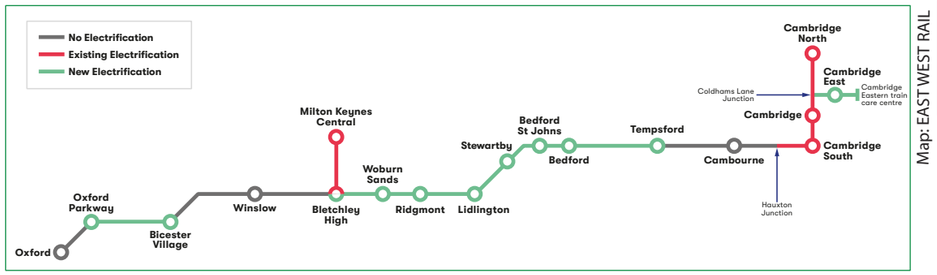
A Transport and Works Act Order was secured in 2019 after a protracted public inquiry. In October 2024, the East West Rail Alliance completed the £1.3 billion construction work on the Oxford to Milton Keynes section, but it was not until March 2025 that Chiltern Railways were appointed as the train operating company for the service. The DfT leased six class 196 units, for driver-only operation, in 2023 at cost of £2.5 million including maintenance.

Delivery did not take place until February 2025, but the RMT, which represents guards, is opposed to driver-only operation.

Various other reasons for the failure to start services have been offered including Chiltern Railways' refusal to accept the new Winslow station as fit for purpose.

Rail minister Lord Hendy listed the issues, saying that the general election had delayed the appointment of a train operator, the trains need modifications, driver training is incomplete, Winslow station is not ready and staffing arrangements have not been finalised.

Frustration has boiled over, initially in Winslow where some people bought homes on the assumption the rail service was due to start in 2025. An East West Rail Action Group was formed to press for



CATCH-UP: Part electrification is now planned on EWR after the previous government chose diesel operation

Map: EAST WEST RAIL

services to begin. National media attention was captured, including the *Times, Telegraph, Sun* and *Private Eye*. A protest demonstration was held at Bletchley station, which the local press dubbed "The Great Train Robbery", and a public meeting was convened at Winslow. A petition to Parliament soon attracted over 2,600 names.

The group's website is at: ***www.eastwestrailactiongroup.co.uk***

It is a national scandal that millions of pounds of potential revenue has been lost on leasing under-used train units, on training 44 drivers who have yet to serve the public, on interest charges, on security at Winslow station and on the modification work.

Moreover, the public are being denied a rail service and access to the much-heralded economic benefits of East West Rail.

Meanwhile, the Aylesbury link into East West Rail, which had been seen from the outset as an integral part of EWR and included in the 2019 Transport and Works Order with funding allocated, has been dropped from the current Development Consent Order application. Councils have contributed £45 million of taxpayers' money to EWR on the basis that the Aylesbury link was included and housing growth was planned for the area. The DfT refuses to provide reasons for the change in policy.

Network Rail is currently re-instating the Aylesbury rail link, but only for freight use, although it has been suggested that a Northampton to Old Oak Common passenger service via Aylesbury is worth exploring.

In May and June, East West Rail was undertaking a final consultation on extending EWR to Cambridge. This is proving controversial, with North Bedfordshire MP Richard Fuller criticising the DfT for not releasing the business case.

Bedford mayor Tom Wootton is concerned about the requirement to demolish homes to make way for EWR, while Bicester MP Calum Miller is worried about the impact of EWR services causing delays to road traffic at the level crossing into the town centre.

Transport East has developed a plan with East West Mainline Partnership (formerly the consortium) for EWR services to be extended to Norwich and Ipswich, but the government response is to say the proposals are premature.

October 2026 will be the second anniversary of the completion of work on the Bicester-Bletchley section of EWR. Rail campaigners and would-be passengers can only ask: When will services start?

■ *Chris Wright is a founder member and secretary of the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee*

North West

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Farewell to rail hero Richard

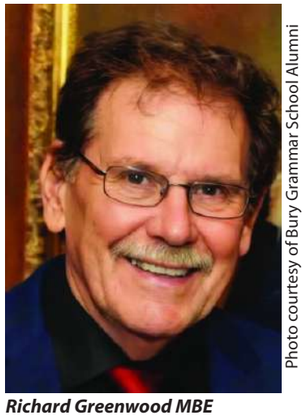


Photo courtesy of Bury Grammar School Alumni

Richard Greenwood MBE

One of the founders of rail user group STORM, Richard S Greenwood MBE, has died aged 89. Richard was formerly chair of STORM (Support The Oldham, Rochdale and Manchester lines). The Rochdale area group was set up nearly 40 years ago to save the Oldham Loop railway route (now Metrolink). Richard served as chair until 2024 before becoming honorary president. He was known to many for his exceptional work in heritage railways, railway photography, railway history and rail campaigning. He was also a frequent letter writer to local and regional newspapers. Richard supported the Electric Railway Charter and the creation of a Calder Valley Line community rail partnership. He worked hard to support both the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway and the East Lancashire Railway.

His railway knowledge and insight was unmatched. He was also a generous, kind, fascinating and witty gentleman.

His photographs of trains, lines and station buildings have appeared in many books and magazines.

STORM has sent condolences to his family, especially his devoted wife Elizabeth.

A station for Slattocks

STORM continues to press for a station at Slattocks (between Mills Hill and Castleton on the Calder Valley line) to serve the local community, workers on the Stakehill Business Park and students and staff at the Middleton campus of Hopwood Hall College. The station is in the transport plans of both Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Rochdale Council. Extensive new housing is planned for the area.

Whitehaven tunnel closure

Rail services have been reduced since July last year between Whitehaven, Corkickle and Barrow because of the closure of the single-track Whitehaven Bransty tunnel, caused by track problems blamed on former mine workings. Network Rail is planning repair work involving strengthening the tunnel floor and replacing the track. It has informed FLAG (the Furness Line Action Group) that the tunnel is likely to be closed until at least September. The £35 million estimated cost will be funded from Network Rail's emergency fund and could rise to £60 million.

Rory Kingdon of Network Rail has warned that the repair is likely to be more complex than originally thought. Some experts say completion may be as late as December.

Josh MacAlister, MP for Whitehaven and Workington, has been pressing for more investment in the line because of its national significance for the nuclear and defence industries. He said: "The most urgent next step is reopening Bransty tunnel. Patch-and-mend repairs over many years are precisely what led us to the closure we face today." He said that the current repairs must last for decades and be part of wider transformation of the route.

FLAG warned users: "Until Whitehaven Bransty tunnel is reopened, rail users have a reduced service between Whitehaven/ Corkickle and Barrow. The resultant frequency gaps are then made even worse with cancellations or late running."

£2.8 billion rail benefit

A feasibility study into the proposed reopening of the Peaks and Dales line between Manchester and Derby has been submitted to the Department for Transport.

Reopening could generate £2.8 billion in gross value added by 2040, remove up to 4.3 million car journeys and improve access for people in the area who do not own or have access to a car. There would be other benefits, such as access for new housing outside the park and carbon emission savings.

The study has been coordinated via the Better Value Rail Working Group, which consists of the DfT, Network Rail, and the Office of Rail and Road. The feasibility study confirms there are no prohibitive technical, environmental, planning or delivery barriers to prevent producing a strategic outline business case.

The route requires only 11.5 miles of track to be reinstated and would open up a new rail corridor of nearly 50 miles, providing rail connections over a wide area.

www.railfuture.org.uk/North+West+Branch

West Midlands

Celebration time

Railfuture West Midlands held its AGM on 18 April with plenty to celebrate. A few days before, the Camp Hill line and its new stations at Moseley Village, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road reopened. The previous month,the Wolverhampton-Walsall freight-only line also reopened to passengers with two new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston. ■ *See pages 1, 2 and 14.*

At the time of the Camp Hill reopening, West Midlands mayor Richard Parker announced that he is considering further plans to extend the rail and tram network with £2.5 billion of funding from the government.

Metro expands – closer to HS2

The West Midlands Metro also expanded in April with the partial opening of the much-delayed one-mile Birmingham Eastside extension. The tram service now branches off from Corporation Street and stops at Albert Street before travelling on to a temporary terminus at Millennium Point. The route is part of a wider programme to expand the Metro tram network to link with the new HS2 station at Curzon Street and on to Digbeth.

Heidi backs Coventry tram pioneers

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander visited Coventry in March to support the city's pioneering "less expensive" very light rail plan, which has benefited from £40 million funding from the Department for Transport.

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www.railfuture.org.uk/West-Midlands-Branch

Railfuture route to a better EWR

By Peter Wakefield

East West Rail will be Britain's first new main line for more than a century and has the potential to change how the national network operates because it links up so many places, providing a direct interchange with five other main lines.

East West Railway Company, which has completed the Oxford-Milton Keynes section, is rapidly moving towards obtaining a development consent order to rebuild the Milton Keynes-Bedford line and construct a new link between Bedford and Cambridge.

After an April-June public consultation, EWR will submit its accelerated proposals to the government. Railfuture and many individual Railfuture members took part in the consultation, largely backing the plan and the positive changes to the original plan, the result of a huge amount of work by East West Rail.

The biggest disappointment for Railfuture is the failure to have electrification along the entire line. Even the "accelerated" plan for EWR is for discontinuous electrification with some non-electrified sections. That will require bimode passenger trains (carrying batteries) rather than simple electric trains. Discontinuous electrification is unsuitable for what is intended to become a busy mixed-traffic main line. Freight will have to be hauled by diesel locomotives because of the gaps in overhead electrification, leading to higher noise levels, avoidable carbon emissions and slower journeys. At Oxford, electrification to Didcot is needed urgently.

A bespoke fleet of bimode passenger trains will have higher costs for maintenance and track wear. Network flexibility will be lost as through-running services from the various intersecting main lines will not be possible. EWR services would become 'isolated' rather than a vital link in the wider network.

Railfuture welcomes:

■ The proposed four passenger services and a minimum of one freight path per hour across the full route.

■ Improvements to existing stations including new entrances at Bletchley, Bedford and Cambridge.

■ Improvements along the Cambridge-Newmarket line as far as Fulbourn.

■ Acceleration of some works to deliver benefits earlier than previously planned.

Railfuture wants the following additions to ensure East West Rail provides the maximum benefits to communities across the region:

■ A station, or passive provision for one, at St Neots, which has a population of 40,000. Relying on a new station at Tempsford (four miles away) is not sufficient because St Neots falls within the "travel to work" area of both Bedford and Cambridge.

■ Cambridge East station should be moved to Cherry Hinton, adjacent to Yarrow Road, which would provide rail access to a much larger population as well as to the significant employment site at ARM Holdings and Peterhouse Technology Park.

■ East West Rail should be extended to include a redoubled and electrified line to Newmarket.

■ Full delivery of the project must be accelerated even further. The railway is needed NOW to support the rapidly developing population and economy along the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.

East Anglia



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Paul Hollinghurst

Success for summer

Railfuture welcomes positive changes from Greater Anglia for the summer timetable, reflecting growing demand from an expanding population and economy, as well as the improved performance of its new train fleet. Salhouse station near Norwich now benefits from an hourly service. To improve journey options from Lowestoft, two services have been converted into cross-Norwich routes by combining them with services between Norwich, Cambridge and Stansted Airport. Railfuture supports the concept of extending similar services to Great Yarmouth, both from Stansted and by extending selected East Midlands Railway services.

Railfuture also welcomes that Greater Anglia's recognition that all its routes should operate at a minimum half-hourly frequency. This will not be achieved until the Ely area capacity and Haughley Junction upgrades are funded. Railfuture East Anglia wants Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to cooperate with Greater Anglia to secure early morning and late evening services between Stansted Airport and Peterborough, currently not provided by CrossCountry services between Birmingham and Stansted Airport.

March station needs to escape no man's land

March should be one of the best-connected towns in Cambridgeshire. Instead, it sits in a railway no man's land. The station is operated by Greater Anglia, served mainly by CrossCountry, while ticket prices are fixed by East Midlands Railway. The result is a confused, inconsistent offer that leaves passengers paying more and receiving less. A simple local journey of 15 miles to Ely costs £8.95 return with a Railcard, while the next 15 miles to Cambridge costs just £3.95. This lack of consistency highlights the need for reform. Service levels tell the same story. The early Sunday morning Ipswich-Peterborough train runs only in summer, despite year-round equivalents elsewhere. The long-requested later evening train from Cambridge remains absent. March and Wisbech together have a population of nearly 70,000. Both should be directly connected to the vibrant Cambridge economy through reliable and affordable rail services. Instead, March station is treated as an afterthought, for which no operator takes full responsibility.

Railfuture East Anglia's six campaign priorities:

- A single operator to take full responsibility for fares, service planning, ticketing and customer experience
- Fair fares, including reducing the cost of short local journeys
- Year-round early Sunday services. Currently, the first year-round departure from Cambridge is not until 1100
- Later evening trains from Cambridge – the last service is currently around 2100
- Upgraded station facilities
- A coherent London travel strategy, including better use of routes via Ely with fair fares

Waterbeach and St Neots campaign

Railfuture East Anglia has printed leaflets for distribution to households in Waterbeach and St Neots, the focus of two current campaigns. We support the local "Waterbeach Two Stations" campaign. A new station is planned to the north to serve the proposed new town, approximately 1.5 miles from the existing Waterbeach railway station which provides fast, direct access to Cambridge. The campaign leaflet encourages residents to sign the petition to lobby for two stations for the future:
https://www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia-Waterbeach

In St Neots, East West Rail proposes that passengers should travel around four miles south to a new station at Tempsford for the EWR interchange with the East Coast main line. Railfuture encourages residents to respond to the East West Rail consultation, highlighting support for an EWR station serving St Neots.

Electrification to solve freight problems

Publication by Network Rail's Advanced Timetable Team of an East Coast main line capacity analysis shows infrastructure "congested" at three locations. One of the three is within our area: from Huntingdon North Junction to New England North Junction.

Existing freight capacity has been maintained after passenger timetable changes but with extremely tight junction margins and no capacity for growth, let alone the ability to meet the government target of a 75% increase in rail freight by 2050. Railfuture is calling on the government to fund electrification of Felixstowe-Nuneaton and the Peterborough-Doncaster via Lincoln line as a way to achieve government targets for decarbonisation and improving fuel efficiency, and easing capacity problems.

www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Rail+Network
X @RailfutureEA



Picture: GREATER ANGLIA

Cub scouts could be future train drivers

Greater Anglia welcomed Cub Scouts to its training academy in Stratford, London, giving them the opportunity to experience the company's train driving simulators. The East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership organised the day-out for Cubs from Ipswich, Suffolk.

Greater Anglia's driver trainer manager Mark Robson explained the basics of railway operations and guided the Cubs on use of the full-size cab simulators. Scout leader James Nunn said: "The day exceeded all our expectations. The Cubs loved every minute and were buzzing long after the visit ended."

Severnside

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Bruce Williamson

MP in contact

Railfuture Severnside was approached by the office of Thornbury and Yate MP Claire Young, as a result of Railfuture's parliamentary event in February. She is interested in opportunities to improve rail services in her constituency, which currently has only three railway stations – Yate, Pilning and Severn Beach. Charfield will become the fourth station when it opens next year.

Lapsed members

Branch secretary John Henderson took the initiative to contact lapsed members to see whether they could be persuaded to rejoin. His efforts paid off and several members rejoined. Maybe other branches could persuade people to rejoin.

Temple Meads' new roof

After two years of dingy and smoky platforms, most of the scaffolding has now been stripped away from the overall roof of Temple Meads (pictured right). There is still some work to do, but the results so far are impressive.

Stations and access round-up

Castle Cary, Somerset
New lifts and overbridge could be installed by 2028.

Charfield, South Gloucestershire
The station is under construction and is expected to open next year.

Henbury and North Filton/ Brabazon, South Gloucestershire
The two new stations on the northern edge of Bristol are expected to open in 2028.

Lawrence Hill, Bristol City
New lift and stairs to make the station fully accessible approved.



Picture: JOHN HENDERSON

Portishead, Pill, North Somerset
These two stations are on the Portishead Line which is currently being rebuilt and is expected to open in 2028. *See back page*

Wellington, Somerset
The government cancelled the new station in 2024, but then reinstated funding last year.

Cullompton
The same goes for the new Cullompton station, also on the Bristol-Exeter line.

Somerton & Langport station

The campaign for a new station at Somerton & Langport, run by the Railfuture-affiliated Langport Transport Group and led by David Northey, gained significant momentum following a public meeting in 2025. Strong support came from from Sarah Dyke, MP for Glastonbury and Somerton, senior rail industry speakers and Somerset councillors.

West Wiltshire Rail Users

The campaign to boost rail services and fill two-hour gaps at Dilton Marsh is led by Railfuture-affiliated West Wiltshire Rail Users Group.

AGM at Chippenham

The Railfuture Severnside AGM will be on Saturday 13 June at 1330 at Chippenham Rotary Hall SN15 1EG, just four minutes walk from the station.

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Connect Bude travel survey

A contribution from Railfuture's Fighting Fund helped our affiliate Connect Bude to publish the results of a survey of Bude-Stratton residents about improving public transport connectivity for the parish's 11,000 population. Residents believe poor connectivity is limiting opportunity and economic growth.

Tavistock rail campaign

Campaign group TavyRail and Launceston Town Council have become affiliated Railfuture members. The council is collaborating with Connect Bude to devise a Connect Cornwall policy, with improved bus services to Devon's rail hub at Okehampton and newly opened Okehampton Interchange.

TavyRail is campaigning for reinstating passenger services between Tavistock and Plymouth, via Bere Alston. It wants to make progress beyond the strategic outline business case, which was part-funded by the Department for Transport.

A Plymouth Metro could see services extending eastwards via a new station at Plympton. TavyRail has congratulated MP Rebecca Smith for raising in the Commons the question of "appalling connectivity" in south west England.

Barnstaple-Exeter line petition

A petition calling for action to improve the Barnstaple-Exeter line was presented to Parliament in February by Ian Roome, Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon.

He said: "The petitioners request that the House of Commons urge the government to ask Network Rail and Great Western Railway to prioritise the Tarka Line for improvements and to work together to make rail travel in north Devon more resilient.

"Demand for the service has continually grown and it is one of the busiest branch lines anywhere in the South West. It is a lifeline for commuters getting to work, students travelling to college and people attending appointments."



Picture: Parliamentlive.tv

North Devon MP Ian Roome presents the 3,000-name petition to the House of Commons. To his right is Honiton & Sidmouth MP Richard Foord



Picture: JEVON WHITBY

United front at Barnstaple station: North Devon MP Ian Roome (centre, holding both tickets) with town, district and county councillors Joy Cann, Helen Walker, Jo Orange, Ed Tyldesley, Frank Biederman, Peter Leaver, Mark Fowler, Caroline Leaver and David Worden, together with Barnstaple mayor Janet Coates

Tim flies Railfuture flag for media

Railfuture branch chair Tim Steer was busy responding to media requests after the extended closure of the Barnstaple-Exeter line caused by floods. He also made reliable information available on various Facebook groups by liaising with GWR and Network Rail.

Devon County Council believes the flooding has revealed that the line is in such a state that it is a strategic economic risk to the county and requires urgent intervention. North Devon Council is also calling for action and has resolved to become a member of the Railfuture-backed Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

It has been proposed that the county council should sponsor next year's alliance convention.

Rail development convention

More than 60 representatives of around 30 partner and stakeholder organisations, associated in one way or another with the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, came together for the third annual convention of the alliance in March.

There were formal presentations and informal networking at the convention, sponsored this year by Mid Devon District Council and organised by Roger Blake, Railfuture's director for infrastructure and networks.

Delegates were welcomed to the convention at the Fox and Hounds Country Hotel, Eggesford, by the district council's vice-chair Sandy Chenore. North Devon MP Ian Roome, with a nod to Network Rail and Great Western Railway, said: "We can be a quaint regional branch line with a shaky reputation or build a real engine for growth for our half of Devon.

The business case for upgrading the Tarka line has never been clearer but somebody must make that case. That somebody is us! So all aboard."



Picture: ALAN QUICK *Crediton Courier*

ALLIANCE IN ACTION: Delegates at the convention of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance at Eggesford

Statements were also read out from Exeter MP Steve Race and GWR's Mark Hopwood. Presentations came from Network Rail's Chris Fuoco, GWR's Matt Barnes and David Whiteway, followed by Peninsula Transport's Hannah Shrimpton. The alliance's independent adviser, Railfuture member Peter West, brought everyone up-to-date with the two preliminary strategic business cases which he has authored pro bono.

One deals with the modernisation of the North Devon line and its services and the other with its extension to Bideford. Network Rail's Andrew Robinson presented the report *Transforming the North Devon Line: a summary of potential infrastructure enhancements*.

During the lunch break, funding was secured for a detailed timetable assessment.

The convention was also addressed by Sean Anstee, from Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority. DTCCA became the area transport authority in April and will be tasked with implementing the 2025-40 local transport plan.

Details of the convention can be found on the Railfuture website. Search for "Bideford and Barnstaple to Exeter diary".

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

ON TRACK: (left to right) Devon County Council's Jacqi Hodgson, Network Rail's Bogdan Lupu and Chris Fuoco with North Devon MP Ian Roome and Network Rail's George Parsons on the North Devon line

North East



Picture: ANNE RIDLEY TVCRP

WINNING WAYS: Members of the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership who participated in the restoration of Haltwhistle station

peter.walker@railfuture.org.uk



Peter Walker

Haltwhistle stars

The transformation of Haltwistle station on the Newcastle-Carlisle line was rewarded with a prize in March. The station won second prize in the *Most Enhanced Railway Spaces* category in the national Community Rail Awards. Haltwhistle's waiting rooms, old booking hall and water tower (mentioned in *Railwatch* 187) have all been transformed in various ways.

New Railfuture campaign leaflet

Railfuture North East has issued a revised and updated leaflet, listing our aims in improving rail facilities across the North East, from Gilsland (towards Carlisle on the Tyne Valley line) to Berwick-upon-Tweed (in the north) and Stockton-on-Tees (in the south). Copies have been sent to all MPs in the region and will be distributed to main stations, as well as model railway exhibitions and local libraries.

More rail reopenings?

Following the record-breaking success of the revived Ashington-Newcastle line, Railfuture is working, along with the South-East Northumberland Rail User Group (SENRUG) towards reinstating the line from Ashington to Woodhorn and Newbiggin, mentioned in *Railwatch* 187, plus the "short cut" line between Bedlington and Morpeth, thereby adding Choppington to the local network.

Chathill wants more trains to stop

Chathill Rail Action Group, based north of Alnmouth, and SENRUG are calling for the existing Newcastle-Berwick TransPennine semi-fast trains to stop at Chathill. At present, Chathill has only two passenger trains each way daily, Mon-Sat only (operated by Northern) which connect with buses to Bamburgh, Beadnell, and Seahouses on the Northumberland coast. Railfuture would like to see more such links, and we support Northumberland County Council in its aim to reduce car use in its coastal resorts, particularly in the busy summer months. Railfuture North East is campaigning for a more frequent train service at the existing stations on the East Coast main line: Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington, AInmouth, Chathill, and Berwick. We also want to see stations reopened north of Chathill at Belford and Beal. CRAG has asked for a meeting with the North East Combined Authority to agree a way forward for trains to serve the Newcastle-Berwick corridor. The group is also planning to cooperate with the North Northumberland Community Rail Partnership.

Oil shortages and the main line

Railfuture North East understands there has been talk of LNER putting on extra trains, particularly from Edinburgh, if airlines find themselves having to cancel Heathrow flights. Amid reassurances from airlines that fuel stocks are more than adequate for all needs for several months, it is encouraging to think that this crisis may be adding more force to arguments made by environmentalists that rail enhancement is the best way to reduce air travel over shorter distances, especially those with potentially good, reliable, fast rail links. Railfuture will give full support to increased rail service provision.

Reconnecting Consett

Railfuture North East MayAGM was held in Newcastle and included a talk by transport activist Don Kent asking the question: "Could Consett once again become part of the national rail network?"

www.railfuture.org.uk/North-East-Branch

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railfuture.bsky.social

Thames Valley

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Andrew McCallum

Soaraway Oxford

The "turn up and go" railway planned by Oxfordshire was the main subject of discussion at Railfuture Thames Valley's AGM in Oxford on 12 May. The ambitious plan attracted 2,571 responses when the county council's consultation process began, said guest speaker Pete Brunskill. Consultations usually attract responses in their low hundreds. Mr Brunskill, rail development lead for the council, gave us a review of progress on *OxRail2040: Plan for Rail* launched last year (see *Railwatch* 187). Passenger numbers are going up at all Oxfordshire's 23 stations, with Oxford station expected soon to have 10 million annual users. Currently, the four-platform station attracts 8.14 million annual users. By comparison, 15-platform Reading station attracts 14 million. The council wants to accelerate rebuilding of Oxford station's concourse and facilities, including adding an extra platform. The county plan sees five new stations being built– Ardley, Cowley, Littlemore, Begbroke, and Wantage & Grove. It also supports the Oxford metro concept of more frequent and longer bimode trains, as well as Didcot-Oxford-Bletchley electrification and expanding the use of rail freight. Mr Brunskill said he was keen to build his relationship with Railfuture as plans develop, and will keep us in the loop.

Improvements to East West Rail

Railfuture Thames Valley has contributed to Railfuture's official response to the latest East West Rail consultation as it affects our area. We support the plans for an underpass at Bicester London Road level crossing, a new depot at Newton Longville and a new eastern entrance at Bletchley station. We also welcome improved facilities at Oxford Parkway including the provision for trains to turn back there if unable to reach Oxford, and the idea of a freight loop near Islip. Railfuture Thames Valley is concerned about the continuing delay to the start of passenger services between Milton Keynes and Oxford, and the damage it is doing to the cause of rail reopenings. Our media representative Dave Richardson was quoted by the *Oxford Mail* in its report:
www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/26002498.petition-calls-progress-oxford-cambridge-trainline/
Our committee member, Alan Francis, has written a guide to the dispute which you can read here:
mkgreens.org/News/Details/23
Railfuture believes that, when services do commence, the trains will be "rammed" with passengers. In the meantime, we welcome the fact that the line is already being used for freight trains.

CrossCountry challenged

Railfuture Thames Valley welcomes the fact that, in the May timetable change, CrossCountry has added more trains on the Reading-north east England route. However, some of these skip Banbury, which CrossCountry says is to provide more seats for long-distance passengers. Railfuture is concerned about the precedent this sets. Banbury MP Sean Woodcock has raised this because he says he often gets complaints from constituents about CrossCountry services. As CrossCountry is the prime provider for the busy Banbury-Oxford commuter route we believe the 0733 from Birmingham could call at Banbury at 0820. We have taken this up with CrossCountry, the MP and Oxfordshire County Council.

Under-par Buckinghamshire

Railfuture Thames Valley is disappointed by Buckinghamshire's recently published local transport plan. Access to Old Oak Common is only briefly mentioned and there is no mention of better services on the Marlow line. There is support for Aylesbury-Calvert (on EWR) and for western access to Heathrow (from Slough) but no mention of any actions to work towards those aims. While Oxfordshire employs five staff for rail, Buckinghamshire has one person working part-time on rail.

www.railfuture.org.uk/Thames-Valley-Branch

X @RailfutureTV



Oxfordshire's Pete Brunskill, seated, and Railfuture Thames Valley chairman Richard Stow, standing, at the branch AGM at Oxford

Picture: ANDREW MCCALLUM

To DOO or not to DOO on East West Rail?

By Bill Davies



Driver Bill in a 1980s diesel

Life on the railway was very different back in the 1980s but big change came to Bedford when the line to London was electrified. British Rail wanted the new four-car electric trains to have a driver – but no guard. BR was in the mood to "modernise" and recruiting guards had become very difficult, while ensuring that the guards were available for work at anti-social times had also become challenging.

I was a train driver and represented Bedford drivers as their "shop steward" for Aslef, the train union which did not oppose DOO, the acronym that was in use at the time to describe driver only operation.

Union headquarters believed any financial benefit to the railway should be shared nationally.

The drivers at Bedford disagreed. The additional responsibility was all ours and dividing the benefit among train drivers throughout Britain would have provided a very small rise for each driver.

Only £2.50 was being offered for each DOO shift worked on the new class 317 trains which replaced the four-car diesel units.

Union general secretary Lew Adams (a Railfuture vice-president after he retired) told me in no uncertain terms that the Bedford drivers were being "greedy bastards".

However, we argued that, if we were to operate trains without guards, we should be paid for the extra responsibility.

The National Union of Railwaymen appeared to accept DOO and found it difficult to help their members at Bedford or Cricklewood, the other depot on the BedPan (Bedford-St Pancras) line. However, NUR local reps fought hard and successfully to retain jobs for their members, all of whom were found alternatives.

BR management watched on with delight as it was obvious that DOO was accepted but payment for shifts worked was not. That is what delayed the introduction of electric trains by just over two and a half years. Had management been more inclined to make a reasonable offer, there would have been no delay.

While we waited for an agreement, some Bedford drivers had training in December 1980 on class 310 trains on the West Coast main line. That meant that we needed only a short conversion course on to the class 317s. After a few of us trained on 310s, it was decided to give us some basic training on the then new Great Eastern class 315s which had far more in common with the 317. On our training runs from Bedford to Luton, we had a guard



Picture: BILL DAVIES

HIGH HOPES FOR EWR: Two Chiltern Railways class 168 diesel units pass the new Winslow station in October 2024. On the same day, a Great Western class 800 inter-city train also went through Winslow on a test run. Nearly two years later, no regular passenger trains have run

because management was worried that the union hierarchies would be prompted to oppose DOO, thus delaying the introduction of the new trains even longer. All Bedford's drivers had been trained by the end of 1981.

By 1982, wiring was completed, as was the elimination of manual signalboxes with the new West Hampstead power signal box covering the lines from Moorgate and St Pancras to Sharnbrook (north of Bedford). A two-week Aslef strike was called in 1982 in protest over proposals to withdraw our sacrosanct eight-hour day, to be replaced by a "flexible roster" which would allow some shifts to increase to nine hours and others to be reduced to a minimum of seven hours. The compensation was that it allowed an extra rest day every eight weeks. In early 1983, a breakthrough was achieved when Aslef agreed to a payment of £6 per shift for DOO turns. Training then commenced in earnest on 317 units which had been stored at various locations, including Nottingham and Cricklewood where the first 317 had arrived in1981.

The local rodents had gorged themselves on internal wiring insulation, so when agreement was finally reached, many units needed attention before they could run.

On 28 March 1983, the first DOO service ran, an 0925 Bedford to St Pancras special, calling at Luton only. It was formed of eight coaches, units 321 and 304. As more 317s became serviceable, they were pressed into the timetable on diesel timings. This did not last, as in July 1983 a major fault was discovered in brackets supporting the transformers, leading to temporary withdrawal of the worst affected units.

Class 313 trains borrowed from Great Northern suburban lines provided some cover, with original diesel multiple units returning to service along with some locomotive-hauled stock, all ironically requiring guards.

Wolverton works carried out remedial work as quickly as they could before BedPan services could finally become fully electric and operated by a driver only.

Thus ended the saga until 1987/8, when 700 yards of track was relaid between Farringdon and Blackfriars, thus initiating Thameslink services run by yet another class of train, the dual-voltage 319.

The fantastically successful Thameslink service, with through trains to Brighton and other destinations south of the river, now operates with 12-coach trains with a driver and no guard, and can carry 1,700 passengers.

DCO and DOO

The acronym DCO (driver controlled operation) is now often used on the railway, rather than DOO. DCO+1 operation always requires a second member of staff on board if passengers are being carried.

DCO+1* allows the train to operate with only the driver if, in exceptional circumstances, a second staff member is not available. This seems to work well on Greater Anglia, which has a full staff complement who are well-trained.

RAIL VISION FOR WALES IN DOUBT

By Julian Langston

Three months before the Welsh Senedd election in May, a visionary plan for the railways in Wales was launched by Transport for Wales with enthusiastic backing from Welsh first minister Eluned Morgan and UK prime minister Sir Keir Starmer who committed to the investment.

However, Ms Morgan lost her seat in the election and Plaid Cymru leader Rhun ap Iorwerth is now first minister.

How much of the plan *TODAY, TOMORROW, TOGETHER: A vision for rail across Wales and Borders* will survive is an open question.

The document recognises that rail can "transform" Wales, and describes work already carried out, as well as future projects estimated at up to £14 billion.

The vision would take15 to 20 years to deliver, in three tranches. These range from already (partly) funded projects, such as the proposed stations on the South Wales main line, to future aspirations such as electrifying the Marches line linking Newport, Hereford, Shrewsbury and Chester.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves committed £445 million of the £14 billion in her June 2025 spending review. More money will be needed to complete any of the first tranche of projects. The second tranche is estimated to cost about £4 billion, including electrification of the North Wales line from Crewe to Holyhead.

The final tranche, with an estimated cost of £10 billion or more, to be delivered in 15-20 years, includes reopening Aberystwyth-Carmarthen and Bangor-Afon Wen, which would create a north-south rail link wholly in Wales.

Railfuture welcomed the proposals. There are flaws, however, the most significant of which relates to the proposed link between Bangor and Afon Wen. TfW seems wedded to light rail for this route. Railfuture believes it should be conventional rail and TfW should concentrate on Bangor-Caernarfon as Caernarfon is a much more desirable destination for passengers from cities in north-west England. Light rail could not cope with conventional through trains from Manchester to Caernarfon, and freight use would also be ruled out. Bangor-Caernarfon should be a conventional rail link in the second tranche.

Railfuture welcomes the high-level political support, but we have to recognise that at present only 3% of the total is funded. Further funding will rely on future budgets and money from both the UK and Welsh governments.

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Tickets please



Jane Ann Liston

Any ScotRail passenger boarding without a valid ticket will now be charged a minimum fare of £10. However, this will not apply where there is no open ticket office or working ticket machine at the departure station, nor apparently when the passenger holds a bus pass or a national entitlement card (which can be used as a bus pass, a library card or for free bus travel for people under 26). Passengers who can pay only cash will be expected to obtain a "promise to pay" chit from a vending machine, assuming they can find one that is working, and then buy a ticket on the train.

Political differences

It was interesting to see how much attention the main political parties paid to rail during the Scottish parliamentary elections.
Reform confined themselves merely to embarking upon a 10-year programme of modernisation, although they also voiced support for the Glasgow Airport link, as did Labour. The Clyde metro was also backed by Labour, and the Greens. The SNP would commit themselves only to supporting the next stage of the feasibility study, as well as investigating tram-trains on the Edinburgh South Suburban line. Extending the Borders line to Carlisle was mentioned by four parties, while the Liberal Democrats committed to explore the possibility and the Greens to make the case for further extension. The Conservatives appeared most gung-ho about actually getting on with it. The Greens included Hawick among stations whose reopening should be investigated, others being Halbeath and Tomatin, while the SNP committed themselves to reopening Winchburgh. The SNP and Greens also undertook to investigate the case for Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh. The Lib Dems promised to reopen Newburgh in Fife, whereas the Greens were more cautious, committing themselves only to investigating the possibility. The Conservatives supported the reopening of stations at Cove, Thornhill and Mauchline.



Picture: LAWRENCE MARSHALL

Around 170 people attended the second in a series of public meetings in support of Tram Trains for Edinburgh in April, according to Railfuture's Lawrence Marshall – with 350 signed up to say they hoped to attend. Edinburgh South MP and former secretary of state for Scotland Ian Murray and outgoing (and subsequently re-elected) Labour MSP Daniel Johnson attended along with two Liberal Democrat councillors. Messages of support came from the Greens and the SNP, which included the project in its election manifesto. The meeting was held at the King's Buildings campus of Edinburgh University, within walking distance of a proposed stop on the South Sub at Cameron Toll. Tram Trains website: www.ttfe.org.uk

Trains to mainland Europe

It was not just specific lines and stations that were mentioned. Both SNP and Lib Dems wanted to explore the possibility of direct trains from Scotland to mainland Europe. The Lib Dems wanted to create a national freight strategy to move goods from road to rail. Labour wished to continue electrifying the network, the Lib Dems to increase the amount of electrified track, while the Conservatives promised to electrify the East Coast main line from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, thus finally achieving the aims of CREATE (Campaign for Rail Electrification Aberdeen To Edinburgh) in the 1990s. The Greens sought increased capacity, particularly on the Cathcart Circle, Fife Circle, Milngavie line and the West Highland line, a ScotCard so that all ages could benefit from discounted travel and an upper limit on the price of Caledonian Sleeper tickets. The Conservatives wanted bus times to be synchronised with rail timetables and the Lib Dems proposed a tap-on, tap-off system for all land transport akin to Transport for London. Oddly, the SNP stated that "Transport Scotland will be brought back into the Scottish Government" which surprised most of us who thought it already was. The Greens wanted to abolish first-class travel claiming that while commuters were forced on to crowded accommodation, 98% of "seats in luxury carriages" were unoccupied. Extra leg room, a table lamp and an antimacassar hardly constitute "luxury carriages".

St Andrews rail campaign

Although St Andrews was not mentioned in any party manifesto, the university has stated that it continues to support the principle of a rail link. In the meantime the Royal and Ancient has announced its new five-year global strategy, with an aim to attract 22 million extra golfers to St Andrews. One hopes that does not mean four million extra cars arriving every year. However, with St Andrews being accessible only by road, it will be interesting to see whether rising fuel costs push visitors towards buses or whether they will decide to go somewhere else altogether, which would be a blow to a town so dependent upon the tourist industry.

Scotland presses on to its electric future

Two sections of the Borders Railway are being electrified, 11 years after the line was reopened. Overhead 25kV equipment was installed during a closure of the line over three weekends in March this year. Since the 48 kilometre Borders line reopened from Newcraighall to Tweedbank in 2015, more than 13 million journeys have been made on it.

Now rail campaigners are waiting for the go-ahead to reopen the Tweedbank-Carlisle line. A feasibility study, funded by the Scottish and UK governments, into reopening the 100-kilometre section, is being carried out and the results are expected next year.

Work continues on the Fife electrification project, part of the Scottish Government's rolling programme of electrification. New battery-electric trains will be needed for both the Borders Railway and in Fife. Scottish transport secretary Fiona Hyslop has already authorised ScotRail to start a procurement exercise for them.

London & South East

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Metro advance



Richard Bowry

On the campaign front, we are pleased to see that train operator Southeastern is planning timetable changes that will match the aspiration of Railfuture's four trains per hour "metro service" campaign on Greater London services. From December, Southeastern is planning a "turn up and go" service with a minimum of four trains per hour across most Metro routes on Monday to Saturday. There are also other improvements, including the reintroduction of a Sunday service on the Bromley North branch. This is in addition to improved services in Kent. South Western Railway is currently in the consultation stage of a "transformational new timetable" to ensure better reliability with fewer delays and cancellations.

Thameslink's Phil is AGM guest

Phil Hutchinson of Govia Thameslink Railway attended the Railfuture branch annual general meeting and gave members an indication of GTR's plans for the future. GTR became part of Department for Transport Operator on 31 May 2026. Phil said that GTR recognises current and future capacity challenges and is proactively developing ideas to tackle them, to enable more services in the longer term to match forecast demand.

Railfuture social events

Railfuture London & South East has introduced what may be a Railfuture first, in the form of a social events programme designed to provide an added element to the membership experience and also to attract new members. This currently comprises an eight-part walks programme conducted in conjunction with the Railway & Canal Historical Society, starting from London main line terminus stations, which we hope will be particularly attractive to younger members. The first such walk was based around Waterloo and ran a reserve list, the second walk is based around Victoria and takes place on 16 June.

AGM backs committee

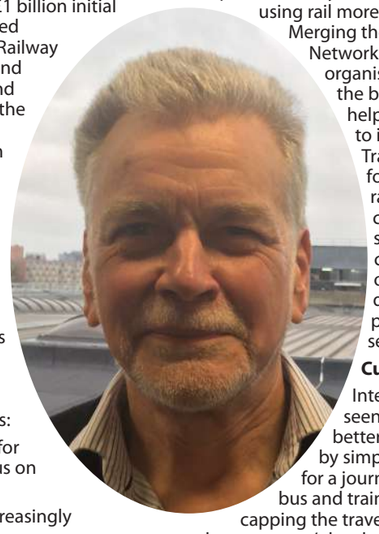
The existing branch committee remains in place following the Railfuture London & South East AGM. We have appealed for more of our members to come forward and help the committee in its work. There is much to be done but unfortunately too few active members to do it.

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

Chair's column by Chris Page

Rail reform progress

The experience of HS2, designed as a point-to-point railway rather than part of the network, and of East West Rail, with passenger services delayed by 15 months and a change toward electrification as part of implementation of later phases, shows the importance of getting objectives right. The key deliverable of the £1 billion initial funding for the proposed Liverpool-Manchester Railway will be to understand and agree costs, benefits and connections, implying the definition of the route and of services on both it and existing routes. Transport secretary Heidi Alexander has written to Sir Andrew Haines on his appointment as chair of DfT Operator Ltd, to which train operators are being transferred as they are brought into public ownership. The letter sets out the key objectives for operators:



- A better experience for passengers, with a focus on value and reliability
- A network that is increasingly attractive to freight
- Stronger ridership and higher load factors
- All underpinned by improved financial sustainability, reduced subsidy and a sustained focus on safety – which will always remain non-negotiable.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1925#threadId547

To meet those objectives, train operators have to solve the trilemma of net subsidy versus performance versus customer need.

Manchester is a model which shows how solving this transport trilemma will deliver general economic as well as rail growth. The Metrolink light rail system has set repeated records for usage, helping Manchester to achieve overall 3.1% annual economic growth over 10 years. Gross value added per capita has trebled since 2000. More Londoners now move to Manchester than move the other way. The next steps are merging some local rail services into the Bee bus and rail network, with integrated ticketing, to help spread the benefits to surrounding towns.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0ljgzjwjx3o

Net subsidy

The Treasury has long wanted to reduce rail subsidy, but only late last year was it accepted that growth is the only way to achieve this. The government is now giving train operators growth targets, allowing operators to run extra services or increase frequencies where a business case can be made. It has also allowed operators to spend on marketing to attract more people to travel. The latest figures show that passenger numbers, including commuters, are still increasing, but more is needed to increase use of existing capacity.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1930

Combined teams should also improve efficiency. However, the letter gives no clue as to whether there will be a single employer for train operating staff, which the RMT union wants. Greater productivity is the prize (or carrot) but at the risk of providing the RMT with stronger bargaining power.

Good performance is essential

Reliability is essential for growth. Perception of poor reliability discourages people from using rail more than anything else. Merging the train operator and Network Rail route organisations should remove the blame game and so help the combined teams to improve reliability. Train operators are now focusing on reliability rather than minimum cost. For example, simpler out-and back crew diagrams within one route avoid disruption being propagated to other services.

Customer need

Integrated ticketing is seen as a way of delivering better value to passengers, by simplifying ticket purchase for a journey using, for example, bus and train, and by potentially capping the travel cost per day within the passenger's local area. However, there is a lack of strategic direction from government on why it is needed, what the objectives are, and standards should be. Therefore we are in danger of balkanised integrated ticketing emerging, with each devolved area setting up its own solution.

You might think that with many people changing to working from home since the pandemic, overcrowding on rail services would be a thing of the past – but it is not. This occurs when demand is concentrated at certain times but there is not a business case for longer trains, poor reliability causes short-formed services, short platforms do not allow longer trains, or there is too much availability of cheap tickets.

One of the risks of growth is that overcrowding will increase. The easy answer is to accelerate procurement of new trains and lengthen services, but it may be difficult to create a business case.

Effective yield management is needed to set fares intelligently, to encourage people to travel when and where space is available. Also needed is the Northern Railway approach of redeploying assets (stock and staff) to where they are needed at any particular time.

www.railfuture.org.uk/article1929

These approaches can only go so far. New trains will be needed to accommodate growth, but the government seems to be in analysis paralysis, unable to decide what new trains to order, with none likely before 2030. The delay will increase costs, with interest rates no longer likely to fall as previously expected. An unexpected consequence of pausing the electrification of the Midland main line between South Wigston and Sheffield is that battery-electric trains will no longer be viable for East Midlands Railway regional services, so new diesel trains have to be considered.

railwatch

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railfuture
campaigning for a bigger, better railway

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All aboard for Portishead and Pill



Picture: TIM GANDER/NETWORK RAIL

After contracts were signed to rebuild the railway to Pill and Portishead, this special train, pictured at Bristol Temple Meads station, carried guests along the route

By Roger Blake
Railfuture infrastructure director

One of the most long-awaited rail projects in the south west of England took a major step forward on 5 May when contracts worth £200 million were signed at Bristol Temple Meads.

The contracts will deliver two new stations and reinstate the Portishead railway line, closed to passengers since 1964.

Railfuture's Wendy Thorne, who lives in Portishead, said: "Seeing a Network Rail road sign in Portishead was something special. I never thought we would see the day."

Alan Matthews, chair of Portishead Railway Group, said: "After years of campaigning, with many false dawns, Portishead Railway Group can at last celebrate that the construction of the Portishead Rail project has at last started."

Rail minister Lord Peter Hendy said: "Reopening the Portishead to Bristol line has been talked about for decades, and thanks to government investment we are finally getting it done."

Morgan Sindall Infrastructure will lead construction of the line and highways improvements at Portishead. Five kilometres of disused line will be restored.

Colas Rail will design and install a new digital signalling system.

AmcoGiffen has been appointed to deliver bridge works and associated road work in Bristol.

Three miles of track will be relaid to create the infrastructure to run a modern, reliable rail service.

This project is funded by the Department for Transport, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and North Somerset Council and will be delivered by Network Rail.

Construction is under way, and services should start in 18 months time. The line will reconnect more than 50,000 people to the railway, with journeys to Bristol Temple Meads taking around 25 minutes from Portishead and 20 minutes from Pill, around half the time it takes to complete these journeys by road.



Picture: ROB EMONY

More than just a spade in the ground: Workers on the rebuilding project use an articulated boom lift to dismantle the old station house, reclaiming the bricks for further use and making way for work to start on Pill's new station

Invited guests were taken on a special journey from Bristol Temple Meads along the line towards Portishead and the location of the new Pill station.

Those on board included Karin Smith, MP for Bristol South, Kerry McCarthy, MP for Bristol East and Sadik Al-Hassan, MP for North Somerset. The Portishead line project is forecast to generate an estimated £43 million in economic growth each year when complete.

Network Rail's Marcus Jones said: "This is a proud moment. This project will unlock better access to jobs, education and services, while offering a faster and greener alternative to road travel."

Mayor Helen Godwin said: "This is an historic moment for Portishead, Pill and the whole of the West of England. This investment will strengthen the country's fastest-growing regional economy."

North Somerset leader Mike Bell said: "Today's train gave me an exciting glimpse of what is to come."

GWR's Mark Hopwood said: "Rail services are essential for local and national growth. The line will allow thousands more direct access to the rail network and in the fullness of time will connect with our other new station, Bristol Brabazon, and the new Aviva Arena, creating further sustainable links for residents and visitors."

However, the Portishead Railway Group has had to accept that, to make the project "affordable", the originally planned service frequency of half-hourly has been cut because less infrastructure work is required for an hourly service. It has taken the group over a quarter of a century from its formation and persistent lobbying before the reopening was confirmed.

That is the key lesson for campaigners. It is a long "game" and you must be prepared to expect frustrations, set-backs and disappointments.

Portishead though is just part of the story of our railway growing bigger and better, although not every reopening candidate is being given the green light. Railfuture and Railfuture-affiliated groups will carry on campaigning.

We know that what is dismissed as unrealistic one day can later become an essential part of the rail network. With polite persistence, we will continue to make the case for rail to play its proper part in the life of the country.

Railfuture in the News

Railfuture has managed to influence the news somewhere on average two days out of three. Devon and Cornwall branch can take much of the credit, while Thames Valley, North East and Cymru/Wales branches have been active too. News talk station LBC sought our opinion three times, on fare evasion, making public transport free and, in an unusual move, Railfuture was asked to comment on motoring. It was suggested that speed limits could be cut to conserve fuel while the US-Iran crisis is threatening supplies through the Straits of Hormuz. Railfuture spokesman Bruce Williamson was invited on to Matthew Wright's breakfast show to comment on this, and of course he managed to give the railways a plug too. All this and more on our web page:
www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture-in-the-news

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