



October 2018

Welcome to the Rail User Express.

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Time is running out if Network Rail (NR) is to keep to its timetable for the Central Section of East West Rail from Bedford to Cambridge, including the interchanges with the Midland and the East Coast Main Lines. Its latest update (July 2017) states: "The current programme would see a preferred route being selected during 2018 following a number of public consultation events. These will be publicised in due course."

Roger Smith

We continue with the usual roundup of news items from groups around the UK. Please keep your contributions coming: they are all gratefully received.

Friends of the Far North Line

FoFNL campaigns for easier inter-modal interchange to make public transport more attractive. Just such an opportunity has presented itself in the Highland Capital, as Royal Mail has announced that it is to vacate its site between Inverness station and the bus station, so the latter could be relocated to create a new, more convenient interchange facility. FoFNL hopes that The Highland Council will seize the opportunity to redevelop the land, so that passengers can transfer between buses and trains in comfort.

VTEC, ScotRail and Transport Scotland are working to resolve a timetable anomaly: the Highland Chieftain arrives in Inverness at 2004, just as an Inverness-Aberdeen service is leaving. Similar attention should be paid to the connection from the Ardgay service that arrives in Inverness at 0743, ahead of the Kings Cross departure at 0755. Although 12mins ought to suffice, passengers have to cross from one side of Inverness station to the other, and the Ardgay service is prone to delay (*but it is a booked connection – Ed.*)

LevenMouth Rail Campaign

The current status of the Levenmouth rail link was raised in the Scottish Parliament. Responding, Michael Matheson, the new Transport Minister, made the customary 'holding' comments about adhering to due process, but referred positively to the active community campaign, now over 4 years old. He also promised to visit the town soon, and meet key stakeholders. Both Council and Campaign eagerly await the outcome of PBA Consultants' Levenmouth Transport Study, commissioned by Transport Scotland.

Campaign for Borders Rail

By the third anniversary of the reopening of the Borders Railway, over 4.1 million passenger journeys had been recorded. It vindicates the original investment, and boosts the case for an extension to Hawick and Carlisle. However, success has come at a price, with some services severely overcrowded, resulting in delays, uncollected fares and under-reporting of usage. More seriously, potential passengers may be discouraged from taking the train. The basic cause is the continued shortage of rolling stock. Some services do now run with additional capacity, but many busy trains still operate with 2-car formations.

Despite many positive statements from Holyrood, Westminster, and local government, there is no evidence of any actual work. CBR Chairman Simon Walton shares everyone's frustration, given the pressing social and economic issues that a reopened a railway would help to redress. However, John Lamont, MP for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk is confident that the campaign for a link from Edinburgh to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) will ultimately succeed, as its business case is stronger than that for the current line was. It would benefit a much larger population, and provide an important link to the wider network. What is needed is the political ambition from both the UK and the Scottish Government to see the project through.

Lakes Line Rail User Group

Negative publicity surrounding the lack of trains on the Lakes Line in early June affected business in the area; people simply went elsewhere. As a result, the rail industry has set aside £285,000 for a Cumbria Tourism marketing campaign to remind potential visitors that the Lakes Line is up and running again. It aims to attract people back onto all of the Lake District lines via mainline services at Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle. Enterprise Car Hire is ideally situated close to Kendal station, or they will meet you at Oxenholme. So let the train take the strain.

At the Arriva Rail North Stakeholder Conference, its MD David Brown presented an overview. The awful problems in the first half of the year were not avoided, but assertions such as 'there is not a shortage of crew members' (!) were burying heads in the sand, as many trains are still being cancelled due to a lack of driver or conductor. Much of the rest was the usual 'the future is bright', and cut little ice. LLRUG believes the Northern franchise should be split east/west. Circumstances and problems are quite different on either side of the Pennines. Even with the setup of four regions, Northern cannot function as a cohesive unit.

Sir Richard Branson let it be known on Twitter that 'Very little annoys me in life, but people turning up late really does.' The Guardian commented: 'His passengers ... have been happy to point out the irony.' Taking two weekdays at random, Dick Smith examined how VT West Coast had performed at Oxenholme. On both 7 and 13 September, just two of the 41 VT trains that call there left within a minute of their scheduled departure. Although many would have reached their destination 'on time', ie no more than ten minutes late, to passengers making connections, punctuality at stations en route just as important. What struck Dick was that some trains were almost identically late on both days. Trains from London via Birmingham were the worst, with double figure lateness, so couldn't they be scheduled more realistically?

TransPennine Express (TPE) also suffers from poor punctuality. Its Manchester – Scotland trains often arrive late at Oxenholme, having been held up in the Manchester area when going south. Southbound trains have even been terminated at Preston, in order to return north on time. The new Ordsall chord that links Piccadilly and Victoria stations seems to be one possible reason. The two-track section from Piccadilly to Deansgate always was very busy, but now even more trains are using it. TPE have said that if a train from the Airport reaches Piccadilly just one minute late, it can be ten late by the time it leaves Victoria.

Cumbrian coast Rail Users' Group

In Cumbria reports that an initial business case to improve the Coastal line has been submitted to the DfT. The Cumbrian Rail Programme Board says that pressure on the line will increase over the next ten years. The Cumbria Local Economic Partnership (LEP) has committed £1m of its Growth Deal funding, and HMG is being asked for £9m to move the plans forward. Tony Potts was due to attend a meeting of the Coal Mine Liaison Group on 19 September, and the DfT will be approached regarding the continuing strike action.

Both punctuality and reliability have improved. In a 5-week period, there were no cancellations on 21 days at Whitehaven on the Coastal line, and 10 days without any at Seascale or on the Furness line. However, the last train from Whitehaven did not run on 3 occasions southbound, and once northbound.

At a meeting with Northern and the CRP, Martin Bibby raised the condition of stations, citing seating at Whitehaven and Millom, and the continuing failure of the screens at Seascale. Strikes and cancellations remain a major concern. CRUG wants to restore deleted stops to the timetable, especially south of Whitehaven, as well as franchise items not yet included. Announcements on trains of where they are stopping, including details of request stops, is confusing, and automated announcements do not cope with skipped stations.

Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group

Cascaded diesel train units continue to arrive from Scotland and Great Western, and some go straight into service in their original livery. The new arrivals have to be dovetailed into the ongoing delivery and refurbishment programmes affecting all cascaded and existing 'to be retained' Northern stock. Completion of Preston-Manchester electrification should release more diesel units, and new stock is well on the way for some services. Meanwhile, Pacers continue to feature prominently throughout the North. A welcome change on weekdays: the 1451 from Lancaster to Leeds via Morecambe now travels direct to Morecambe from where it returns as the 1503 to Leeds, departing Lancaster at 1515.

A regeneration scheme west of Skipton station, including an additional entrance to the existing subway, is under consideration. The cost of the Dales Railcard will remain at £10 for the rest of 2018. Details of this year's Winter Offer are still pending, but it is likely to be similar to last year's: £7 for a day rover ticket on the Bentham Line, and £9 on the Settle-Carlisle Line, excluding the first eastbound train on each line.

Ribble Valley Rail

Northern has not been able to roster train crews to run the Sunday DalesRail service, so with great reluctance DalesRail had to be abandoned. Northern inherited the issue of Sunday working, but the fact that it is not in the staff contracts is something that should have been sorted years ago. The other problem has been too few staff with route knowledge from Blackpool to Carlisle - when you have a timetabled service, you should have sufficient staff to run it. The service has been downgraded from 'Class 158 - Express Sprinter' to a mere 'Sprinter' operation this year; most weeks it is a Class 150. Together with the cancellations, you could be forgiven for thinking that Northern was trying to kill the service off!!

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

The Northern Community Rail Conference on 10 September was Vicky Cropper's last day as Communities & Sustainability Manager, Central Region, before moving on to West Midland Trains. In just 18 months, she has won huge respect and gratitude for her tireless work, and her support for volunteers and friends groups in the Region. STORM wishes Vicky every success in her new post, and recorded its thanks for all her work at its September meeting.

May 2018 excepted, timetables are meticulously prepared and proven viable, so shouldn't they be regarded as sacrosanct? Instead, the timetable is treated as something to achieve if possible, but if not, that's just one of those things. For instance, there is no justification for letting a freight train depart two hours ahead of its booked time. It is a widespread complaint that, since privatisation, even advertised connections are not met, as trains are not held for a late arrival. The dilemma is whether to adhere to the timetable by letting a stopper out in front of an express, causing yet more delays, missed connections and much frustration, or to please as many passengers as possible by being flexible.

A "Special Stop Order" (SSO), which must be approved by NR, authorises a train to call at a local station that it would normally pass through non-stop, but they do not seem to be happening. At Manchester Victoria turn-round times are very tight, so an SSO could well result in a late departure. If the original responsibility was NR's, it could have to pick up any penalty, so could this be why SSOs are not made routinely? Franchisees are also reluctant to use SSOs when they would be responsible for any penalties. Not only would they suffer a penalty for the cancelled train, they would get another for the delayed arrival of the train complying with the SSO. But imposing a penalty for this reason works very much against the public interest. So is the financial consideration against SSOs an issue that the DfT needs to address?

STORM applauds MPs and local councils who support electrification of the Calder Valley line, but neither Rochdale MP has responded to STORM's Electric Charter, either in the local press or by correspondence. Meanwhile, NR has set out plans for £2.9bn of investment to cut Leeds - Manchester journeys by 40 mins: electrification of Leeds-Huddersfield and Stalybridge-Manchester Victoria; four tracking Huddersfield to Ravensthorpe; digital signalling between Cottingley, near Leeds, and Stalybridge; line speed improvements between Manchester and Stalybridge; renewing unreliable equipment; increased capacity at Leeds and elsewhere, and enhancing Huddersfield and Stalybridge stations. However, it warned that the plan would entail significant disruption: a reduced service will be integrated with the existing Calder Valley service, as was the case during the Stalybridge station rebuilding three years ago. Other diversionary routes will be Mirfield to York via Wakefield, or serving Leeds by reversing at Kirkgate.

On 20 September, the first of Northern's £500m fleet of Class 195 diesel trains made its first trial run on the UK network, leaving Liverpool on the St Helen's branch, and running on the WCML between Warrington and Carnforth. The train was unveiled at Edge Hill on 4 October. And on 21 September, a refurbished Class 158 made its debut between Leeds and Lincoln. It offers a brighter and more comfortable journey, with new seating and more legroom. There are USB charging sockets at every seat, and free Wi-Fi throughout. Soon, they will also gain customer information screens and digital seat reservations. Northern has also made it easier to buy tickets, with improved mobile applications, and the roll out of over 600 new ticket machines at stations across the north of England.

North Cheshire Rail Users Group

A lack of rolling stock means that Halton Curve services won't now begin until May 2019, a full year after completion of the engineering work. However, NCRUG fears that 280 seats on the 2-car Class 150 'Sprinter' units will be inadequate at peak times although TfW, who take over the Wales and Borders franchise on 14 October, have an ambitious program of rolling stock procurement. Its proposed timetable is for an hourly service starting from Chester at 0617 and ending from Lime St at 2316. NCRUG will lobby for an even earlier morning service, to feed into the first wave of departures from John Lennon Airport.

Another NCRUG campaign, for Merseyrail to step in and provide an effective rail service on the Ellesmere Port-Helsby line, will ramp up with the arrival of new rolling stock that can operate beyond the limits of third-rail electrification (Ellesmere Port). A frequent service on the line would complete a 'rail ring' around the Mersey Estuary, connecting Frodsham and Helsby with the economies of both the Liverpool city region and the Wirral.

Friends of the Barton Line

The Chairman was in touch with TPE over allowing double-length class 185 trains to call at Habrough - either by extending the platforms, or enabling selective door operation - and to request that the first train on Saturdays out of Cleethorpes calls again at Habrough. FBL has submitted its Rail Franchise Proposals to Stagecoach to inform its bid for the East Midlands franchise.

East Suffolk Travellers' Association

Following the extended closures during "The Beast from the East", NR is developing a series of key route strategies to enable more of the unaffected network to remain open during future forecast events; criteria for their implementation have also been modified. NR is also working with the TOCs to develop "off the shelf" timetables based on these strategies, to provide better information for passengers. It is reassuring that lessons have been learnt, and NR will henceforth take a different approach.

On 23 July three Railfuture members met Ms Ellen Goodwin, Infrastructure Manager of the New Anglia LEP. It recently reported on integrated transport, and can make capital grants (but not operating subsidies) for projects such as improving rail or bus station accessibility, and easing onward travel, eg for visitors arriving in Lowestoft by train and wanting to continue to their journey by local bus. It is for local councils or other bodies to apply for grants, but the voluntary sector can offer support, and provide back-up evidence.

The new bimodal trains will increase capacity by 240%, but ESTA President, Rod Lock, reports that "It is not apparent if GA has a strategy to increase car parking capacity at stations on the East Suffolk Line to meet the increased ridership. The 300-space car park at Lowestoft is substantially under used, and the ten intermediate stations have a total of 189 spaces between them. There is scope for more spaces at certain stations, but also a problem at some stations when people park there who are not using the trains."

A new Anglia Plus leaflet from GA offers "One day, One ticket, Unlimited travel, Just £19". Anglia Railways introduced this ticket over two decades ago, but it hasn't always been well promoted. Often the only publicity on stations has been an ESTA poster, so this attractive and informative new leaflet is a very welcome addition.

ESTA and the CRP have long pressed for through ticketing to Leiston and Aldeburgh, similar to the Southwold scheme. Tickets to these towns that include the bus fare from Saxmundham can now be obtained from any Greater Anglia (GA) booking office, its website or app, or from a train conductor, but not yet from ticket vending machines.

Barking - Gospel Oak Rail User Group

Withdrawal of five peak-time services in June, when the Barking-Gospel Oak train fleet was reduced from eight to seven, made the severe overcrowding even worse. Transport for London (TfL) has belatedly responded by hiring two buses on Monday to Friday mornings to provide extra capacity between Leytonstone High Road and Leyton Midland Road stations, and Walthamstow Central on the Victoria Line and London Overground to Liverpool Street.

Bombardier has finally obtained Type Approval for its new Class 710 Aventura, some ten months later than planned. After testing one of the six units at Willesden depot, it started overnight runs on the West Coast Main Line to Crewe. Each Class 710 has to achieve 2,000 miles fault free running before Arrival Rail London will accept it. ARL then has to run a gauging train over every route it will use, before starting its drivers on a 4-day conversion course. "Providing there are no further hitches," said Glenn Wallis, "Barking-Gospel Oak passengers could be riding in the first of the new trains in a couple of months."

Ealing Passenger Transport Users' Group

EPTUG has been campaigning since 2001 to improve services throughout the borough. Its achievements include five more 5-coach trains, and new trains brought into service; more bus shelters, and new lifts and escalators at local stations; a stop for the 607 bus at Christ Church, Ealing, plus a Sunday service and later running, and reopening of the southern exit at Hanwell Station, greatly improving access

Currently, it wants to ensure: adequate bus access to Crossrail stations, aligning bus links to NHS reorganisation, and for Old Oak Common to be developed for the benefit of Ealing. It has cross-party support, but there are always new challenges. It urgently needs more committee members, as well as volunteers to monitor the transport situation in their area, so that EPTUG can take up those issues. The more support, the more it will influence TfL and the TOCs. To help, email info@eptug.org.

Windsor Lines Passengers Association

The RMT Union has agreed with GA that train guards with safety critical competency will continue: drivers will operate the doors and, subject to a risk assessment, undertake train dispatch; guards will maintain competency in door operation in case of equipment failure. Also on some routes, in the event of disruption, trains may run without a guard to a point where one is able to join the train. So RMT's new mandate for further strike action on SWR is bitterly disappointing. There seems to be no reason why SWR cannot have the same agreement as GA.

There will be no significant changes to the December 2018 SWR timetable: NR has said the infrastructure isn't ready, nor is there sufficient power. And mindful of the disruption to customers elsewhere, it was decided at a national level that a period of stability was needed. Even before its franchise started, SWR was preparing for a major change in December 2018, so it is disappointed that the May 2018 timetable would be rolled over. Some minor changes will happen in May 2019, but not what WLPAs was hoping for. Even so, SWR will deliver additional capacity, and continue to work with NR, the DfT, customers and stakeholders to implement timetable changes to ensure maximum benefit with minimal disruption.

SWR's contract with the DfT is being renegotiated accordingly. Originally it agreed to pay the government a premium of £2.6 billion over the seven-year contract, but the company has suffered an 11% fall in passenger figures over the last year, due partly to engineering work and strikes. Compared to 2015/6, on-time arrivals fell by 6.2% in 2017/8, with 68% of the delays attributable to NR.

ORR, the rail regulator, has rejected Grand Southern's bid to run an open access service from Waterloo to Southampton, as it would take custom away from SWR, and there is insufficient Class 442 stock available.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

The new Southern timetable introduced in May has worked well, but good performance has been marred by infrastructure problems such as signal and points failures, emergency engineering works, trespassers, suicides and storm damage. The interim weekday Thameslink timetable from 16 July omitted four Horsham - Peterborough services in each direction: the 1125, 1455, 1725 and 2055 from Horsham, and the 1000, 1330, 1600 and 2200 from London Bridge. However, to cover the 2055 from Horsham, a replacement bus leaves at 2035, calling at Littlehaven, Ifield and Crawley, and arriving at Three Bridges at 2115. It is hoped that the missing Thameslink trains will soon be restored.

The guest speaker at the AGM will be Angie Doll, Southern's Passenger Services Director. Any spare Class 377s should be used on the West Coastway rather than go to South Eastern. They are desperately needed to replace the 40 year old, toiletless Class 313s, particularly between Brighton and Portsmouth.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

On 6 September, BTPG raised the following issues with senior GWR and NR management:

- The current blockades, when trains and rail replacement buses miss their connection.
- Punctuality and reliability problems caused by the transition from diesel to electric.
- Missed connections at Newbury: BTPG stressed the need to hold trains.
- NR policy of automatically putting on buses whenever the turn-back points could freeze: GWR hopes this will cease, but will make unscheduled stops on through trains to maintain a service.
- Timely announcements of short notice cancellations, ideally with a 'real person' over the PA.
- The May 2019 timetable: BTPG wants to retain the current service, but speeded up by the IETs, and with an extra service at around 0730.
- More parking at Bedwyn, with Hungerford set to permanently lose 96 spaces. However, a Bedwyn car park would not be revenue earning, so any solution needs to be a joint enterprise.
- Commuter trains westbound to Bath, Bristol or Exeter, and support for the idea of a future Devizes Parkway station.
- A dedicated bus service to Marlborough.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

Despite its much friendlier and responsive attitude, SWR's performance in its first year has been a major disappointment, with a serious lack of information when things go wrong, even at Waterloo; skip-stopping for operational convenience, and Lymington trains leaving Brockenhurst just as the mainline 'connection' arrives. First Group did assure a stakeholder meeting that that was one station where connections could be held for a few minutes.

Last year's extensive consultation raised hopes of an improved First/MTR timetable from December, but virtually all such changes have been deferred, whilst delay in delivering the promised capacity improvements will also reduce revenue: the lower seating capacity of SWR's recently refurbished Wessex Electric trains compared with the Class 450 stock means they cannot take over Waterloo-Portsmouth services until the additional hourly train on that route has started. Nor will the Wessex Electrics get new, higher-performance motors until NR has remodelled the power supply.

Passengers with a SWR Touch Smart card can now buy a ten-ticket carnet at a 5% discount. Each ticket is valid for one day up to two months from the date of purchase, and can be used all day for travel between the stations. And to help passengers who cannot get salary advances to purchase annual seasons, SWR has also introduced an Auto Renewal Monthly Season Ticket, which allows passengers who buy eleven monthly season tickets in succession by direct debit to get the twelfth free.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

The Avocet line between Exeter and Exmouth has just a single passing loop at Topsham station. During the day, every train crosses another at this point, so any late running causes extended knock-on delays. Exmouth bound trains more than 13 minutes late may be terminated at Topsham, but the tiny shelter on the down platform cannot accommodate what could be 50 or more people [*the next project for a DfT/GWR Customer and Communities Improvement Fund bid? – Ed.*] Recently, GWR has started skip-stopping to recover time, which avoids overcrowding on subsequent trains, but needs careful monitoring. Decisions must be made early enough to give passengers timely warning. And if a train then reaches its destination less than 5 mins late, its performance figure is presumably unaffected, or does the part cancellation count?

GWR has bid farewell to six more single car Class 153s leaving it with just five, all of which will go to Wales next May. Two orphaned Class 150 units have been replaced by 150207 in Northern livery with a GWR logo. The transfer of Turbos from Reading to Bristol has slowed. Their use on the Cardiff-Portsmouth route awaits completion of the Newbury electrification, and infrastructure work at Portsmouth Harbour, but will eventually release stock to ease the shortage in Devon and Cornwall.

RAILFUTURE

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Nominations for Railfuture's seventh RUG Awards have now closed. The awards will be made at the [annual conference](#) in Reading on Saturday, 10 November, for which bookings can be accepted until 8 November, with special discount rates for non-members booking the combined conference+membership package.

PASSENGER GROUP

In respect of fares and ticketing, the Group agreed in principle that:

- The validity of peak and off-peak fares should be standardised, based on arrival time in the morning and departure time in the evening, but with a degree of flexibility
- Return tickets should be available for any journey where a round trip is feasible in a day, with significant time spent at the destination
- Advance purchase tickets should be retained
- As far as possible, fare levels for comparable journeys should be broadly the same
- Anomalies with shoulder peak fares should be resolved, with a consistent validity of off-peak and super off-peak fares, and with off-peak singles priced at half the comparable off-peak return
- All first class fares should cost 150% of the standard class fare; mark-ups of 200% were unjustified. The cost of weekend upgrades should reflect the facilities provided and the journey length
- Future fare increases should be based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI)
- Existing ticketing formats and purchase methods should remain available for the foreseeable future, so as not to disadvantage current travellers
- Any changes to fare structures and levels should be phased in over several years.

On production of a ticket, anyone arriving at a National Trust property by public transport receives discounted admission, though this is not well publicised.

Seats for new trains specified by the DfT, eg the Class 800 Intercity Express Trains (IET) or Class 700, cannot be changed for more comfortable ones although, following complaints from passengers, one operator is considering fitting improved first class seats to its IET fleet. A Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) research project aims to produce a comfort specification for the seats on new trains.

RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE

The July branch meeting focused on three of its RUGs and their progress. David Walsh of SELRAP listed the stages in the process of delivering a new line between Skipton and Colne. Its completion would be an outstanding achievement for the Group, and justly reward their years of hard work. Last February, Secretary of State Chris Grayling announced a new study on the viability of the line, as part of improving connectivity across the North of England. He also introduced the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline, with rules set by the Treasury, so control moves from NR to the DfT. Funding can be public money additional to NR's budget, and from private sources, freeing the project from many of the normal constraints on rail improvements.

Three groups along the Trans-Pennine line had merged to form the Stalybridge to Huddersfield RUG. It covers local stations in both Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, and aims to cross the divide. Whereas the Northern service had called at all local stations, TPE currently used skip stopping: one train an hour calls at some local stations, and the other train each hour calls at the other stations. However, from December, the stopping Manchester-Leeds service will be split at Huddersfield into two local services, respectively serving Batley and Slaithwaite, so these calls will be cut from the Hull-Manchester service.

The Aire Valley RUG said that its line has had no significant improvements since 2001, and suffers from overcrowding: the 4-car Class 333 trains with just 360 seats regularly carry 600 passengers, and even the new 6-car trains promised by Northern will have only 410 seats. Nor is there currently any plan to extend the 4-car platforms. Passengers on full trains will not be able to get to a carriage from which they can alight. The RUG is campaigning to extend all of these platforms, hitting the local media and meeting MPs, resulting in the issue being raised in Parliament.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA

Kelvedon, Marks Tey, Stowmarket, Diss and Whittlesford Parkway all have major accessibility problems. Together they have an annual footfall of some 3.6m. Two are important junctions, where connections need to be made quickly, while all five have car parks on either side of the tracks. They all need lifts, but share a standard design, so RFEA suggests a single package to reap the benefit of scale. The New Anglia LEP will have funds available in the autumn, so GA ought to have a nomination ready under the "Access for All" scheme (see below); bids are open until November.

Whittlesford Parkway station in particular is a mess: road access on either side is inconvenient, but its footfall is expected to grow to serve new science parks, whilst the Imperial War Museum at nearby Duxford lacks any regular public transport. So in April, RFEA hosted a meeting with the local RUG, GA and parish councillors, coinciding with publication of a "Whittlesford Parkway Station Masterbrief" by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP). Then in July, RFEA attended a project stakeholder workshop. It hopes that the GCP will adopt the report, and fund the improvements needed to turn Whittlesford into a model travel hub for the area.

By the end of the summer, GA plans to install state-of-the-art TVMs at 30 of its smaller stations. Each will have a 24/7 audio link so passengers can, if they wish, talk to a GA "virtual ticket agent". The Newmarket TVMs were prone to teething problems, so RFEA hopes that these new German machines will be more reliable, and really improve passenger experience at the unstaffed stations.

Whereas Lowestoft has seen a 9% growth in footfall over the last 5 years, Great Yarmouth has seen a 10% decline. Every train on the branch terminates at Norwich, and the hourly service interval compares poorly with buses every 15mins. Great Yarmouth station is on the edge of town, but lacks bus integration, and pedestrian access is poor. Hopefully, the advent of Stadler bi-mode trains next year, and improved pedestrian access to the town, will arrest the decline.

RAILFUTURE SOUTHEAST

Amid the mayhem, one timetable success story was Railfuture's proposal for the "Eastbourne overlap". It was taken up by the Hastings and Rother Rail Users Alliance of six RUGs, but has fallen victim to its own success, with an increasing lack of capacity: sometimes over 100 prospective passengers are left behind. However, a Javelin service from St Pancras to Rye and Eastbourne would require a link between HS1 and Platform 2 at Ashford. NR's Andrew Wood said that this could not be done at the same time as urgent track renewal, but should be co-ordinated with the subsequent re-signalling project.

Three years after a London Travelwatch recommendation, TfL's latest "[London Connections](#)" map has an additional symbol to show pairs of stations that are close enough to walk between. [*My nomination would be Lancaster Gate – Paddington, which appear to be some way apart on the tube map - Ed.*]

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

A group from Dementia Friendly Keighley enjoyed a day trip to Gisburn Forest near Slaidburn organised by the Leeds-Morecambe CRP, Northern and the Forest of Bowland AONB. The group travelled from Keighley to Bentham by train, and then by coach via Bowland Knotts summit to the Birch Hills Trail on the edge of Stocks reservoir. This specially adapted walk has been designed to assist those living with dementia: its direction posts have 'forget-me-not' symbols, and there are benches and picnic tables at regular intervals.

On 14 September, the Friends of Bentham Station celebrated its 7th birthday, along with its twin, the Mytholmroyd Station Partnership; representatives of Northern, ACoRP, the Lancaster and Skipton RUG, and the Bentham Line CRP; members of Bloomin' Bentham, who tend the gardens and tubs at the station, and other local people who have contributed to FOBS' projects.

Community Rail Lancashire has just completed a year-long engagement with 11 Northern apprentices. As well as learning about community rail, the group developed and implemented eye-catching projects at Burnley Manchester Rd and Blackburn stations. Work at Blackburn included the installation of additional seating and planters, a map of the town centre, artwork for the waiting room, dementia friendly signage, and a link to the new bus station. Children from a local primary school and artist Alistair Nicholson helped the apprentices to produce a colourful mural depicting Blackburn's past, present and future. CRL is looking forward to welcoming a new group of apprentices this month.

As part of Blackpool's recent rail revolution, Kirkham & Wesham station will benefit from an improved track layout, a new platform, lifts to all platforms, and electrification. On 13 September, Fylde MP Mark Menzies unveiled a commemorative plaque as NR, Northern, Lancashire County Council, local councillors and RUG members marked the upgrade during a short ceremony.

Church and Oswaldtwistle station was in a very poor state-both inside and out, so volunteer Rotarians and Friends of Rotary decided to adopt it, with the aim of restoring its former glory. They weeded both platforms and, aided by Northern's contractors, completely repainted the station. Outside its entrance, approximately 30 yards of undergrowth was replaced by 4 tons of chippings and two large planters financed by the Prospects Foundation. But the 'Show Stopper' is a large model wooden engine on the Colne platform, with coaches brimming with begonias. Immediate Past President, Jim Hargreaves, proposed the purchase, delivery and installation of the train, built by Barrel Creations of Huntly, Aberdeenshire.

TRANSPORT FOCUS

After the torrid summer of timetable disruption, patchy performance, and strike action, TF is working to ensure the Government's Rail Review puts passengers at the heart of services. It needs to sweep up the developing themes that have emerged from Glaister and other recent reviews, including the joint fares consultation. TF will work to ensure that the passenger voice is paramount.

Case study: as Mrs D boarded a Chester train at Manchester, Oxford Road, she realised she had left her shopping on a seat at the station. When Mrs D called, Northern said that Oxford Road had her shopping, and would hold it for 90 days; she was also given a reference number. But on returning to Oxford Road, Mrs D was told that her shopping wasn't there - but it could be at Manchester Piccadilly. She provided the reference number only for the staff to say that they "don't deal with references". This was then repeated at Piccadilly! Mrs D submitted a complaint, and then a chaser, but Northern did not respond to either. Following TF's intervention, Northern confirmed that Oxford Road had already disposed of Mrs D's items; it has a limited amount of space to keep lost property, and following an influx had had to dispose of some items before the 90-day deadline. At TF's behest, Northern agreed to reimburse Mrs D both for her nugatory train journeys, and for the cost of the items, using her bank statement as proof of purchase.

FELIXSTOWE TRAVEL WATCH

Enhancement of the Felixstowe branch – track doubling at Trimley, with associated level crossing and signalling improvements - is going ahead as planned. The new track bed is virtually complete. Track-laying will take place later this year, together with the delivery to GA of new 3-coach trains.

Where up to 4 children are accompanied by at least one adult child on an off-peak GA return journey, each child can travel for a flat fare of £2. The child fare can be obtained from an on-board conductor, but is not available from ticket vending machines.

...and now the rest of the news ...

Bids are open until November for train operators to nominate stations under the "Access for All" scheme. £300m is available over the next 5 years, and funding decisions will be announced in April 2019. Bids are weighed against five criteria:

- Passenger footfall
- Incidence of local disability
- Local circumstances, eg a nearby hospital, or a high volume of interchange passengers
- Availability of third-party funding
- Distance from the nearest step-free station.

The DfT has cancelled the 2019 [Cross Country franchise](#) award. Due to its unique nature, traversing the network from Aberdeen to Penzance, an award at that time could prejudice the ongoing review of the whole rail system. The existing franchisee will continue, with options for the future considered in due course. All other franchise competitions and ongoing rail projects will continue as planned.

Before it is rolled out across Britain next autumn, London Northwestern Railway, West Midlands Railway, Greater Anglia and South Western Railway are trialling a "life-changing" app that tells station staff where every disabled rail user who has booked assistance is at any time. Currently, station staff receive a list of such requests in the morning, but this cannot be updated if things change. So when actually required, staff may be in the wrong place or simply unavailable, leaving passengers without the assistance they need.

As part of its regulatory function, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) enforces competition and applies market powers in matters relating to the supply of services relating to railways. Its [market study](#) into the supply of ticket vending machines and automatic ticket gates highlights concerns about how weak competition in these markets may be detrimental to both passengers and taxpayers. ORR is also reviewing the 58 responses received to its consultation on its draft determination for the 2018 Periodic Review of NR, and will shortly publish its Final Determination.

Unsurprisingly, the East West Rail Consortium's [response](#) to the TWAO consultation for the Western Section strongly supports the case for EWR Phase 2, and the principle of the application: "EWR provides an attractive, viable alternative to the car through the restoration of the mothballed section of the railway, enabling fast and frequent scheduled rail services which, by improving connectivity...will encourage people to switch from car to rail, [and so] deliver growth with reduced environmental impact."

[Hindsight](#), a new app about to launch, claims to take the guesswork out of buying train tickets. You plan the journeys you want and travel as normal, paying as you go. But after each journey, Retrospective Pricing™ automatically calculates the cheapest combination of fares based on your travel so far. In the real world, plans change - now tickets can too: passengers can get cheaper train tickets after they've travelled.

...and finally

Thomas the Tank Engine is getting a makeover. Tidmouth shed will gain some female engines, new companions for Thomas and Gordon. Out go Henry and Edward, and in come strong, speedy female locos like Rebecca, a blond Bulleid Pacific. Girls form about 40% of the audience, and representing females only as carriages pulled by the male engines is behind the times.

In August, the toilet at Bentham station was twinned with a latrine on the outskirts of Paquip, a village close to the town of Santa Clara La Laguna, in the Sololá region of Guatemala. Toilet Twinning is a water and sanitation initiative aimed at 'flushing away poverty, one toilet at a time'. Donating £60 to twin a toilet helps to provide a proper latrine, clean water and the information those in poverty need to stay healthy.

Miniature railway buffs should be watching Channel 5's [The Great Model Railway Challenge](#) on Friday evenings, with the Grand Final on 9 November. Railway modellers compete to create miniature masterpieces against the clock.

CONSULTATIONS

- Southampton City Council: [Connected Southampton - Transport Strategy 2040](#), closes 16 October.
- TfGM: [The Future of Manchester City Centre Transport](#), closes 17 October.
- DfT: [Angel Road Station Closure](#), closes 21 November.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local Transport Authority.

EVENTS

Do please keep your events coming, both to me and to [Roger Blake \(Railfuture\)](#), who maintains the Railfuture [List of Events](#) to attend, and now a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a Calendar of Events embedded in a document may be discarded, and that is a problem if the venue changes from month to month, a stand-alone copy would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

- Railfuture events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

October

- Saturday 13. Cumbrian Coast Rail Users' Group, Methodist Church hall, **Seascale**, 1305 – **NB** change of time
- Monday 15. Avocet Line Rail Users Group AGM, Globe Hotel, **Topsham**, 1900.
- Tuesday 16. Felixstowe Travel Watch, Salvation Army Church, Cobbold Road, **Felixstowe**, 1430 (also 12 February and 7 May (AGM)).
- Thursday 18. Magor Action Group On Rail, Golden Lion, **Magor**, 1930 (and the 3rd Thursday every month).
- Saturday 20. Railfuture Herts and Beds, St Paul's Church, Blandford Road, **St Albans**, 1045.
- Saturday 20. Campaign for Borders Rail AGM, Hawick High School, Buccleuch Road, **Hawick**, TD9 0EG, 1300
- Tuesday 23. Chesham and District Transport Users' Group AGM, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (also 11 December.)
- Wednesday 24. North Cheshire RUG AGM, Frodsham Community Centre, Fluin Lane, **Frodsham**, 1900.
- Saturday 27. Railfuture Yorkshire, The Creative Lounge, The Showroom & Workstation, Paternoster Row, **Sheffield**, S1 2BX, 1300.
- Monday 29. English Regional Transport Association, The Metropolitan Bar, 7 Station Parade, Marylebone Road, **London** NW1 5LA.
- Tuesday 30. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife College, Methilhaven Road, **Buckhaven**, KY8 1EA, 1830 (also last Tuesday of every month except December and July).

November

- Saturday 3. West Sussex Rail Users Association AGM, Studio of the Capitol, North Street, **Horsham**, 1000.
- Tuesday 6. English Regional Transport Association, Rupert Brooke, 8-10 Castle St, **Rugby**, CV21 2TP, 1400
- Tuesday 6. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, **Clitheroe**, 1430.
- Wednesday 7. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (TBC).
- Thursday 8. Lakes Line Rail User Group AGM, The Village Hall, Abbey Square, **Staveley**, 1930.
- Saturday 10. Railfuture Rail Users Conference / RUG Awards, Novotel Hotel, 25b Friar St, Reading, RG1 1DP, 1000.
- Saturday 10. Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association. Details TBN.
- Monday 12. Skipton East Lancs Rail Action Partnership, Herriots Hotel, **Skipton**; (Also 28 January 2019, Earby, and 11 March, AGM at The Lesser Municipal Hall, Albert Road, Colne).
- Saturday 24. English Regional Transport Association Aylesbury Forum, The Bell, 40 Market Square, **Aylesbury**, HP20 1TX, 1400.
- Tuesday 27. Railfuture Surrey, NEW Travelodge Redhill Town Centre, 26 London Road, **Redhill**, RH1 1NN, 1800.

Further Ahead

- 13 December. Westminster Social Policy Forum: Next steps for the Cambridge - Milton Keynes - Oxford Corridor, Central **London** TBN, 0900
- 5 February 2019. Cheshire Best Kept Stations Awards, The Grange Theatre, Bradburns Lane, Hartford, Northwich, 1900.
- 23 February. English Regional Transport Association Rugby Forum, Rupert Brooke, 8-10 Castle St, **Rugby**, CV21 2TP, 1400
- 9 March. English Regional Transport Association Olney Forum, The Bull, 9 Market Place, **Olney**, MK46 4EA, 1400.
- 23 March. English Regional Transport Association, The Bell, 40 Market Square, **Aylesbury**, HP20 1TX, 1400.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise indicated, views expressed in Rail User Express are those of the contributing organization, and not necessarily shared by Railfuture.

Contact Roger Smith by e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk, or phone: 01462 815992. Follow us on Twitter @Railfuture

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