



March 2021

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Building on the idea of cycle hire in major cities, wouldn't it be a good idea if you could hire an electric car with your rail ticket to complete your journey? Any such scheme would have to be administered but, unlike bike hire, would be completed at the station for the return journey.

Where are all the rail announcements that were supposed to be on hold pending the budget?

Roger Smith

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

Friends of the West Highland Lines

FoWHL and The Scottish Association for Public Transport contributed a comprehensive joint [response](#) to Transport Scotland's stakeholder engagement regarding its Rolling Stock Strategy.

An Argyll & Bute Council priority is a new WHL station at Shandon to serve the Faslane naval base, which is set to expand. The Scottish Government is funding a Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership study into opportunities in the Helensburgh area. Extending the overhead wires from Craighendran to Garelochhead, where there is a passing loop, could also be considered.

Alvance Aluminium plans to double production from 40,000 to 80,000 tons/year. Unfortunately, the last remaining freight service on the WHL, the bauxite (alumina) service from North Blyth, Northumberland, to its hydro-electric powered smelter at Fort William, could be withdrawn in favour of shipping it into Corpach. Haulage of the finished product moved to road some years ago.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

On 10 February, over 30 members of the community joined an online meeting with NR on the proposed East Linton station. The discussion covered vehicle and pedestrian access and car parking, the footbridge/lifts, and the proximity of the primary school. There were also questions on all aspects of the construction work, and when the station would open. Subject to planning permission from East Lothian Council, this should be within four years.

Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line

FoSCL, the S&C Development Company Ltd and the S&C Trust made a joint submission to Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review. A network diagram made the point that the Midland Railway built the S&C as the most direct possible route from London to Scotland, and highlighted the relevance of Derby-Sheffield-Leeds-Settle-Carlisle for UCR purposes. The S&C has the capacity to cope easily with fast through traffic, local traffic and freight.

Joanne Crompton's application to replace John Ingham as FoSCL Treasurer was most impressive. She is a self-employed accountant from Darwen, Lancashire, a volunteer Steam Locomotive Fireman on the East Lancs Railway, and treasurer of the Bury Standard 4 group. Having co-opted her in the interim, the Committee will propose her as the next Treasurer at the AGM in May.

Ribble Valley Rail

The RVR [website](#) has had a complete re-design. Comments would be welcome.

The Restoring Your Railway project is making good progress, with the consultants Stantec asking:

- How would you see improved connectivity benefiting those residing in your community?
- Would there be greater benefit in extending services beyond Hellifield eastbound towards Skipton, or westbound towards Settle and points beyond towards Carlisle?
- If additional services were provided south of Clitheroe, where do you think the most beneficial connections would be to: ie enhancing the service frequency to Manchester Victoria, or a new direct connection to Preston?

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Northern is slimming its May timetable to protect reliability and punctuality across the network. The Smithy Bridge service is halved to hourly, but the West Yorkshire services will continue to fly through. According to the industry standard demand tool, more passengers would travel into Manchester and Rochdale (even in Covid 19) if the needs of all of Rochdale's local stations were given due weight, but the bias towards running fast services remains.

TfGM did ask Northern to look at reinstating a second train per hour at Mills Hill, but this meant a call had to be pulled elsewhere. So it requested the switch from Smithy Bridge (annual patronage 200,000) to Mills Hill (340,000), and which has just benefitted from Access for All and car park works, whilst Smithy Bridge is within one mile of Littleborough.

In the consultation (now closed) on thinning services to Manchester Oxford Road, Piccadilly and Airport stations, Greater Manchester residents have a greater claim to these than North Wales, which is now also served by Liverpool Airport. And if all North Wales trains went to Victoria, the half-hour service would be more attractive to passengers.

Proposals to transform the area around Rochdale station are out to public consultation (see below). Ian Holt believes that the bus interchange must be at the front of the station, as the low bridges on Richard Street and Milkstone Road would prevent double deck vehicles from using Miall Street. The 471 bus, the only one now serving the railway station, would have to operate via Drake Street, making the nearest bus stop for Heywood and Bury passengers a quarter of a mile away. In 1970, that service was used to support the argument to close the rail service to Bury.

Friends of the Barton Line

Transpennine Express (TPE) is working with the DfT and East Midland Railway (EMR) to find the optimum solution for the transfer of the Barton line to EMR planned for May. EMR's May timetable would increase Grimsby Town - Lincoln Central services from 7 to 11 daily.

Northern Trains has confirmed that PRM dispensation for Class 153 units had been extended to 31 May 2021. However, the service is already running with EMR Class 153 units, so it is assumed that they have received similar dispensation. FBL Secretary Anthony Berridge wonders if the Barton line service is unique in requiring three TOCs to operate it: Northern runs it, EMR provides the stock, and TPE the staff!

FBL is seeking views on the option in DfT's Manchester Recovery Task Force consultation to terminate the TPE Cleethorpes services at Liverpool Lime Street via Warrington rather than at Manchester Airport, effective May 2022.

The Secretary completed a JNP Group questionnaire concerning both the current and proposed provision of accessibility at Barrow Haven station. The Barton Cleethorpes CRP continues to press for the installation of Customer Information Screens at Barton line stations.

Keighley & Worth Valley Railway renovated their running-in boards using marine ply sealed around the edges with waterproof pva and no moulding on the bottom edge. FBL was now seeking quotes to rebuild the Thornton Abbey boards. A local company could be approached for funding in exchange for unobtrusive publicity on the boards.

NR Customer Assistant Kate Smith cleared FBL and the Barton Lions to remove excess vegetation and self-set trees from the old goods platform at Barton, exposing its full frontage. Subsequently, tree surgeon Mark Burton generously felled the sycamore trees gratis.

East Norfolk Transport Users Association

In Greater Anglia's timetable consultation, ENTUA noted that all Great Yarmouth services terminate at Norwich, whereas those from Kings Lynn, another major Norfolk town, serve Ely, Cambridge and London. According to the franchise submission, even Lowestoft is promised four direct services each weekday to London.

It is highly likely that the majority of rail passengers from Great Yarmouth travel to destinations beyond Norwich. Extending a Great Yarmouth - Norwich service every two hours to Cambridge and Stansted Airport would cater for this demand. A twice-daily Peterborough service would be particularly useful for holidaymakers in the summer. It could be provided either by GA Stadler trains, or by extending EMRs' cross-country services. There is also scope for some additional services via Cantley and Reedham.

The reintroduction of one or two direct services from Great Yarmouth to London Liverpool Street would "reinvigorate interest and patronage for passengers using the line and prove very popular during the summer months." Such a link could be provided via Norwich or by Lowestoft – London morning trains starting from Great Yarmouth and reversing at Reedham and Lowestoft, with return services following the opposite pattern later in the day.

English Regional Transport Association

Some borough councillors are opposed to East West Rail (EWR) running through Bedford Midland. One spoke of it being "doomed" to suffer freight trains at night, while another denied that the Conservatives had supported a northern route to Cambridge. However, EWR Consortium member Cllr Michael Headley said it had been the Borough Council's "long-standing position with cross-party support for EWR to serve Bedford Midland Station."

ERTA has serious concerns with the northern route. It believes that Oxford trains should come into new bays at Bedford Midland, and reverse to head east. Reinstating the St Johns triangle would then allow freight trains to bypass the town centre. Also, the Interchange Retail Park outside Bedford needs a station with a footbridge to Kempston for local trains to serve the local area.

ERTA believes that rail in London is lacking in three key areas:

- Light rail in Central and West London, despite growing volumes of people
- Orbital rail links around East and West London for radial traffic from the rest of the country to serve the South East, South Coast and the Channel Tunnel.
- Cross-Thames tunnels and bridges for north-south rail travel within London to take more freight off the roads.

Currently rail freight from Felixstowe and elsewhere goes across London, and out via the West Coast Main Line, taking time, energy and London-centric capacity. ERTA suggests new build from Pitsea to Rayleigh, and from Purfleet and Grays in the north to Crayford in the south, with branches to Slade Green and Dartford. Linking Tonbridge-Gatwick-Horsham-Guildford-Heathrow-Old Oak Common-Chiltern Lines would create an outer orbital.

Tonbridge Line Commuters

The Southeastern network lacks capacity planning. Since 22 February, Tonbridge - London off-peak services have been cut from 6/hr to just 2; shortening most of them to just 4 carriages resulted in an overall 83% drop in capacity! This level of service is inadequate to maintain a safe level of physical distancing on-board for those who still need to travel at this time. As restrictions are gradually eased, service levels ought to increase in order to meet the needs of people travelling again, be it for work, school or leisure, but Southeastern does not plan on any further changes to the timetable until May. Even then, only a “4 to 5% step up” can be expected until December. However, this applies only to the number of trains, so 4 carriage services could return to 8.

Tunbridge Wells Rail Travellers

The Kent Rail Action Plan 2021 included: power supply enhancement in West Kent to support more/longer trains, HS1 extension to Hastings and Bexhill, and improved connectivity between Kent and Gatwick. [Subsequently, the [Kent Rail Strategy 2021](#) that will inform KCC's statutory Local Transport Plan 5 set out its aspirations for services, infrastructure and rolling stock - Ed.]

Southeastern has a scheme in hand that will involve a discount “providing greater value for the enlarged number of people who will not travel into the office 5 days a week, post-pandemic. This should also incentivise people to travel in at more convenient, quieter times.”

Tarka Rail Association

TRA hopes that the blockades on the Tarka line after Easter will lead to speed increases and thus shorter journey times. The work also includes platform extensions at Eggesford.

Given the limited space on the Class 158 units now in use on the Tarka line, TRA sees it as a missed opportunity not to convert redundant single-carriage Class 153 units to carry cycles and surfboards as Scotrail has done for use on the Highland lines.

The number of engineering trains making deliveries on the Okehampton line from where it diverges from the Tarka Line at Coleford Junction is encouraging. It received £40m in the Budget, but there is still no firm date for restoration of a passenger rail service.

RAILFUTURE

Rf welcomes new members, both individual and groups: the more we are, the more weight to our campaigns. Join [here](#): from the "Membership Types" menu top right, select either the appropriate category of individual or, to affiliate, select "RUG or similar". Read the latest from Rf on [News and views](#), [Press releases](#), [Railfuture in the news](#), and [Consultation responses](#).

The Rf AGM on 17 July will take the form of a short formal meeting in the morning, and one or two speakers in the afternoon. It has provisionally booked the Priory Rooms in Birmingham and hopes to be able to go ahead with a physical meeting. If not, the meeting will be virtual.

1 March saw fare rises of 2.6% across England and Wales. "This is the usual annual punishment for rail passengers, just slightly delayed" said Rf spokesman Bruce Williamson. "In fact it's worse than that, as the government is screwing the public with an extra 1% over and above inflation. As part of the government's announcement of a gradual easing of lockdown, they should be encouraging the public to start using trains again, but instead they're gradually pricing the railways out of existence. It just doesn't make sense to kick the rail industry when it's down."

Transport for the North's final report on its preferred route for Northern Powerhouse Rail published on 8 March was supposed to await the Government's long overdue Integrated Rail Plan. An Rf [commentary](#) on the TfN proposals suggests how they should be prioritised and improved. Top of its priorities are:

- A high-speed line from Leeds to through stations at Bradford and Manchester Piccadilly, linking directly into HS2 serving Manchester Airport and Birmingham
- Electrification and capacity upgrade of the [Hope Valley Line](#) from Sheffield to Manchester.

Better late than never...on 11 March, HS2 Minister Andrew Stephenson announced the award of £137m to upgrade the Hope Valley Line. A passing loop between Bamford and Jagers Lane Bridge in Hathersage, and the addition of a second track and platform at Dore & Topley station will allow a third fast service each hour, and reduce the Sheffield – Manchester journey time from 50min to 40min. First announced in 2018, [the £80m scheme](#) should start next year and complete in 2023.

PASSENGER GROUP

Neil Middleton presented his [paper](#) calling for Flexible Season Tickets in the near term. DfT has tasked the rail industry with introducing them this summer. Alternatives, which would have to use the rail industry's existing ticketing infrastructure, could include the use of a phone app with a QR code that can be scanned at the start and end of the journey, pre-paid smartcards or contactless payment by debit/credit card. On smartcard enabled routes that should be the only option. Paper based ticketing has problems with passengers having to write in the date of their journey on the carnet ticket before starting their journey.

Head of Passenger Group Allison Cosgrove took up the DfT's refusal to allow refunds or extensions to Railcards with the House of Commons Transport Select Committee; it responded by suggesting that Railcard holders might be offered a free return ticket for a future journey. But although it takes up specific issues, it does not tend to take up individual cases with the Transport Secretary.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

An [article](#) by Nigel Rose envisages a comprehensive Oxford Metro network. The Cowley branch would be reinstated with through services to Hanborough. A new branch from the North Cotswold line to RAF Brize Norton would serve Witney and Salt Cross Garden Village, a major development on the north side of Eynsham.

To complement the railway running north-south, a tramway would run east-west through the city centre to the John Radcliffe hospital complex. Further afield, the line in from Didcot would be four-tracked and electrified, with EWR extended at least as far as Swindon via a new Wantage/ Grove parkway station.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN has £40k available in its 2021-22 [Integrated Sustainable Transport scheme](#), with up to £8k per grant aimed at community rail initiatives to help better connect the railways with buses, community transport, walking and cycling. Community rail grants are also still available in the TfGM and SWR areas, and it hopes to announce the 2021-22 DfT Community Rail Development Fund and main small grants fund shortly.

Bolton Station Community Development Partnership commends The Platform Anthology, beautifully illustrated by Allison Timmins. It contains the winning and shortlisted poems on the theme of Journey from the recent competition funded by TfGM, and represents the creative work of over fifty people with ties to Bolton.

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

Sir Peter Hendy has published the [Interim Report](#) of his Union Connectivity Review. The UK has left the EU Trans-European Network for Transport; in recent years it put in an average of €447m/year, but received back only a tenth of that figure, so there is a strong case to invest that sum in a multi-modal UK transport network tailored to its own needs, including the levelling-up agenda. The final UCR report will outline a new network with a strategic pan-UK focus, and make recommendations relating to its development, implementation, operation and funding. The feasibility of a bridge or tunnel between Scotland and Northern Ireland will be formally assessed, and the Government has committed £20m on plans to upgrade existing rail, road, sea and air links. Further submissions to the UCR would be welcomed and fully considered.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has had a cross-party call for the £500m paid by London motorists in vehicle tax to provide long-term funding for TfL.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris and Innovate UK have launched another First of a Kind competition. The £9m fund is aimed at developing pioneering technology and cutting-edge ideas to improve journeys and decarbonise the rail network.

The National Infrastructure Commission's [Annual Monitoring Report](#) proposes a ten-point plan to accelerate action to turn government's ambitions into reality. NIC Chair Sir John Armitt writes: "We anticipate that publication of the National Infrastructure Strategy [last November] will catalyse decision making and investment across all sectors...2020's policy statements set the bar high: 2021 must be a year of turning policy goals into delivery."

Citing 'the current state of rail finances', the Office of Rail and Road has rejected Grand Union's application to run a train service between South Wales and London, as it could abstract £25.6m. In 2016, the ORR approved further open access services on the East Coast Main Line forecast to abstract £24m (£26.32m today). However, the competition drove up usage, whilst InterCity rail services are expected to recover much faster than commuter services.

NR has awarded Mott MacDonald a £900,000 contract to develop the concept designs for the [Edinburgh Waverley Masterplan](#), assessing and selecting the most appropriate options.

On 16 March, the North East Joint Transport Committee was set to adopt the £6.8bn North East Transport Plan, including work to reopen the dismantled Leamside Line between Tursdale Junction in County Durham and Pelaw in Gateshead to passenger and freight, investment in electric vehicle charging, a local bus partnership and smart ticketing.

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has granted an additional £66m from the Transforming Cities Fund for a new station at Headbolt Lane in Kirkby, with 300 P&R spaces, a bus interchange, and step-free access throughout. The development forms part of the plan to extend the Merseyrail network beyond Kirkby to Skelmersdale.

The West Midlands Combined Authority is set to buy the land needed to restore Aldridge station, east of Walsall, for a Birmingham service, and has also approved the full business case for a new £24m Interchange in Dudley as part of the wider regeneration of the town centre. The budget allocated some £59m for new stations at Darlaston and Willenhall between Wolverhampton and Walsall, and for new stations at Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell on a re-opened Camp Hill line in Birmingham.

Because of the Covid lockdown, there was little fanfare on 14 February when the 0912 from Machynlleth to Aberystwyth called at Bow Street on the Cambrian Line, the first train to do so since 1965. The new P&R station is a single-track halt. The £8m project took 11 years to come to fruition.

The southern end of the Heart of Wales line has reopened after a freight train derailed last August at Llangennech, and the wagons caught fire spilling around 350,000 litres of diesel. To protect the local environment, it took 37,500 hours of work to excavate 30,000 tons of contaminated soil.

Geoffrey Blyth notes that the Durham Coast resignalling project mentioned last month covered not just the Billingham/Stockton area but the lines from north of Stockton to south of Sunderland; from Norton West to Ferryhill, and the start of the Seal Sands freight branch. Nine signal boxes were closed, and control transferred to the new Hartlepool workstation in York ROC, which will also absorb the Bowesfield workstation that controls east of Darlington to north of Stockton to make way for a new one at Middlesbrough.

Despite record levels on the River Thames and over 35 flood warnings, Oxford – Didcot rail services were unaffected thanks to the 2016 Hinksey Flood Alleviation scheme, which raised 400m of track underneath Old Abingdon Road in Oxford by around 40cm, and installed two new culverts.

To regenerate brownfield land with up to 13,000 new homes, the London Borough of Enfield foresaw the need for a new Meridian Water station and the rail infrastructure to support a 'turn up and go' service. Rail investment in mainline infrastructure has traditionally been a NR domain, with challenging levels of complexity, but in a Rail Business Daily [article](#), Peter George, Enfield Council Programme Director, and Damien Gent, MD of CPMS Infrastructure, set out the ground breaking work needed to finance and deliver the project.

NR has begun a long-term project to modernise track and signalling on lines into London Victoria. The first phase, between Victoria and Balham, and from Clapham Junction to Shepherds Bush will continue at weekends until January 2023; this will be followed by Tulse Hill to Peckham Rye and Crystal Palace, and Nunhead to Herne Hill and the Battersea area until 2025.

NR has urged businesses and homeowners to secure their outdoor possessions after plastic sheets were blown onto the 25,000 volt overhead lines at two separate locations in the Duddeston and Gravelly Hill areas of Birmingham.

A £1 million [pilot scheme](#) in Coventry seeks to take the most polluting cars off the road, and encourage a move to public transport. Motorists who scrap a car over 10 years old can claim mobility credits worth between £1,500 and £3,000, to be added to a smartphone app or Swift travel card that will pay for public transport, taxis, bicycle share or car club schemes.

Major traffic changes affecting drop-off and short stay parking have come into force at Coventry Railway Station. They form part of an £82 million masterplan to transform the station and the area around it.

David Dundas suggests that Wesley Paxton was wrong to claim that compressed natural gas is safer than hydrogen. As the lightest gas of all, if hydrogen leaks, it rises and disperses very quickly, whereas CNG is much denser and disperses slowly, so readily forms an explosive mixture. And whilst CNG is cleaner than diesel, both produce harmful NOx when burnt, whereas hydrogen is fed into a fuel cell that combines it with oxygen from the air to make only water vapour.

In partnership with Aggregate Industries, GB Railfreight has launched a new service to move 90,000 tons of aggregate, about 60 trainloads, from Portbury, south of Bristol, to Acton in London, with further shipments under consideration. And GBRf has also launched a new intermodal service from the Port of Felixstowe to Maritime Transport's location at Wakefield Europort.

Tata Steel and DB Cargo UK have successfully trialled 100% renewable Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil in a Class 60 locomotive. Transporting some 2,500 tons of steel coil from Wales to the West Midlands, it was the first train powered purely by the more environmentally friendly fuel to travel on the mainline UK rail network.

DRS's Aberdeen freight train service has launched a multi million-pound rail freight hub at the Port of Grangemouth. The 775m dual rail siding can handle the longest freight trains, and offers enhanced container/domestic intermodal options, of particular benefit for the food, drink and perishables sectors [*so would be handy for the Cameron Bridge bottling plant in Leven – Ed.*]

Barry Doe has published the 48th edition of his [Rail Operators Map](#), with minor tweaks covering operators' names, station names, dates and minor corrections. Copies may be downloaded free for private or commercial use, including printing any size. Any changes introduced in the May timetable will be shown in the next edition.

,,,and finally

...or maybe not! At the age of 76, Bob Bryce, a passenger host and team leader at Luton station, is currently completing a Level 3 Supervisor Apprenticeship with Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR).

Workers preparing to refurbish the Grade II-listed Bishopstone station near Seaford opened up the old parcel office after 30 years to reveal that it was full of vintage junk including 1970s car parts, BR advertising posters, fishing rods and two wooden water skis. GTR is kindly donating the proceeds of any sale to the Friends of Bishopstone Station.

Tarka Rail Association is sad to report the passing of Viv Mitchell, who founded the railway publisher Middleton Press, and was one of the original group responsible for restoration of the Ffestiniog Railway. They are a fitting tribute. RIP.

CONSULTATIONS

- Hastings Borough Council: [Draft Local Plan](#), closes 24 March.
- Rochdale Borough Council: [Draft Rochdale Station Area Supplementary Planning Document](#), closes 7 April.
- NR: [Cambridge Area Resignalling](#), closes 11 April.

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 a [List of Events](#) and a [List of Key Dates](#) for consultations, franchise changes, CP6 planning, service alterations for major rail projects etc. As a newsletter with list of events embedded may be discarded, a stand-alone list would be very helpful.

Blob colour indicates the various types of event:

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

NB. Because of Covid-19, events are being cancelled, postponed or conducted online. Webmasters, please update your websites with any changes as soon as they are made.

March

- Tuesday 23. Rf East Midlands, **Online** 2000 (Also 24 April 1430).
- Friday 26. English Regional Transport Association, Rail Reopenings Meeting, **Zoom**, 1400.
- Saturday 27. Ribble Valley Rail AGM, **Zoom**, 1400. Email margebirch@icloud.com.
- Monday 29. Rf London & South East Herts & Beds Division, **Online** 1930 (Also 24 April 1030).
- Tuesday 30. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, but all meetings currently **cancelled**).

April

- Thursday 1. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month except June (mid-month) and August).
- Tuesday 6. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Tuesday 13. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, Castleton, **Rochdale**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month, but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Thursday 15. Wessex Branch general meeting, **Online**, 1900.
- Saturday 17. Rf London & South East Regional Branch, **Online**, 1100.

Further Ahead

- May 12. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- May 15. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Online**, 1400
- May 19. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (or Online) (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at Cleethorpes and the Sloop at Barton, 2000).
- May 22. Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line AGM, **Online**, 1030.
- June 18. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, Ross County FC, **Dingwall**, 1000.
- July 17. Rf AGM, Priory Rooms, **Birmingham** (TBC) or **Online**.

Disclaimer: unless otherwise stated, views expressed are those of the contributor, and not necessarily shared by Rf.

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