



June 2021

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Regarding the devolution of power, has the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail missed a trick? “Existing devolved authorities in Scotland, Wales, London, Merseyside, and Tyne and Wear will continue to exercise their current powers...Great British Railways will continue to own the infrastructure in Scotland and Wales (other than some of the South Wales Valley Lines), as NR does now”, and will take over the management of stations in England. And most surprisingly: “In London and the South East, a new strategic partnership will be established to support housing, economic growth and the environment.” But that is precisely the role of the Sub-national Transport Bodies, which don’t even get a mention! So why not grant them statutory powers, and embed the GBR regional divisions within them?

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 Far North Line

FoFNL hopes that the Scottish Government will get a grip on the ‘railway infrastructure deficit’ that is so obvious away from the Central Belt. It is agreed that the best way to build back after Covid is to invest in infrastructure, so the imperative to transfer freight to rail means double tracking the Highland intercity routes. Whilst expensive in the short term, it would give the North of Scotland the public transport system it needs and deserves.

Transport Scotland does not currently envisage electrification beyond Tain, so much work is being done on alternative traction. The UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow later this year will showcase both the Porterbrook HydroFLEX Class 319 conversion, complete with a boardroom, and the Arcola Energy and University of St Andrews Class 314 Hydrogen Accelerator. The Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership is said to want the latter used for "Zero Emission Trains safety and reliability tests". FoFNL hopes that the opportunity will be taken to demonstrate the viability of a Thurso - Wick shuttle service. In another development, HITRANS is about to fund a study to see how a Class 158 could accommodate the hydrogen equipment.

The Highland Council has granted planning permission for a bridge to replace Delny level crossing. The time saved by trains passing at full line speed may strengthen the case to reopen the station at Evanton, where housing development will see an increase in the local population. HITRANS received a £5,000 grant for a feasibility study that should be completed this summer.

Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership

The SELRAP [website](#) now includes a new short video by Scott Dawson that sums up the benefits of re-opening the Skipton to Colne line.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

NR has painstakingly restored George Stephenson's 181-year-old Grade II listed Gauxholme viaduct in Todmorden to improve journeys in the Calder Valley. A before-and-after [video](#) shows how this important piece of railway heritage has been restored to its Victorian splendour.

Friends of Hunmanby Railway Station

A [Tile Map](#) over 6 foot square has arrived in Hunmanby showing the railway network as it was in 1920 from the Humber across to the Irish Sea and up to the Scottish Borders, with detailed maps of the ports. It will be a big job just to prepare the hand made brick wall of 1848 to receive it. In the meantime, the North Eastern Tile Company has loaned a half-size, mounted tile map to display in the village and show its two centenarians.

The line from Hunmanby to Bridlington is its most scenic section. Enjoy the big skies of the Yorkshire Wolds as the train climbs towards Speeton summit, followed by the great sea view towards Flamborough and Sowerby as it descends into Bridlington. From the new 3 coach Turbo Star Trains look out for hares, barn owls and deer. Bridlington Station is a listed building, and its glass canopy acts as an Edwardian Conservatory with a year round flower display.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

The Mid Cheshire Line regained an hourly service on weekdays from May, but still awaits the hourly Sunday service promised in December 2017. Northern was relying on volunteers to operate it, but there weren't enough. It has since negotiated new contracts with train crew, so this service should start in December once they have come fully into force.

MCRUA now awaits the outcome of the Manchester Rail Recovery Task Force consultation. Option C is by far the most favourable for the Mid Cheshire Line, and to provide more reliable train services in and around Manchester. To enable "two trains an hour", three farm crossings would need upgrading. If Option C is chosen, NR says that this would be done before the revised timetable is implemented, currently planned for May 2022.

The [MCRUA website](#) also lists a number of long-running campaigns, including plans to reopen the Middlewich Line between Northwich and Sandbach to passengers, and for a western link to the Airport. Cheshire West and Chester have set up a new Task Force to identify ways to create communities to support town centre economies through the improved delivery of inclusive walking, cycling, public transport and integrated transport projects. MCRUA has made initial enquires about working with the Task Force, and looks forward to supporting it.

Having achieved DfT Accreditation, subject to annual renewal, the Mid Cheshire CRP will regularly review the Line Plan. Accreditation gives it access to additional CRN funding, and also offers the opportunity for it to take on additional stations, subject to agreement by the Train Operator.

Friends of the Barton Line

When it took over the Barton line in May, EMR changed many of the times, but introduced through services between Grimsby and Leicester. The early and late services now call again at Ulceby, the bus replacement services have reverted to trains, and New Clee station is now a compulsory stop. However, for logistical reasons there is no foreseeable return of the second daily service from Cleethorpes to Barton and back.

East Suffolk Travel Association

ESTA has updated its case for through trains from the East Suffolk Line to London Liverpool Street, and sent it to senior Greater Anglia managers and to politicians including Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney who raised the matter in a House of Commons debate. Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft are the two largest towns in East Anglia with no direct service to the capital, a handicap to attracting both new businesses and tourists.

English Regional Transport Association

ERTA believes the Great Central Corridor from Calvert to Rugby, possibly with a Banbury arm, would cater for passengers and freight traffic from Bristol, Southampton, Old Oak Common (OOC) and Oxford to Leicester and East Midlands. HS2 will be a passenger only line with no stops between OOC and Solihull, so a domestic line is needed to meet the demand for modal shift. Richard Cooper has researched the route. After crossing Onley Lane south of Rugby, the trackbed forms part of the Great Central Way, a well-maintained cycle-way/footpath, for the next two miles. The line of the former railway is unbroken north from there until it reaches Abbey Street, Rugby, just before the West Coast Main Line.

Guildford – Cranleigh – Horsham - Shoreham is a strategic missing rail link to take both passenger and freight traffic off local and regional roads. The route is currently a 'green corridor', but there are applications with Guildford and Waverley for the 'Wey and Arun' canal to take over part of it. These must be rejected as they would conflict with the railway interest, and there are other options to combine existing watercourses and new build. A broader trackbed with a perimeter fence would require land, but could accommodate a railway and a slewed cycle-way/footpath, whereas a canal would be a different matter altogether.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

BTPG has expressed its dissatisfaction with the current Bedwyn to Newbury shuttle service replacing the failed IETs. GWR agreed that they are the worst affected stations. Some 10-car sets are still in operation, so BTPG asked if one could be split at Paddington at around 0900 and reinstated at around 1700, with one of the 5-car units operating the Bedwyn service in the interim. GWR agreed to look at this.

West Sussex Rail Users Association

Weekday Victoria to Portsmouth trains now terminate at and start from Portsmouth & Southsea; passengers for Portsmouth Harbour should change at Fratton. Weekend services still run through to the Harbour.

Track realignment is underway at Gatwick Airport station to allow the construction of wider platforms from 2023, as well as work to refurbish the existing station concourse and overbridges, and to prepare for eight new escalators, five new lifts and four new stairways. A new Airport concourse superstructure will also be built between the two airport footbridges.

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

Totton has a claim to be the worst served town in the South East (relative to population) since the former South West Trains halved its services when passenger numbers were soaring, so it is good to see SWR restore and even slightly enhance the full Monday-Friday peak service. The 2035 from Waterloo is officially a Totton service by doubling back at Brockenhurst - but with the single fare from Southampton increased from £3.90 to £13.60 (about £4.20 per mile)!

Although there are no direct services from South Hampshire to anywhere west of the Southampton - Bristol line, a new weekday 0450 Fratton - Gloucester service connects at Salisbury with the 0610 to Exeter, so South Hampshire residents can reach a range of major centres much earlier.

Modern Railways magazine (February 2021) reports that Transwilt's CRP has plans to increase the Swindon - Melksham - Westbury service to hourly, and amalgamate it with SWR's 'figure of 6' Salisbury - Romsey service via Romsey, Southampton, Eastleigh and Chandlers Ford. It would also serve the proposed Wilton park-and-ride station, as will the Waterloo - Yeovil service. With the 'Metro' service to Bristol already authorized, and Paddington - Bedwyn trains extended via Pewsey and the proposed Devizes Parkway station, Westbury would become an important interchange. Finally, Transwilt's services might be extended back to Didcot Parkway and Oxford via a new station at Royal Wootton Bassett [*and another at Grove for Wantage - Ed.*]

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](#).

Rf gave a cautious welcome to the long awaited Williams review. "It seems that the government wants to make rail work, to improve the passenger experience and support economic growth" said Rf Chair Chris Page, "but the devil of course will be in the detail. We will be looking for flexibility and responsiveness in the White Paper, a can-do attitude, and whether the new structure will create a joined-up railway that works. There are many important questions, and until we get the answers we can't tell whether the reality matches the rhetoric."

Subsequently, Ian Brown CBE, Rf Policy Director, published a [critique](#) of the Plan for Rail and the changes that led to it. It concludes that the review is a revolution, even if it did not start off as one. The desired outcomes are excellent. The actual outcomes however could range from a fantastic way forward for our rail system to a dismal monolithic failure. Its success will depend on capable leadership; appointing Andrew Haines to lead the process alongside NR Chair Sir Peter Hendy is a very good omen. It certainly deserves a chance.

What infrastructure investment and innovation does the North need to build back a smarter, faster, greener and more reliable rail network, asks Rf Chairman [Chris Page](#). Rf's proposal to reroute freight trains to Trafford Park would unlock the Castlefield Corridor, but the big investment has to be in a rolling programme of electrification to meet decarbonisation targets. These also need a modal shift of passengers and freight to rail, as the most sustainable transport option. But people make door-to-door journeys, so the railways must offer reliable services as part of an integrated travel solution.

In its consolidated [response](#) to the latest consultation, Rf sees East West Rail as a national strategic asset for both passenger and freight operation that will serve mainland Britain well into the future. As such, it should be electrified at the time of construction, and enter Cambridge via the biomedical complex at Cambridge South to allow through services to Ipswich and Norwich without the need to reverse.

Rf YORKSHIRE

RfY hopes that the new Metro Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, can make a real difference to its public transport. Like trains, buses play an important role in achieving modal shift from private cars. Rf will stress the importance of connectivity both between bus and train services, over which she will have some control, and between different train routes, where she will have influence rather than control. Mayor Brabin wants cheaper fares and contactless ticketing, and whilst this may initially be only for buses, it is vital that it is extended to trains as well. A West Yorkshire “Oyster” should be a forerunner to a Yorkshire one, and then a pan-Northern one.

Bradford Council’s proposals for a new Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) station on the site of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market will compound the folly of two unconnected railway stations half a mile apart. Who, especially women, will want to walk up Bridge Street and across the Ring Road after dark? What is needed is a new station under the city centre linking NPR and the existing Calder Valley and Airedale/Wharfedale routes. Presumably, the Council is proposing this remote site because it owns it, to cut costs. But if the country is to spend over £30bn on NPR, then it needs to spend the extra billion or two that would transform West Yorkshire’s transport network for the next 100 years.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

RUX congratulates The Friends of Buxton Station and Mytholmroyd Station Partnership, who have both been awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK. It recognises the outstanding work done in their communities.

CRN welcomes the commitment in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail to make it more responsive to local needs, and is thrilled that the vital role of community rail has been clearly recognised. The Plan specifically mentions the work on dementia awareness by the Leeds - Morecambe CRP.

CRN continues to work with rail partners to better understand wider industry plans to encourage rail use once Covid restrictions are lifted. Many community rail initiatives promote walking to get more people out and about for travel or leisure. [Living Streets](#) has a great range of info and resources to encourage and celebrate walking.

Funded by the DfT through the CRN, East Hampshire CRP has created a four-part Cycle Training Programme for Summer 2021 to encourage greater cycling to/from and around its stations:

- To audit cycle facilities for parking, signing and routes etc
- Bike Doctor events at stations
- Cycle Proficiency Training for Adults
- Bike rides with an experience leader.

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

ORR's annual review found that NR's was broadly on track in delivering against its plan for Control Period 6 (2019 - 2024), but expressed concerns about the remaining levels of risk funding, particularly in Scotland, whilst continued focus is needed to deliver renewal work. In the North West & Central region, NR has addressed most of ORR’s recommendations, but it will continue to monitor progress and commitment on six outstanding issues.

ORR is inviting stakeholder comments on the [revised wording](#) of its draft licence condition and delay compensation code of practice prior to implementing them.

At NR's online National Supplier Conference on 6 May, rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Sir Peter Hendy and Andrew Haines all said that the railway needed to lower its costs and reduce public expenditure. And Scotrail MD Alex Hynes challenged the rest of the industry to ensure the sector remains affordable and relevant: "This doesn't mean ScotRail and NR beating up its suppliers and trying to squeeze the margins, it's how can we work smarter together to deliver better outcomes for passengers and freight at lower cost."

NR and the Forth Rivers Trust have put up bat boxes along the route of the Levenmouth Rail link. Helen Simmons, a NR ecologist said: "Unavoidably, vegetation clearance for the new rail link involved cutting down trees which provided habitat for a range of birds and wildlife including bats. The boxes will offer alternative roosting opportunities throughout the construction period, and thereafter until the natural habitat around the completed railway regenerates to the point where it will again provide natural roosting opportunities for bats, birds and other species".

Political and business leaders have told Transport for the North (TfN) that they cannot continue to wait for the Government's Integrated Rail Plan – expected to outline its commitment to HS2, NPR and other major rail projects. Further work on NPR had reduced its infrastructure costs and increased projected benefits, but electrification would tackle climate change, create jobs and unleash the North's economic potential.

On 7 June, Transport for Wales launched an improved rail service between Cardiff and Holyhead, with greater capacity and fully refurbished intercity carriages. It has also purchased a further 30 Mark 4 intercity carriages.

['Rails to Recovery'](#), a feasibility study by regional transport body Midlands Connect, found that electrification of the Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury line, with an hourly train to London via Wellington, Telford and Birmingham, could benefit the local economy by £500m: up to £377m in passenger time-savings, and £145m from fewer cars and other environmental benefits.

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is working on desired outcomes for defined study areas (Oxford to Milton Keynes, and to Northampton and Peterborough), which it will take forward as part of the investment pipeline associated with its transport strategy. It wants to develop a comprehensive evidence base, and a clear position on the opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed (see Consultations).

Various East Coast Main Line operators are consulting on a completely recast timetable for May 2022. See Consultations below for LNER's.

TfL has secured a further £1.08bn of government funding, but with conditions: one obliges it to draft proposals for driverless trains on the Piccadilly and Waterloo & City Lines, whilst the need to cut costs might curtail plans for the [West London Orbital Line](#), an 11 mile extension to London Overground from West Hampstead and Hendon in the north to Hounslow via Brent Cross West, Neasden, Harlesden, Old Oak Common, South Acton and Brentford.

The Highland Council's planning committee has approved proposals for a two-platform station at Inverness Airport on the Aberdeen line that will also serve the Business Park and the new town of Tornagrain. It will have step-free access via a footbridge with lifts, and parking for 64 cars with ten electric charging points, four disabled spaces and cycle parking.

Northumberland County Council has applied for a [Transport and Works Act Order \(TWAO\)](#) to re-open the 18 mile line between Newcastle and Ashington to passenger services in early 2024, with six new stations. The project is projected to deliver economic benefits of up to £470 million.

Darlington Borough Council has received a planning application for a £100m redevelopment of the station, to create a new platform and entrance with upgraded transport links, and on the east side a new station building with three more platforms, and a footbridge to the existing station.

Nik Johnson, the new mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, has confirmed that he would not be taking forward plans for a £2bn Cambridge Autonomous Metro.

Crossrail has reached an important milestone with the trial running of four trains an hour. And Tottenham Court Road has become the third Elizabeth line station in central London to be handed over to Transport for London (TfL). The line is set to open in the first half of 2022.

London Euston now provides passenger information using British Sign Language. Ten touchscreens have gone live, and ten more will be installed by the end of the year, as well as an additional large screen beside the arrival and departure boards on the main concourse.

On six weekends this summer, trains between Finsbury Park and Moorgate will be diverted into King's Cross as NR upgrades track and signalling as part of the [East Coast Digital Programme](#).

PD Ports has extended its GB Railfreight Teesport to Doncaster service to Elderslie, West Central Scotland. Its deep-water ports at Southampton and London Gateway can handle 775m intermodal container trains. The three roundtrips daily from Southampton save over four million road miles and 9,500 tons of carbon emissions per year.

Hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO) will fuel all of DB Cargo UK's freight trains running between Tarmac's Mountsorrel site in Leicestershire and its asphalt plant in Birmingham. Trials showed that HVO fuel can reduce a train's carbon emissions by up to 90% compared to traditional red diesel.

The [49th edition](#) of Barry Doe's GB NR Operators' map complements the May timetable changes. East Midlands Railway no longer operates to York and Scarborough at summer weekends, but has taken over the Barton-on-Humber branch, whilst South Western Railway has withdrawn its direct summer Saturday service from Salisbury to Weymouth via Yeovil.

,,,and finally

A helium party balloon caused delays to three trains between St Helens and Liverpool Lime Street when it snagged on 25,000-volt overhead electric cables in Prescot. The line had to be closed and the electricity supply cut off so the balloon could be safely removed.

CONSULTATIONS

- EEH: [Connectivity Studies](#), closes 30 June.
- NR: [Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Scheme Phase 2](#), closes 4 July.
- LNER: [May 2022 Timetable](#), closes 5 August.
- Transport for the North, [Draft Decarbonisation Strategy](#), closes 31 August.

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](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#). Stand-alone lists are preferred, as newsletters may be discarded.

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.

June

- Thursday 24. ERTA Great Central Rail Projects, **Online**, 1500.
- Thursday 24. Friends of the Barton Line meeting with EMR, White Swan Inn, **Barton**, 2000.
- Friday 25. ERTA Brackmills and Northampton Area, **Online**, 1500.
- Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, normally at Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS).

July

- Saturday 3. East Suffolk Transport Association AGM, **Saxmundham**, 1415.
- Monday 5. ERTA Guildford and South East Area, **Online**, 1400.
- Tuesday 6. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Saturday 10. Rf Herts & Beds, Clarence Park, **St Albans** (alfresco), 1200 (or **Online**, 1130).
- 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**).
- Wednesday 14. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (and second Wednesday of every alternate month.)
- Thursday 15. Rf London & South East, Sussex and Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (also the first Thursday of each month except July (mid-month) and August).
- Saturday 17. Railfuture AGM, Priory Rooms, **Birmingham** – *register in advance to attend*.
- Wednesday 21. Friends of the Barton Line AGM, White Swan inn at **Barton**, 2000 (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at Barton and the No 1 Inn, Cleethorpes 1900).
- Saturday 24. Rf London & South East, Herts and Beds Division, **St Albans**, 1930.
- Sunday 25. Rf East Anglia, St Mary's at Stoke, Church Hall, Stoke Street, **Ipswich** IP2 8DA, 1400.

Further Ahead

- August 20. ERTA Brackmills and Northampton Area, **Online**, 1500.
- August 26. ERTA Great Central Rail Projects, **Online**, 1500.
- September 25. Rf Yorkshire, **Sheffield**, 1400, or **Online**, 1300.
- October 1. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, **Dingwall**
- October 20. England's Economic Heartland annual conference, **Silverstone**
- October 30. East Suffolk Travel Association, **Lowestoft station**, 1400.

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

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