



August 2021

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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“We’ve made up our mind; don’t confuse us with facts”. So much for the “consultations” on the May 2022 ECML timetable, which sacrifices local connections to save a few minutes on long-distance journeys. It will drive many existing rail users back to their cars – modal shift in reverse! – and threatens a repeat of the 2018 timetable debacle, not because it can’t be delivered but because it would no longer deliver services on which people have come to rely. The consultations should have been on the premise on which the timetable would be constructed.

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.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

The station sites are now confirmed. Leven’s is to be located behind the Leisure Centre; how the wires fit underneath Bawbee Bridge may determine exactly where the platform is finally located. An island platform layout will make onward freight connections to Methil Docks as straightforward as possible. Cameron Bridge Station will be on the Leven side of the A915 Durievale roundabout, with options for both 150 and 300 park and ride spaces. The line will be electrification-ready from the outset, but the rolling stock will be determined by progress on the entire Fife Circle line. Diesel units may continue initially, followed by battery units for a transitional period before full electrification kicks in.

Freight is still a major question mark, and may depend on the main potential users presenting business cases. If these do not materialise soon, the cost and complications of introducing freight once passenger services are running would be considerably greater. Because they are very demanding of trackside space, freight terminals and train depots are unlikely to be co-located, which could reduce prospects for the latter.

The Campaign will be looking to Fife Council to ensure that the target date of December 2023 for passenger services to resume does not drift.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

50 members of the public attended a meeting in Berwick upon Tweed called by Georgina Hill, Councillor for Berwick East, on the proposed ECML timetable. Invited speakers were Ben Garrett, Head of Stakeholder Engagement LNER, RAGES President Tom Thorburn, and SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett. LNER's position on the proposed changes came over loud and clear: largely unwavering with very little compromise at best. Connectivity between towns and local communities is sacrificed to save 15min between London and Edinburgh.

South East Northumberland Rail User Group

RUX congratulates Dennis Fancett on being named Rf's Rail Campaigner of the Year 2021. He has been instrumental in restoring the Northumberland Line to Blyth and Ashington, and for a huge growth in local rail use.

However, SENRUG is now fighting cuts to Morpeth and Berwick services proposed in the new ECML timetables. "These changes, if implemented, will virtually wipe out every improvement we have secured for train services in our region, which have resulted in enormous growth in the use of rail, at Morpeth in particular. So we are not stepping back or standing down, but focusing our campaigning efforts with renewed energy and vigour."

SENRUG [proposes](#) seven key amendments to four of the draft timetables, including: TransPennine Express services continuing north of Newcastle, calling at Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick; two off-peak LNER trains per day each way continuing to call at Morpeth, in particular the heavily used morning Aberdeen service, and Northern services continuing to Hexham and Carlisle, as terminating all local trains at Newcastle would deter commuters to the MetroCentre.

The Northern Weekly Salvo (Paul Salvesson)

Part-funded by CRN's Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund, a new hourly bus service from Wigan Wallgate station to [Haigh Woodland Park](#) is a joint initiative of South East Lancs CRP, Wigan Council, the Park (owned by the Council) and Friends of Haigh Woodland Park.

A unique art exhibition in the Platform 5 Gallery on Bolton Station runs until 28 August, 'Routed – an exhibition of railway workers' art' displays the work of active and retired railway employees, and will culminate in the first-ever Station Mela with stalls and music. The exhibition is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 1200 to 1600, and admission is free – barrier staff will let visitors through the gates on request.

Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines

Northern mayors will accept reduced train services through Greater Manchester only if belated rail infrastructure upgrades are delivered. Calls have long been made for more routes into Manchester Piccadilly, upgrades to Oxford Road station, and new signalling. Instead, from December 2022, DfT proposes to axe Sheffield's direct link to Manchester Airport, and terminate Wigan services at Oxford Road rather than Piccadilly. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and other leaders slammed the plan at a Transport for the North rail committee meeting.

A [Petition to Parliament](#) asks the Government to direct Highways England to halt and reverse the infilling of legacy rail bridges, tunnels and viaducts that they believe to be unsafe - but not, it would seem, according to some well informed engineers in both private and public sectors. Many closures are in areas where there is a realistic potential to reuse the trackbed for heritage, leisure or tourist purposes.

Meldreth Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group and CRP

The Group has campaigned since the timetable change of May 2018 for new semi-fast services and half-hourly weekend services, so it welcomes GTR proposals in the May 2022 timetable for:

- 6 semi-fast services from the village stations in the morning peak
- 5 semi-fast services from Kings Cross in the evening peak
- A half-hourly services all day on Saturday.

English Regional Transport Association

Phase 1 of a joint NR and Highways England [Solent to the Midlands Multimodal Freight Strategy](#) shows how the road and rail networks could be used more efficiently in terms of their overall capacity and carbon footprint. Every scenario identified for rail freight growth to 2050 predicts an increase in the number of trains needed of between 5 and 20 per day. The ERTA [blogspot](#) suggests the need for a rail alternative to the Southampton – Reading – Oxford – Birmingham route.

Bedford Commuters Association

Available only on a Smartcard, the new Flexible Season Ticket allows eight return journeys within a 28-day period. At both Flitwick and Bedford, it represents a saving over a Weekly Season ticket for two or three journeys/week. Following its introduction, the Peak Carnet ticket was withdrawn, although the Off Peak Carnet will continue to be sold for the time being. BCA feels that this ticket is very useful and should be retained.

BCA voiced its concerns to GTR regarding the increase in short notice cancellations due to the number of staff having to self-isolate. It therefore understands the decision to remove some services to make the timetable more reliable, but expects GTR to reinstate them as soon as possible.

Windsor Lines Passengers Association

WLPA's first draft response to the South Western Railway Timetable Consultation for December 2022 recognises that some slimming of services post Covid will be necessary, but is concerned that some stations have a 50% cut for most of the day. The projected fall in passenger numbers does not justify this. There are no proposals for Saturdays or Sundays, and no indication as to when services start in the morning or finish late at night, so a proper timetable is needed to comment on the detail, especially in the peak hours.

After 74 days of action, the guards' strike on SWR is finally resolved. Driver Controlled Operation of the doors will be used on the new Class 701s, and every train will have a guard. The Class 444, 450 and 458 fleets will eventually be modified, but meanwhile the driver will open the doors and the guard will close them. There has been no decision regarding DCO on Class 158 and 159 trains. Any future SWR stock will have DCO.

There will be two grades of guard: those on suburban services will be known as Metro Guards, and on other services as Commercial Guards. By December 2022, the working hours of both will reduce from 42 hours over five days to 39 hours over 4.5 days, so the number of rest days will increase from 104 to 130.

The Class 701's software is still causing problems, and driver training has yet to start, so they will not now enter service until the autumn. With the Class 442s going for scrap, the 458s will be made into 4-car units and regearred for 100mph running.

SWR is seeking a coordinator for a Hounslow/Richmond Community Rail project. Details are on its website or by calling in.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group

CLPG welcomes restoration of a full North Cotswold Line service and a twice-hourly Worcester – Kidderminster - Birmingham Snow Hill service, but Worcester Shrub Hill that serves the hospital has lost all of its off-peak services via Kidderminster, and two of its commuter services to Birmingham New Street. And Cross-Country trains pass through Shrub Hill without stopping.

The North Cotswold Line Task Force submitted a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) to the DfT in 2020 for two Worcester – Oxford – London trains per hour, one each from Great Malvern and from Kidderminster and Droitwich Spa, and awaits DfT approval to progress to the next stage. A full business case could take 18 months and cost £2.8m. The group has over £1m towards this sum, and hopes DfT will fund the balance, so the enhanced service can start by 2025.

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](#).

Rail campaigners have given a cautious welcome to the DfT Transport Decarbonisation Plan: “It seems like good news, with talk of a sustainable programme of electrification, and encouraging modal shift to rail” said Rf Director Ian Brown, “but there’s a danger that this is the age-old story as with so many Government announcements. What we need are decisions. Where is the commitment to build up an electrification workforce to work on a rolling programme? Will the Treasury support the investment needed? There’s the usual risk of the report being quietly filed away with no decisions made.”

The delay to the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) has led to fears of cutbacks or cancellations to investment in the North of England’s railways. “A smart solution? We’re keenly aware that the term 'smart' has been used before as a euphemism for cutbacks”, said Ian Brown. Rf sets out ten [demands](#) needed to achieve the objective of levelling up the North. Chairman Chris Page added: “The only truly smart solution in a government cut back scenario is an HS2 London – Manchester – Leeds high speed route, with a branch to the East Midlands integrated with an upgraded Midland Main Line to Sheffield and Leeds.”

Any changes to the proposed May 2022 ECML timetable will require further collaboration between the operators and NR, so Rf submitted a combined [response](#) to all six consultations. The “seriously flawed” timetable has been too strongly influenced by long-distance journey time improvements at the expense of local/regional connectivity. Anyone concerned should ask their MP to ensure the DfT and the rail industry fully consider the substantial dissatisfaction expressed through the consultation process, and adopt practical solutions to resolve the issues.

RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY

At the RfTV AGM, John Ellis, Chairman of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, will talk about the SOBC to restore Stratford – Honeybourne - Oxford/Worcester that is with the DfT, and also the work of the North Cotswold Line Taskforce (see above).

RfTV continues to work closely with Witney Oxford Transport in support of its campaign for a rail route to Witney and Carterton, which could become “The Windrush Line” following a river theme. The branch is concerned about the future of the Aylesbury spur of East West Rail, which is in limbo at present. It may not be at serious risk due to the amount of housing planned for the north of Aylesbury, and the importance of connectivity to Milton Keynes and the north, but pressure will be kept up to ensure it is committed.

Reading Council has granted planning permission for improvements at Reading West station, with provision of a ticket office and café/kiosk. However, progress on Green Park station (and the adjacent development) appears to be slow; as of mid-July only the platforms and steel framework for the station buildings were in place.

A new CRP will encompass GWR rail services and stations between Reading and Basingstoke, which are key interchanges with other routes across the country. Ideas are being sought for a name for the CRP that reflects the route it serves. Continuing the river theme, RfTV suggests "The Loddon Line".

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

According to CBT CE Paul Tuohy: "With a permanent move to homeworking for many people, leisure travellers could soon outnumber rail commuters. As the Government looks to promote greener travel to help tackle climate change, it needs to create a modern railway that takes advantage of this new market. But to encourage more people to choose the train for leisure trips, we need to see an end to swathes of the network closed for weekend engineering works, better storage for bikes and luggage, and tickets that are cheaper than flying or driving." [We also need services to seaside resorts fully restored, eg a second hourly through service to Weymouth, and its summer Saturday service direct from Salisbury via Yeovil – Ed.]

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Chris Tarrant is backing CRN's Days Out By Rail campaign, hailing train travel as the perfect way to explore the best Britain has to offer. It aims to inspire and encourage people to jump on board to enjoy parts of England and Scotland, not only on the main lines but also by discovering the lesser-known railway lines. To discover itineraries and days out near you, visit [Scenic Rail Britain](#).

Sponsored by the Rail Delivery Group, CRN's first annual Community Rail Week will run from 18-24 October. With the run up to COP 26 drawing attention to the climate and decarbonisation, Go Green by Rail will focus on stimulating sustainable travel. CRN is encouraging all of its members and partners to consider how to make the most of this opportunity to raise awareness.

Collated from members' queries about forthcoming changes such as the structure of Great British Railways, timescales, community rail funding and relationships, CRN has produced an [FAQs](#) on the transformation for those working and volunteering in community rail.

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

A House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report concludes: "the Government must ensure that the railway electrification programme is accelerated, and the development of battery and fuel cell trains...supported to serve those parts of the network that remain non-electrified."

South Yorkshire Mayor Dan Jarvis says it is totally unacceptable that the long overdue IRP will not now be published until the autumn: "We're being asked to make impossible decisions about vital rail links, such as that between Sheffield and Manchester Airport, without even seeing the government's list of rail investment projects". And [The Chronicle](#) reports that the DfT has halted work on the Birmingham - Leeds section of HS2. Its Chief Executive Mark Thurston said: "We wait to be guided by the Department on what we do with the Eastern link."

The RAIB [reports](#) on a near miss between two passenger trains at around 2143 on Sunday 21 June 2020. When a southbound Chiltern Railways train passed a signal at danger, the emergency brake came on automatically. After resetting the alarm believing it to be spurious, and without the necessary authority from the signaller, the driver continued to Chalfont & Latimer station where the train was switched to the northbound line. It stopped just 75ft from a stationary Metropolitan Line train. There were no injuries, only minor damage to signal equipment and a set of points.

The driver was subsequently diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnoea, not picked up in his routine medical assessments. Since qualifying in 2002, he had been involved in 15 previous safety-related incidents such as failing to stop at and overrunning stations, and opening doors on the wrong side. In 2015 he was restricted to depot driving, but was cleared to return to normal duties in 2018.

England's Economic Heartland's (EEH) [Passenger Rail Study Phase Two](#) identifies 36 regional and long-distance journeys where rail is best placed to improve connectivity. It details at a high level how this could be achieved, and provides the basis for long-term rail investment in the Heartland.

And the priorities in the Government Decarbonisation Plan marry with those in the EEH transport strategy: to make sustainable and public transport the first choice wherever possible, and increase opportunities for rail freight. The Plan rightly sets out the role of local and regional leadership, and specifically that of sub-national transport bodies, in helping Government shape the required programmes, funding and delivery mechanisms.

A new DfT [strategy](#) aims to remove barriers and improve confidence for disabled people as they return to public transport after the pandemic. An audit of all UK train stations will inform a new public database to help people plan their journey, and shape future investment in accessible rail travel. Tactile paving on every station platform will improve safety, and a [Passenger Assist App](#) will simplify communication with rail staff, and encourage better customer service.

British reserve may be renowned, but a survey by the Samaritans shows how much we rely on small talk, even with the social restrictions of the pandemic. Together with NR, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry, their [Small Talk Saves Lives](#) seeks to empower all of us to act to prevent suicide on the railways and in other settings. So if you think someone may need help, trust your instincts and strike up a conversation. It could save a life.

NR's public safety campaign '[Beware the Bubble](#)' aims to make people more mindful of their surroundings when using the railway. It is based on one simple, psychological and relatable truth: we all live our lives in a world of our own; but sometimes this pre-occupation can lead to injury or harm, particularly when using a level crossing.

Over 95% of the rail network will be open as usual over the August Bank Holiday. However: London Euston will have an amended timetable; track renewal will take place between Water Orton and Nuneaton, Birmingham International and Long Lawford, and at Pitsea; no trains will run between Luton and London St Pancras, with a reduced service between Bedford and Mill Hill Broadway; buses will replace trains between Bristol Temple Meads and Bath, Keynsham and Oldfield Park; and Moorgate services will be diverted to London King's Cross. Services will also be affected by work at Soham station and Barking Riverside.

NR will close Barmouth Viaduct from 12 September to 12 December to replace rotten timbers and 452 main beams, and from 11 September to 11 December 2022 to replace corroded steel. The historic swing bridge elements will be retained, and 900yds of track re-laid.

The Denmark Hill station upgrade will be formally opened on 2 September. Photovoltaic (PV) film will power the platforms, canopies and facilities, making the extension carbon positive. An artwork by Godfried Donkor commissioned by the Camberwell Society will also be unveiled.

As the rules on social distancing are relaxed, LNER has bowed to pressure and made one carriage in each of First and Standard class available to passengers without a seat reservation. In the remainder of the train, 'Seat Sure' allows for reservations up to five minutes before departure.

To mark its 25 years as a train operator, Chiltern Railways launched HybridFLEX, Britain's first battery-diesel train, a collaboration between asset manager Porterbrook and Rolls-Royce. It offers near silent operation at stations, and will cut CO₂ by up to 25%, Nitrous Oxide (NOx) by over 70%, and particulates by over 90%. The aim is for it to enter full passenger service in September.

Researchers at the University of Portsmouth have developed a tool that uses machine learning techniques to detect delays on the SWR network, identify which trains will be affected, and select the appropriate contingency plans to dramatically reduce the time to get services back to normal.

Imperial College monitoring of air quality and surfaces such as seats, escalator handrails and ticket machines at four main line stations, and on inter-city trains, found no trace of Coronavirus.

Fast Light Intercity and Regional Trains (FLIRTs) being built by Stadler are on test in Switzerland. After further tests on the Wales and Borders network, the 35 trains will enter service on the South Wales Metro network from the end of next year: the Class 756 tri-modes on the Vale of Glamorgan, Rhymney and Coryton lines, and the Class 231 diesels between Cardiff and Ebbw Vale, Maesteg and Cheltenham.

Neath Port Talbot Council's Planning Committee has conditionally approved a planning application for a rail infrastructure and technology testing facility. The Global Centre for Rail Excellence will have a 4.3ml electrified high-speed rolling stock track and a 2.8ml low speed infrastructure test track, together with facilities for research and development, education and training.

A new type of mast designed to lower the construction and maintenance costs of overhead line equipment, as well as its lifetime carbon emissions, could potentially extend the viability of electrifying more of the UK rail network. One of 30 winners of Innovate UK's First of A Kind 2021 rail competition, Furrer+Frey is developing the prototype mast along with Cranfield University, composite materials manufacturer Prodrive, rail technology firm TruckTrain, and teams at Southampton and Newcastle Universities.

The Tarmac cement plant in Dunbar on the ECML will host the development and trial of an electrified rail freight terminal. At present, overhead cables stop short of rail freight terminals. Furrer+Frey's Moveable Overhead Conductor-rail System, another First of a Kind 2021 winner, is able to retract the overhead line to allow electric trains to be loaded and unloaded safely once in position, obviating the need for diesel shunters.

Magtec has commissioned a 65,000 sq ft state-of-the-art factory in Rotherham for the design, manufacture and integration of drive systems for electric and hybrid vehicles.

...and finally

A culvert under the main line near Gleneagles was blocked by part of a beaver lodge, causing a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to flood. Working with specialists at NatureScot, a team from NR pumped the water away, and took a day and a half to remove the 6ft high 15ft wide dam. An 18in pipe was then inserted into the culvert with wire mesh on either side so that wildlife, including beavers and otters, can pass safely under the line, whilst the water can drain.

CONSULTATIONS

- Hampshire County Council: [Waterside Transport Strategy](#), closes 29 August.
- Transport for the North: [Draft Decarbonisation Strategy](#), closes 31 August.
- Oxfordshire Growth Board: [Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy](#), closes 31 August.
- C2E Partnership: [Improving Transport Links between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet](#), closes 3 September.
- Lewes District Council: [Issues and Options for the new Local Plan](#), closes 3 September.
- House of Lords Built Environment Committee: [Call for Evidence for Meeting the UK's Housing Demand](#), closes 10 September.
- Office of Rail & Road: [Review of the Schedule 8 Train Performance Regime for Control Period 7 \(CP7\) 2024-29](#), closes 10 September.
- Solihull Council: [Redevelopment of Solihull Station](#), closes 12 September.

- Peninsula Transport: [Vision for Transport](#), closes 17 September.
- South Western Railway: [December 2022 Timetable](#), closes 19 September.
- West Sussex County Council: [Draft Transport Plan 2022-36](#), closes 8 October.
- Oxfordshire Plan 2050: [Spatial Growth Options](#), closes 8 October.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: [Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc - Priorities for its Spatial Framework](#), closes 12 October.
- Surrey County Council: [Surrey Transport Plan - LTP4](#), closes 24 October 2021.

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.

August

- Saturday 14. ERTA Brighton Forum, The Post and Telegraph, 155-158 North Street, **Brighton**, BN1 1EEA, 1500.
- Friday 20. ERTA Brackmills and Northampton Area, **Online**, 1500.
- Saturday 21. Rf London & South East, Kent division, **Online**, 1400.
- Thursday 26. ERTA Great Central Rail Projects, **Online**, 1500.
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign AGM, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month, normally at Fife Renewables Innovation Centre, Ajax Way, **Methil Docks**, KY8 3RS).

September

- Thursday 2. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division: **Online**, 1800.
- Saturday 4. Rf Thames Valley AGM: West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, **Oxford**, OX2 0BT, 1030.
- Saturday 4. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds division, **St. Albans**, or **Online**.
- Tuesday 7. Ribble Valley Rail, New Inn, 20 Parson Lane, **Clitheroe**, 1430 (Also first Tuesday of every month but **meetings cancelled until further notice**).
- Wednesday 8. London & South East, Eastern division, **Online?**, 1900.
- Saturday 11. Rf Wales, **Online**, 1000.
- Tuesday 14. 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 15. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn, **Cleethorpes** 1900 (also the third Wednesday of each odd month alternately at Cleethorpes and the White Swan inn, **Barton**, 2000).
- Saturday 25. East Midlands AGM, Online, 1230; Open Meeting, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf Yorkshire, **Sheffield or Online**, 1400.
- Saturday 25. Rf East Anglia, **Norwich**, 1400

Further Ahead

- 1 October. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, **Dingwall**
- 7 October. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online?** 1800.
- 12 October. South East Northumberland RUG, **Morpeth**.
- 18 October. Avocet Line RUG AGM, venue TBA, 1930.
- 20 October. England's Economic Heartland annual conference, **Silverstone**.
- 30 October. 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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