



November 2021

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Commuter traffic is still at less than half of its pre-Covid levels, so rush-hour journeys ought to be more comfortable. However, train operating companies benefit from cuts to peak services, as the more even demand leads to greater efficiency - but not be at the expense of essential school journeys, the timing of which must be dictated by starting and finishing times of the school day.

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

From 19 July, Class 153 Highland Explorer Active Travel coaches were attached to the Class 156 trains on some Oban services, but not Fort William services because of platform length constraints. They can take 20 bicycles including a tandem, and a feature unique to UK railways is an e-bike charging socket. There is a £10 surcharge for a seat in the coach, with or without a bike, but this is not made clear, so many passengers are unaware of it until the conductor explains it.

The 10 journey Flexipass now offers a standard 15% discount on 5 Anytime Return/Anytime Day Return tickets, and is valid for 60 days, twice as long as before. It is available only on a Smartcard, but may be used on all ScotRail, CrossCountry and TransPennine Express services in Scotland. A Highland Railcard then gives a further 50% reduction.

Next April, ScotRail Trains Ltd, owned and operated by the Scottish Government, will replace the Abellio ScotRail franchise. However, NR Scotland will still be run from NR's HQ in Milton Keynes.

### Levenmouth Rail Campaign

LMRC is concerned that plans for freight use of the new line remain unclear, with limited signs of progress. According to rail expert David Spaven: "The Levenmouth rail link scheme has a potentially strategic freight dimension, unlocking a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits. [Given] the presence of the largest distillery in Europe and a major bottling plant... it is vital the Scottish Government works closely with whisky giant Diageo, logistics companies and the rail industry to ensure that the freight potential of the Levenmouth line is fully realised".

## **Campaign for Borders Rail**

In her address to the CBR AGM, newly elected Chair Marion Short said that she wanted to dispel negative comment. The Campaign's professionalism meant that both Holyrood and Westminster Governments took it seriously. Carlisle MP John Stevenson defended the feasibility study as a necessary part of the process. Railway engineer Gareth Dennis examined how the Borders Railway might be completed, and CBR Patron and TV Presenter Rob Bell rounded off the afternoon with a rousing call to action for all Campaigners: "Engineers have always overcome challenges to build something not just spectacular, but spectacularly useful."

## **Lakes Line Rail User Group**

On 21 September, LLRUG celebrated the opening of Oxenholme and Kendal stations. It was the first in a series of events commemorating the 175th anniversary of the Lakes Line opening through to Windermere. More events will take place along the route, culminating in April 2022.

The Group's submission to the consultation on the Windermere Gateway project concluded: "LLRUG supports the aim of improving onward, sustainable transport links from Windermere station. This will help achieve the Group's aim of making better use of the railway asset, and contributing to maintaining the economic and environmental sustainability of the National Park, while reducing dependence on the private car. However, the plan outlined so far is negative as regards the railway, and any positives such as improving the terminal building and its facilities are merely aspirations, with no detail given, for an uncertain later phase." The National Park Authority is now assessing the feedback it received.

The County Council's 'Restoring Your Railway' fund bid, supported by Tim Farron MP, for a passing loop on the line was not one of the 13 successful bids announced in the Autumn Budget.

## **Furness Line Action Group**

By the end of November, every Northern station will have an updated 2D map online. And by the end of March next year, new interactive Street View 3D maps will make it easier to find facilities such as ticket offices, toilets, and platforms. The aim is to give disabled customers, and anyone anxious about travelling, confidence and familiarity. Manchester Victoria is already available.

On 17 July, as part of Furness Railway 175 celebrations, Locomotive No 20, originally built in 1863, made a post-overhaul appearance outside the Dock Museum as part of the Barrow Festival of Transport, prior to running for the first time in over three years on the Ribble Steam Railway in Preston on 23 October. On 1 October at Barrow station, Mayor Helen Wall named Class 195 unit 195109 "Pride of Cumbria". There was special mention of Northern employee Robin Nott with 50 years of service, and of Richard McTigue, Gareth Nicholson and Darryl Evans from Barrow depot who lost their lives recently, and to whom a memorial garden at the station is dedicated.

## **Friends of Bentham Station**

When FOBS celebrated their 8th anniversary, they also announced ambitious plans for Bentham to become a 100% Green Energy Station, with a grant from the Social Stations Investment Fund. The flat roof on the station building can accommodate the 32 photovoltaic panels needed to generate all the electricity the station requires for the LED platform lights, information screens, and within the offices. Richard Wilson of FOBS, who devised the scheme, hopes that it will become an exemplar for other buildings within the town. Richard Isaac from Northern said, "it is proof that local involvement works; the final result will be absolutely fantastic, and will act as an example for other stations within and beyond Northern's network".

## **Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines**

The DfT has awarded Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) £50,000 towards a passenger rail service between Stockport and Ashton-under-Lyne, with a link to Rose Hill Marple. The grant could also support proposals for new stations at Denton, Reddish South and Heaton Norris, subject to TfGM's initial feasibility study and a detailed business case.

TfGM's [Bee Network](#) aims to transform travel in Greater Manchester by integrating buses, trams, cycling and walking by 2024, with rail incorporated by 2030.

Northern is seeking volunteers to adopt 37 more of its stations in the Greater Manchester area. Hundreds already work with the operator to keep their local stations tidy and well presented.

NR having passed on the large increase in gas and electric prices to freight companies, DRS is limiting its Class 88 bi-modes to diesel and short journeys only, while both DB and Freightliner are storing their Class 90s and using Class 66s - so much for climate change and the environment!

## **Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association**

HPSRUA had a meeting with Dewsbury MP, Mark Eastwood, and Penistone and Stocksbridge MP, Miriam Cates, sponsors of the £4.7m Levelling-Up Fund bid backed by Kirklees Council for investment in the Penistone Line. It centres on securing enhanced route capacity and increased line speeds to enable the launch of a half-hourly timetable.

Miriam Cates also sponsored a Restore Your Railway Fund bid to reopen Sheffield – Stocksbridge. HPSRUA maintains that any feasibility study should include reinstatement of the 4+ mile Deepcar - Penistone gap on the grounds of economies of scale and network development. A direct rail connection between the corridor's two largest towns would benefit the whole Upper Don Valley. [*The bid to reopen the Don Valley line to passenger services was successful – Ed.*]

## **Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association**

Patronage on both the Crewe-Liverpool and Mid Cheshire Lines is returning to pre-Covid levels, particularly with leisure travel and at weekends. On some Saturdays, Mid Cheshire Line loadings have been so heavy trains were unable to keep to time. Commuter travel has also been coming back since early-September, and Northern has one of the highest levels of return of any train company. However, it has yet to restore its pre-Covid timetables, so on the Mid Cheshire Line towards Manchester, bizarrely, there is a train every 60mins throughout the day, but a 72min gap in the morning peak. As a result, children as young as 11 are having to arrive so early for school that the gates are still closed, leading to long days and some very tired pupils.

## **Fen Line Users Association**

Cambridge South station, Ely North junction, and East-West Rail are progressing through a series of consultations and enquiries, but it will be a while before work starts "on the ground", and several years before any benefit. It's not all in the future, though. Longer trains began running nearly a year ago, and GTR, which operates most Fen Line stations, has been working at making them a better environment for passengers.

With the pantomime season on its way, there have been some recent issues that make it tempting to rename the Fen Line the "Cinderella Line". Greater Anglia (GA)'s full peak service, advertised as returning from 13 September, still hasn't been reinstated. As late as 8 October, GA's weekly updates still referred to a "near full service" on the route "to Cambridge and on to King's Lynn" – a case of the timetable saying "Oh, yes it is" when in fact it was "Oh, no it isn't".

## Rail Haverhill Group

[RHG](#) campaigns for restoration of the rail link to Cambridge, which closed in 1967 just as the population of the town was expanding from 9,000 then to almost 30,000 today, and maybe 40,000 in the future.

The AGM in September elected Bob Edwards as its Chair in place of Marcus Field Rayner, who had resigned along with the Secretary, Nathan Clough. He thanked them both for their sterling efforts in keeping the Campaign going through difficult times.

## English Regional Transport Association

ERTA continues to champion rail alternatives and more integrated public transport. Affordability for the user is critical to any plan for modal shift: walking miles each way for warehouse work is a high bar; many living on the minimum wage need cheaper public transport. Combined bus-rail passes for Under 65's, especially for local commutes such as around Milton Keynes, St Albans, Bedford or Cambridge, could take up spare capacity. Alas, ideological obligations translate to contracting buses that sometimes run empty, whilst others remain disenfranchised.

ERTA proposes rail solutions from the grassroots up. If something is right, what counts is delivery, not pontificating around million pound studies and reports. East West Rail could have been reopened decades ago, and incrementally upgraded as it earned its keep. Instead, we still await trains from Bedford / Milton Keynes to Aylesbury or Oxford, let alone to Cambridge and beyond. The politics and the system are failing to deliver in a timely manner. We need a new way of getting things done, and yes, Government does play a pivotal role!

## 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's [Rail User Group Awards](#) will be held at its 2022 National AGM, close to Bristol Parkway station, on Saturday 16 July. There are six open award categories:

- # Best social media
  - # Best website
  - # Best newsletter
  - # Best new RUG – the Oliver Lovell Award
  - # Best campaign
  - # Best campaigner – the Clara Zilahi Award,
- plus the Judges' Special Award, which is totally at their discretion.

All entries received for the 2020 awards will be carried forward, unless advised otherwise, but may also be updated/supplemented. Further new entries are also welcome; the closing date for all is 16 April 2022. The Judging Panel takes a fairly relaxed view of what constitutes a RUG, so local campaigns, station adopters, community rail and heritage groups should all feel free to enter.

Sadly, RUX has to report that Paul Abell, a Rf Vice-President who played a very active role in visiting and judging nominations, has passed away suddenly. Given his professional background as editor of Today's Railways UK, it is suggested that the RUG Award for Best Newsletter will from next July's awards be known as the Paul Abell Award.

## NEWS

Rf is hugely disappointed with the lack of support for the rail sector in the Autumn Budget, particularly so as domestic Air Passenger Duty was reduced, and both Fuel Duty and HGV Excise Duty frozen, but with no corresponding announcement of a below inflation rail fare rise. 13 out of 89 bids in the third round of Restoring Your Railway get £50,000 each for feasibility work, but only six meet Rf's viability test. There were just three announcements on actually developing rail projects: the line from Fawley to Totton and Southampton, and stations at Wellington, Somerset, and Cullompton in Devon.

Also, the Integrated Rail Plan was postponed yet again, until after COP26, but is now expected just after this issue of RUX has been put to bed. Some sources claim to know what's in it, or rather what isn't: the Eastern leg of HS2, and a new cross-Pennine rail link. If the IRP is finally published, look out for a full report and no doubt much comment in the December RUX.

The Transport section of the Government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) did share Rf's aims of more use of public transport, freight modal shift, increased rail capacity and electrification, but there was no such announcement in the Budget, nor on transport day at [COP26](#), which was totally eclipsed by the draft final report. According to [Ecopassenger.org](#) a London - Glasgow train user will cause 32.2kg of carbon dioxide, a car user 90.6kg, and an air passenger 120.3kg.

Back in July, Rf set out its [ideas](#) on rail fare reform to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee, both specific tactical improvements and some principles for fundamental change. On 5 November, the Committee wrote to the Rail Minister, calling for a Government strategy. The need is urgent: a NR survey found that the public see rail as green, but many still prefer their car. Rail operators must have the freedom and finance to make rail convenient, affordable and comfortable.

## RAILFUTURE SEVERNSIDE

A [petition](#) to Parliament aims to stop SWR axing its Bristol - Waterloo service from 12 December. Transport Focus wants it retained until fully consulted, and appropriate alternatives provided. One Waterloo train a day will run as far as Warminster, but Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon, Oldfield Park and Keynsham will lose their direct trains to London. And as the only direct service from Woking, Basingstoke and Andover to West Wilts, Bath and Bristol, these are not duplicate trains providing excess capacity as SWR claims: when they are cancelled, the GWR services can be grossly overloaded. [*How ironic that SWR's newsletter is entitled "Staying on Track"! – Ed.*]

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT says it's vital that the Government freezes rail fares for 2022 to encourage people back onto the railways. It also wants to see major reform of fares to make them fit for the future, and rail travel more attractive: eg pay-as-you-go ticketing with price capping (like London's Oyster scheme) in more places, and a much better flexible season ticket for people who commute part time.

Over 500 people responded to CBT's question "where would you like to travel by rail in 2022 unless fares get too expensive?" On 20 October, it delivered a giant postcard to the Chancellor with many of the responses.

### COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

CRN's first Community Rail Week, 18-24 October, sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, focused on the environmental benefits of rail, and the role community rail can play in creating a greener future. Activities included sustainable travel workshops, creative competitions, exhibitions, 'Go Green by Train' campaigns, engagement with schools and youth groups, 'try the train' trips, and Question Time style sessions with young people.

To mark Community Rail Week, Bolton Station boosted its title of 'Poetry Station of the North' by displaying eight poems by local writers on the platforms, alongside poetry by Lancashire writers and Walt Whitman. Bolton Station Community Partnership selected the winning poems from the 2021 'Poetry from the Platform' competition held in partnership with Live from Worktown and the University of Bolton. The poems are also included in an anthology of over fifty selected from the submissions, which can be purchased via the Group's [website](#).

With substantial grants from CRN and Northern Trains Ltd Seed Corn Fund, the Leeds-Morecambe CRP has commissioned a study from Stantec UK Ltd and Allen Rail to examine the potential to develop the Bentham Line as a trans-Pennine route serving communities between Leeds and Bradford, and the coast at Morecambe and Heysham via Keighley, Skipton, Bentham and Lancaster. It is the first such study to be commissioned by a CRP in the country. Due for completion in early 2022, it will form the basis for discussions with the DfT, NR, regional transport bodies, and train operators. A [public survey](#) welcomes contributions from stakeholders, interested parties and individuals along the length of the Line.

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

Construction has started on a new two-platform station at Dalcross for Inverness Airport on the Aberdeen line. The £14m facility will have step-free access via a footbridge with lifts, together with 64 car parking spaces with 10 electric charging facilities, four disabled spaces, and cycle parking. Two buses an hour will initially link the station and the airport.

A new rail timetable aimed at reducing delays in the Greater Manchester area will be rolled out next year. It retains direct routes from Manchester Airport to Liverpool, Chester and North Wales, as well as hourly daytime services from Southport to Manchester Victoria and Stalybridge, and to Wigan and Manchester Oxford Road.

Earlier this year, the Ely area capacity enhancement (EACE) programme consulted on options for upgrading the railway in the Ely South area. A further NR consultation on options for the wider Ely area is now open until 28 November (see below).

A new M1 to A6 Link Road north of Luton will incorporate a rail freight interchange at Sundon Park on the Midland Main Line. The DfT has approved £32.7m towards the £60.3m scheme.

On 27 October, NR Air Operations successfully flew a drone over 15mls from Bicester airfield along the East West Railway – believed to be the furthest a civilian drone has flown Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) in Britain. Communicating with a NR helicopter, the proof-of-concept flight marks a significant milestone in the use of BVLOS drones to inspect the railway safely, quickly and cost-effectively. However, their use in normal operation is still some way off.

Rolling stock company Eversholt Rail has joined forces with Alstom to create the UK's first fleet of hydrogen trains. Ten three-car hydrogen multiple units (HMUs) will be based on Alstom's Aventura platform originally developed by Bombardier. Final contracts for the fleet, to be built in Britain, are due to be signed early next year.

*,,,and finally*

NR has installed 15 deer leaps on the Far North Line between Kinbrace and Forsinard, where the gamekeeper on the Auchentoul estate believes they regularly cross. Ground levels are changed on either side of the fence to create a quick, safe escape route, especially for the smaller deer.

In a first for a major rail infrastructure project, the plans for the construction of East West Rail between Bicester, Bletchley and Milton Keynes not only committed to restore any habitats disrupted, but then to create 10% more. To date, 250 acres of new habitat on 20 different sites have been created, and 150,000 trees planted. Species relocated and protected include otters, badgers, bats, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians including great crested newts.

## CONSULTATIONS

- NR: [Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Round 2 \(part 2\)](#), closes 28 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](#), 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.**

### November

■ Saturday 20. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, Christ Church URC (rear entrance), High Street, **Tonbridge**, Kent, TN9 1SG, 1400.

■ Tuesday 23. English Regional Transport Association AGM, **Online**, 1500.

■ Saturday 27. Fen Line Users Association AGM, Baptist Chapel, Chapel Street, **Waterbeach**, CB25 9HR, and **Online**, 1400.

■ Tuesday 30. Levenmouth Rail Campaign AGM, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

### December

■ Wednesday 1. East Hampshire CRP Stakeholder Meeting, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, PO8 0QE, 1030.

■ Thursday 2. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Venue TBN**, 1800.

■ Saturday 4. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1030 (Also 11 January, 1930).

■ Saturday 4. Rf Thames Valley stall, Oxford Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall, St. Aldate's, **Oxford** OX1 1BX. 1030-1630.

■ Saturday 4. Rf East Anglia, The Signal Box Centre, Glenalmond Avenue, **Cambridge**, CB2 8DB, 1400.

■ Tuesday 7. Rf East Midlands, The Canalhouse, 48-52 Canal Street, **Nottingham**, NG1 7EH, 1200.

■ Tuesday 7. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, Chesham, 1930 (Also 4 Jan, 15 Feb, 5 April, 10 May, 21 June, 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)

■ Thursday 9. Community Rail Awards 2021, Guildhall, **Southampton** and **Online**.

■ Tuesday 14. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).

## Further Ahead

- 6 January. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 3 February).
- 15 January. English Regional Transport Association, Pilgrims Progress, 42 Midland Road, **Bedford**, MK40 1QB, 1500.
- 12 February. English Regional Transport Association, The High Cross, 103-105 High Street, **Leicester**, LE1 4JB, 1500.
- 26 February Rf East Anglia AGM, **Bury St. Edmunds**, 1400.

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

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