



February 2022

Welcome to the Rail User Express

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At long last Covid restrictions are coming to an end, and train operating companies are restoring peak-hour services, albeit somewhat belatedly. There were reports of Hitchin passengers having to stand to and from London. Leisure services have fared better with a rise in staycations, and this demand needs to be exploited to the full.

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

The draft Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 went out for consultation on 20 January. Once ratified, it will be the final document in an extraordinarily long process. The frustration for rail campaigners in the Highlands is that what needs to be done has been obvious for many years. The stack of evidence in STPR2 is truly massive, with every conceivable statistic relevant to Scottish Transport. However, the document contains no plans or specifics for rail in the Highlands, just a suggestion that in each category enhancements would be a good idea.

Levenmouth Rail Campaign

NR is installing 12m of fencing along the route of the Leven line, and ballast is arriving at Thornton three nights a week. While modern railways seek to minimise crossing points, some are essential, and residents along the line have strongly expressed to LMRC that neither NR nor Fife Council is providing sufficient opportunity for reviewing concerns. The project is also looking at ways to connect the line to the Fife Heritage Railway, and to support freight aspirations.

Sustrans has awarded £2.6m to take the active travel network project to detailed design stage - critical in providing links to the two new railway stations. A key but as yet unfunded pedestrian/cycle bridge over the River Leven to link Cameron Bridge station to Methilhill would bring 1,100 of Methil's population within 5mins walk of the station, 3,300 within 10, 6,700 within 15, and 8,400 within 20.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

On 12 January, ScotRail began a 21-day consultation on proposed changes to ticket office opening hours that would impact 120 stations. Some locations such as Dunbar could see reduced opening hours, and the ticket offices at Cartsyde, Clydebank and Woodhall would be closed. The proposed changes are based only on ticket sales, and take no account of the other duties that the ticket staff perform such as providing travel information, issuing pre-booked tickets etc.

On 17 January RAGES participated in a Rail Steering Group (East Lothian) meeting hosted by Paul McLennan MSP, and attended by local and national politicians, government agencies, rail action groups and most train operating companies. Paul took an action to arrange a meeting for further discussion of a new railway station at Haddington.

To create the new platforms at £15m East Linton station, which will be fully accessible, NR has started piling from 2300 to 0900 on Saturdays and from 2300 until 0530 on Sundays until the end of March. Being close to the running line, the work has to be at night for safety reasons. Less disruptive vibration piling will be used where possible, but some hammer piling is unavoidable.

Campaign for Borders Rail

CBR welcomed ScotRail's decision to restore an all-day half-hourly service throughout the week on the Borders Railway albeit on a trial basis. Along with other stakeholders, it responded to ScotRail's 'Fit for the Future' consultation that sought views on its proposed May 2022 timetable with a well-articulated case against austerity-driven cutbacks. Most peak-hour services run with six coaches, and three coaches at other times. However, six-coach trains must also be a consideration at times of significant regional demand. The recent Calcutta Cup match at Murrayfield resulted in significant overcrowding. This is a disincentive for would-be passengers, and also inhibits ticket checks, resulting in fares going uncollected, which undermines accurate assessment of the line's popularity and potential.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

For many years, STORM has campaigned for flood defence works in the Walsden area. Now the [Halifax Courier](#) reports that, as part of flood alleviation measures in the Calder Valley, work is ongoing to improve railway track drainage.

Between Blackburn and Clitheroe, passenger trains are subject to a 45mph speed limit whilst freight trains can run at 60mph. For passenger services to run at 60mph, a more frequent inspection regime is needed, but Northern won't meet the extra cost.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salveson

The Community Rail movement faces some major challenges. Combined with reductions in rail patronage, the major re-structuring of the rail industry is a threat, but also an opportunity for dozens of CRPs (and hundreds of station friends) across the UK.

Paul's [paper](#) argues that investment in Britain's local railways and their partnerships offers good value for money, not just for railways but also for hard-pressed communities in both rural and urban areas: 'Community Rail' can apply to InterCity operations as much as to regional ones, and to large city centre stations such as Bolton and Wigan as much as remote rural halts. It proposes some radical but deliverable solutions, including more station facilities operated by community enterprises, supporting local economies, and calls on 'Great British Railways' (GBR) to recognise the value of community engagement, and support further developments across the network, including 'hard to reach' urban areas whose stations are often unwelcoming.

Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association

Transport for the North's decision to disregard all the timetable options proposed by the 'Manchester Rail Recovery Task Force' and recommend Option B+, which was not consulted on, is a shocker. Option C was the firm favourite in Mid Cheshire: it would have delivered two trains per hour on weekdays, and was the best for reducing the delays through the Castlefield Corridor. Instead, TfN has chosen a timetable that tries to squeeze extra trains through the corridor. It will necessarily be less reliable than Option C, and not the 'high performing timetable' that TfN claims.

Northern's performance on the Mid Cheshire line has been abysmal at times, and rarely better than just about acceptable. Most of the problems are described as "issue with train crew". Manning seems to be a particular problem for Northern. The inability to train new crews or existing crews on new routes and with new stock has not helped. There have also been broken down freight trains, and flooding between Skelton Junction and Stockport.

MCRUA is trying to reinstate a system with Northern that flags when it expects passenger numbers to be greater than normal, such as race days at Chester, concerts at Delamere, and other events along the line. When the Chairman returned from Chester Races in August, he was met with a two-carriage unit that was standing room only.

London Northwestern Railway's new late-evening Saturday service from Liverpool at 2216 ought to be very welcome – except that it runs non-stop to Crewe, where it terminates. It doesn't call at Mid Cheshire stations of Acton Bridge, Hartford and Winsford, or anywhere else. MCRUA will try to get this changed.

Friends of the Barton Line

At the OGM on 20 January, the Chairman said that they had responded to TPE's South route timetable consultation as follows:

- Welcome the direct service to Liverpool provided that it does not adversely impact on the timing of trains on the single line to Cleethorpes
- Accept the withdrawal of direct services to Manchester Airport if this improves reliability on the main line, provided that convenient connections can be made at Piccadilly and fares be transferable between TOCs
- Run one or two direct services to Manchester Airport outside the peak periods.

On behalf of the Barton Civic Society, FBL member John French petitioned Martin Vickers MP to reinstate the 0800 train service from Barton to Cleethorpes. The meeting agreed the Chairman's proposed response to EMR. It also agreed to submit FBL's Barton line timetable to the Bartonian, the Goxhill Gander and other local newsletters, and to deliver A5 versions by hand to various properties along the line.

English Regional Transport Association

Reopening Northampton - Market Harborough would provide multiple links and serve numerous markets: locally along the A508 corridor, and challenging the M1 as part of modal shift and an environmentally 'greening' agenda. It would serve expanded populations that were not present when the line shut as part of the Serpell Report in the early 1980's: Milton Keynes was not built and Northampton was half its current size or less, but the line was used for freight until the end. A curve at the southern end could allow direct running between Felixstowe and both the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) and the new Northampton Rail Freight Depot. Then a new Bedford - Northampton line could relieve the lack of capacity on the Midland Main Line.

ERTA would welcome more volunteers to help with fact-finding, making a case for its projects, organizing meetings, and leafleting. If interested, email richard.erta@gmail.com.

Windsor Lines Passengers Association

A Stakeholders' Conference on Zoom attracted over 100 participants. South Western Railway's CEO Claire Mann was very positive, although 2021 had been very challenging, with twelve changes to the timetable since the beginning of Covid. A new 2-year contract will give SWR some stability. Three themes run through its plans for the second year: efficiency, trust, and better journeys. The implementation of GBR will come later.

Considering that the timetable and frequency of trains is by far the most important aspect of running a railway (together with punctuality), the amount of time that the Conference gave to this was disappointing. The North London line showed that increased frequency results in increased usage, so a 15min frequency of 5-car trains is better than a 30min frequency of 10-car trains.

NR is seeing if blocking whole weeks rather than several weekends would speed up maintenance. There are now fewer speed restrictions across the SWR network. Plastic sleepers are used where weight is an issue. End of platform gates have reduced the number of suicides, and Welfare Officers are proving successful.

At a meeting with SWR, WLPA suggested extending "off-peak times" to encourage travel (eg starting before 1100). There seem to be peak fares even at weekends, and differences between to-London and from-London. SWR will let WLPA have definitive statements as to what counts as peak hours during the week and at weekends.

Although many of the new trains have been delivered, a number of short trains are running. SWR has negotiated a delay until August in moving the remaining Class 707s to Southeastern, which has not pleased many as it prolongs the lack of toilets on quite long journeys.

The lithium batteries on e-scooters have caused fires on TfL trains, and will be banned. SWR has trained its guards to deal with this sort of emergency: passengers should not be evacuated onto the tracks between stations!

South Hampshire Rail Users' Group

The Southampton - Havant corridor needs rebalancing in favour of public transport. In the short term, semi-fast Waterloo trains need to call at Totton, the existing railhead for the Waterside. Diverting the Romsey - Eastleigh - Salisbury service to the Waterside, with a separate Salisbury - Southampton service is the most straightforward option. Alternatively, could the Waterloo - Southampton service terminate at Eastleigh off-peak, and at Portsmouth (via Hedge End) in the peaks? A Waterside - Eastleigh (or Chandlers Ford, with extra signalling capability) on the opposite side of the hour from the Waterside - Romsey service could reduce the 40min gaps (almost hourly on Sundays and on Mondays-Fridays in the morning peak) in the Southampton - Eastleigh service. This has long been a busy passenger flow, but is not reflected in the service level.

The Government's thinking on a Waterside scheme is unclear. However, the line is already in use as far south as Marchwood, which gives it an advantage over some other schemes. The Campaign for Better Transport identified services to Fawley as a top priority for restoration, and reopening has been staunchly supported by Hampshire County Councillor David Harrison, and more intermittently by the County Council generally. Government presents the proposed Solent Freeport as the Nation's Global Gateway, with initiatives providing job opportunities to help level up a number of coastal communities including New Forest Waterside, so the railway could be a useful adjunct to its development.

Avocet Line Rail Users Group

A new pay as you go (PAYG) scheme is being introduced in the Bristol 'travel to work' area. You tap a smart card on a reader at the start and finish stations, and the system works out the cheapest fare for the journeys made. A new simplified fares structure makes it easy to understand both for the

passenger and the computer system. Fares are similar to those they replace, so it hasn't been used for a sneaky fare rise. There is a proposal for a similar scheme across Devon and Cornwall.

The transfer of more Turbo units to Bristol/Exeter depends on the introduction of Class 769 Flex trains on services in the Reading area, but none has happened, nor even the necessary driver training. The lack of additional units for Devon and Cornwall has left GWR with too few for its working 'diagrams'. The plan for the Avocet Line on weekdays is for three diagrams with Turbo units and four with pairs of Class 150s, but this is very rarely achieved. The vast majority of planned Avocet services do run, but are often 2-car or a Class 150/158 combination.

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 (see Events below). There are six open award categories:

- # Best social media
 - # Best website
 - # Best newsletter – the Paul Abell Award
 - # 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. The Judging Panel is fairly relaxed about what constitutes a RUG, so local campaigns, station adopters, community rail and heritage groups should all feel free to enter.

NEWS

On 12 January Rf hosted an online webinar "[Rail Recovery - how to realise the potential](#)". Chaired by Rf President Christian Wolmar, it featured Steve White, MD of Southeastern; Suzanne Donnelly of the GBR Transition Team, and Rf VPs and Directors Stewart Palmer and Ian Brown CBE. After opening remarks from the Chair and each of the panelists, there was an hour's Q&A.

17 January marked a new low point in SWR rail services on the lines from Waterloo to Weymouth and to Exeter, with no through services to London on weekdays from west of Bournemouth, and on the Exeter route just one through train in one direction only. Passengers have to change at Bournemouth or Salisbury, resulting in a loss of convenience and longer journey times.

Chris Loder, MP for West Dorset and once Head of Service Strategy for South West Trains, took the matter up with SWR and the Rail Minister. At PMQ on 3 February, the Prime Minister responded that the timetable was "expected to return to December 2021 levels" from 19 February. SWR has since announced that services will be restored to pre-Omicron levels from 21 February.

John O'Sullivan believes that the 'London Rail and Tube map' is now only available on line. "It seems a very negative step at a time when everything should be being done to bring back people to rail travel. In my opinion the small pocket London tube map is not fit for purpose and should be replaced by the 'London rail map', which was never widely distributed in the first place."

Rf Chair Chris Page comments: "Being an ATOC (now RDG) publication, TfL has 'Not Invented Here' syndrome, so doesn't stock it at tube stations. The rail operators have a temporary derogation from their obligation to produce printed timetables during COVID because timetables are changing so frequently, but our Passenger Group will be keen to push for both the timetable and the map to be reinstated when the pandemic has passed."

Rf EAST ANGLIA

RfEA welcomed the reopening of Soham station on 13 December, which is being well used. The two-hourly service from Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds to Ely and Peterborough must be seen as the first part of a longer-term vision of a train every hour, which will only become possible when the capacity through Ely is finally enhanced. Doubling of the line into Ely from Soham and restoring the West Curve at Newmarket Junction would allow for a second train to Newmarket every hour, direct from Soham into Cambridge, though even with a change at Ely rail is cheaper and quicker than the bus into Cambridge.

A meeting with NR on 4 December on the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements addressed Rf's concern that the scheme was not ambitious enough. The encouraging news was that the publicized increase from 6.5 to 10 paths/hour could increase to 13 or 14 with other interventions to resolve constraints elsewhere on the network. However, because NR works in silos, the Cambridgeshire Resignalling Project doesn't include any work to increase capacity, so EACE could highlight secondary bottlenecks elsewhere in the region.

Rf has [responded](#) to the (now closed) [consultation](#) on Transport East's 30-year plan that listed six core corridors including Kings Lynn – Norwich and Stansted - Colchester. However, there was nothing substantive about reopening lines and stations, nor any detailed thinking about urban infrastructure and transportation. Transport East should also make more explicit its support for step-free stations. Overall, whilst the strategy makes a start in recognizing the contribution rail can make, more boldness is essential if rail (including light rail and tram) is to be a significant regional player. Transport East is invited to involve Rf in its thinking.

Rf HERTS & BEDS

The Division coordinated a [response](#) to the Herts CC consultation on the Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transport scheme: it must be seen as just part of a high volume public transportation scheme. West Hertfordshire presents some specific problems as regards the interaction of HERT with the potential alternatives for a Watford - Croxley Link ([W2CL](#)) (a successor to the now defunct Metropolitan Line Extension) and the successful Restoring Your Railway bid for a passing loop on the Abbey line between Watford and St Albans.

The Mayor of London has proposed withdrawing from the Travel Card Agreement to generate more revenue. However, while RfH&B would strongly support any simplification of the ticketing system, there is as yet no PAYG product available that caps a combination of national rail and TfL travel. And those for whom PAYG is not suitable must also be catered for.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Community Rail Week will return from 23 - 29 May. CRPs, station groups and CRN partners are encouraged to take part, to highlight the incredible work of community rail. More details around this year's theme will follow, with suggestions on how to get involved.

The webinar with the Great British Railways (GBR) Transition Team will be the start of ongoing dialogue with the community rail movement. CRN has submitted a comprehensive response to its call for evidence on the Whole Industry Strategic Plan, sharing a wide range of community rail examples and evidence. A meeting with the new Rail Minister, Wendy Morton MP, was also very productive in demonstrating the value of community rail. She was interested to hear about the full breadth of work the movement is involved in, and CRN hopes to welcome her to a Community Rail Week event.

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

NR has started work on a new £4.2m railway station at the Portway P&R site in Shirehampton, jointly funded by Bristol City Council, the West of England Combined Authority and the DfT as part of the MetroWest programme. From later this summer, it will have a half-hourly service to Bristol Temple Meads and Severn Beach, complementing the existing P&R bus service, and offering both the local community and those from further afield a rail option to destinations along the Severn Beach line, or for onward travel on the wider rail network.

As requested by Defra under the Adaptation Reporting Power (ARP) requirements in the Climate Change Act (2008), NR has published a third [report](#) on how it is adapting to climate change. Different market sectors report on the steps each is taking to identify and adapt to climate risks. Working closely with many other stakeholders, NR has developed a risk assessment and reporting framework that provides a standardised approach for the land transport sector, enabling Defra to draw comparisons and conclusions.

NR is trialling a monitoring system to provide early warning of earth movements at sites across Scotland's Railway. It has installed surface mounted tilt meters at 26 sites, with a further seven planned. By flagging potential issues, trains can be slowed down and stopped before they reach the problem area.

Trees and vegetation are being cleared on the West Highland Line between Craigendoran and Helensburgh Upper. The area will then be replanted with native trees and shrubs including Holly, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Rowan, Hazel and Elder. Man-made habitat, including bat and bird boxes, will enhance the existing natural features.

A Chiltern Railways HybridFLEX diesel/battery train has entered service between London Marylebone and Aylesbury. It can travel at up to 100mph, and will cut fuel consumption and carbon emissions by 25%.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, there were 253 fatalities from suicide or suspected suicide on Britain's railway. In addition to the tragic effect on families of the deceased, exposure to such traumatic events is very challenging for those in the rail industry. Over 22,000 rail and transport police staff have been trained, and in 2020-21 rail employees, police, and the public made 1,810 interventions. Since 2010, Samaritans has been working with the industry to prevent rail suicides and support those left affected.

...and finally

Last May, John Roberts from Northampton boarded a Watford Junction - St Albans Abbey service without a valid ticket. Birmingham Magistrates fined him £220 plus £150 costs, a £34 victim services surcharge and £6 compensation, a total of £410.

SWR was left red-faced when "pornography sighs" were played over the public announcement system on a Wandsworth to Clapham train. A passenger can be heard asking: "Is this coming from the driver?" It is not known how the sounds came to be played, or who was involved.

CONSULTATIONS

- Fife Council: [Local Transport Strategy](#), closes 7 March.
- House of Lords Built Environment Committee: [Public Transport in Towns and Cities Inquiry](#), closes 11 March.
- Oxfordshire CC: [Local Transport & Connectivity Plan 5 to 2050](#), closes 16 March.
- Transport Scotland: [Strategic Transport Projects Review](#), closes 18 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](#), 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.

February

- Saturday 19. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, 1400.
- Tuesday 22. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).
- Saturday 26. Rf East Anglia AGM, Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, **Bury St. Edmunds**, IP33 1SJ, 1400.
- Saturday 26. Rf North West AGM, Holiday Inn, The Ringway, **Preston**, PR1 3AU, 1200. Note change of date.
- Saturday 26. English Regional Transport Association, In N Out Autocentres, Brackmills Business Park, Caswell Road, **Northampton**, NN4 7PW, 1400

March

- Thursday 3. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 7 April).
- Friday 4. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1400
- Saturday 5. Rf Severnside, **Bridgewater** Railway Club, 1400.
- Saturday 5. East Suffolk Travel Association, Methodist Church, St John's Street, **Woodbridge**, 1400.
- 7-8 March. Community Rail Conference, Crowne Plaza Hotel, **Nottingham**.
- Tuesday 8. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Wednesday 9. Rf West Midlands, **Online**,
- Wednesday 9. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division. **Online**. 19.00.
- Saturday 12. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division. **Online**. 10.30.
- Wednesday 16. Friends of the Barton Line, White Swan, **Barton**, 2000 (Also 20 July (AGM) and 16 November at the White Swan, and 19 May and 15 September at No 1 Inn Cleethorpes, 1900.)
- Saturday 26. English Regional Transport Association, Unitarian Church, Worthing Road, **Horsham**, West Sussex, RH12 1SL, 1400.
- Monday 28. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1100.

Further Ahead

- 2 April. Rf East Midlands Branch AGM, Midland Hotel, **Derby**, 1230.
- 5 April. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 10 May, 21 June, 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- 11 April. Avocet Line Rail Users Group, venue TBN, 1900 (Also AGM 17 October).
- 23 April. Rf West Midlands Branch AGM.
- 26 May. Sub-national Transport Bodies Conference, the Vox, **Birmingham**, B40 1NT.
- 17 June. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, **Dingwall**.
- 16 July. Rf AGM and RUG Awards, St Michael's Church Centre, The Green, Stoke Gifford, **Bristol**, BS34 8PD, 1100.
- 15 September. Rf Annual Conference, St Georges Centre, 60 Great George Street, **Leeds**, LS1 3DL.

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

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