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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Many of the two million refugees from Ukraine have escaped by train. RUX salutes all those who have kept the rail service running, particularly the train crews returning to the danger areas for the next load of passengers. Up to 10,000 refugees a day arrive at Przemyśl in Poland, while many stations have been transformed into reception centres. Once the refugees have reached safety, they have free onward rail travel to anywhere they want.

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

Construction of the £63m Barrhead corridor through East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire is due to start in April and be completed by December 2023. But although the East Kilbride line is double track as far as Busby, only one will be electrified. A Transport Scotland spokesman said that this would release funds for other decarbonisation projects such as Borders Railway electrification.

NR has awarded Siemens Mobility Ltd a £50m contract to support the remodelling of Carstairs Junction on the West Coast Main Line, where the Glasgow and Edinburgh routes diverge. Trackguard WTS digital technology will remedy the severe speed restrictions, particularly for Edinburgh services, whilst a loop around Carstairs station will take 775m long freight trains and increase operational flexibility. Final commissioning is due to take place with a three-stage blockade between April and June next year.

Transport Scotland aims to replace all diesel trains by 2035. It is not yet known what will replace the Class 156s, including those on the WHL, which will become life-expired by 2025. Battery Electric Multiple Units (BEMUs) should replace the Inter7City HSTs by 2030, when the Class 158 units will also be life-expired, as well as the Class 318/320 EMUs. Class 170s should go by 2035.

Campaign for Borders Rail

CBR is disappointed with both the second stage of the Holyrood "Strategic Transport Projects Review" (STPR2) and the "Union Connectivity Review". Neither document gives any substantial weight to the economic, social and environmental benefits of extending the Borders Railway.

Subject to membership approval, CBR will commission a consultancy specialising in transport and sustainability to develop its case in further detail. "Using professional consultants will give us robust and independent evidence to support our engagement with the official feasibility study process," said CBR Chair Marion Short.

The Campaign will hold its 2022 AGM in October in the Great Tapestry Building in Galashiels.

Furness Line Action Group

In February, Cumbria County Council published its [Cumbria Transport Infrastructure Plan](#) (CTIP) for 2022 to 2037, developed in conjunction with the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (CLEP). FLAG is disappointed that there is again no mention of the proposal for Beeching Reversal funding to re-open the Penrith to Keswick line, despite the support of four Cumbrian MPs, local Councils and tourist organisations. However, the County Council is happy to include the Scottish Executive's Borders Railway proposal to complete the link from Carlisle to Edinburgh via Tweedbank.

Indicative Northern and TransPennine Express timetables for December 2022 show Barrow and Windermere to Manchester trains routed via Bolton rather than Wigan, potentially saving 10mins. However, northbound trains would then run ahead of the trains from London, so they would miss their connection at Preston or Lancaster, increasing journey and waiting times. It would be better to hold the Airport-to-Barrow trains at Preston for 10mins.

Also, the last train into Barrow is planned to leave the Airport at 2129 rather than at 2210, making the 1910 ex-Euston the last connection rather than the 2030. It also reduces the opportunity for nights out in Manchester, as Bridgewater Hall concerts usually end by 2200, enabling current departures from Piccadilly and Oxford Road of 2225/2229. The equivalent 2217 from the Airport, as well as the 2148/2248 services, would instead all go to Blackpool North. Northern is currently considering these FLAG and CRP concerns.

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

In Regional Railways days there was a constant argument about frequent services between main terminals where you could virtually change to anywhere (Leeds being a good example), or less frequent through trains that inevitably went through numerous major junctions where delays etc could have knock-on effects. It was suggested that the Chester to Airport service be redirected to Victoria where 2 Calder Valley services per hour could provide a cross Manchester Rail service, and where there were 2 trains per hour to Chester from Victoria. Clearly the visionaries of today are in the through-service camp with the inherent problems which that can entail.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

Michael Gove's 'Levelling-up' white paper has been met with predictable scorn. At 332 pages it's certainly long, and actually reads well – but lacks any real commitments to invest, repeating promises of 'jam tomorrow'. Various commentators have pointed out the lack of commitment, some comparing the huge investment poured into East Germany post-unification. Full of good intentions, and with much useful evidence on regional disparities, it presents ten 'missions', or promises to get things done. But how much is just wishful thinking?

So what should 'levelling-up' mean to towns like Bolton? Paul hates the term. It suggests that we all aspire to be car-dominated, alienated suburbs like Slough, Basingstoke or Crawley, whereas many people in Bolton want to be more like their image of how it used to be, with a flourishing town centre, locally-based jobs and a local council that had real power to get things done.

Friends of Hunmanby Railway Station

Visitors to Hunmanby have a new attraction this year: a Good Food & Real Ale Trail starting at the station. So come by train, grab a free Heritage and Flower Trail leaflet, take a scenic 2.5 mile walk through the village, partake of good food and drink, relax and take your time with 'slow tourism'.

The Friends have also developed a train timetable and event guide. With funding from the local community, local councillors and Northern Rail, they have found a way to promote both the Hull to Scarborough Line in its 175th year, and events in the local community.

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

Re-introduction of passenger services on the Lichfield - Burton - Derby line has been a driving force for the L RPG for much of the last 20 years. With a new station at Alrewas to serve the National Memorial Arboretum, the connection to West Coast Mainline services at Lichfield Trent Valley and West Midlands Trains' Cross City services would provide much needed relief to both the A38 and local roads. Following a visit to Lichfield Trent Valley and the proposed site of Alrewas station arranged by Lichfield MP Michael Fabricant, the new Rail Minister, Wendy Morton, said: "Today's visit has put this scheme very much on my radar for the future."

Malcolm Holmes, Director of the West Midlands Rail Executive, which has done much of the work determining how the line would operate, added: "There is a very strong case to open this line, not least for the thousands of visitors who go to the National Memorial Arboretum every week. We at the WMRE are developing a plan through which we could establish a basic service relatively quickly and scale up over time." It is thought that funding to implement the scheme could be allocated within the next 2 to 3 years.

East Suffolk Travel Association

A half-hourly InterCity service between Norwich, Ipswich and London has been restored, with just a few exceptions in the evenings. ESTA's Chairman was in contact with Peter Aldous MP about the possibility of Lowestoft – London through trains mentioned by Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris, but he has moved on, so ESTA has written to his successor, Wendy Morton.

A substantial article in the East Anglian Daily Times reported the results of the ESTA survey on local train and bus journeys made during October:

- 53% of trains arrived on time and 32% arrived early. Bus connections were generally easy, and there was a high level of satisfaction with staff helpfulness.
- 48% found out about train times via the internet and 23% from a printed timetable. 18% said they already knew the times of their trains
- 27% bought their train ticket online, 25% used a station booking office (of which there are only three in the area: Ipswich, Lowestoft and Norwich), 16% used a ticket vending machine, and 14% bought their ticket on the train. 92% said their ticket was checked on the train – an improvement on some earlier surveys.

ESTA has also made a submission on Transport East's Draft Transport Strategy:

- To press for enhanced capacity to enable an hourly passenger service between Ipswich, Ely and Peterborough.
- To welcome Transport East's support for the East/West Rail Link and for operating some East Suffolk Line trains to and from London, and for its aspiration for better transport connections to "places near the sea", which should mean Sunday buses to Aldeburgh, and a better link from Halesworth to Southwold.
- To urge support for a two-hourly bus service between Halesworth, Bungay and Norwich.

English Regional Transport Association

ERTA has fanned the flames for activism in the Devon area. There is an aspiration to re-rail Ilfracombe, Bideford, Bude, Tavistock and Sidmouth, as well as for a direct London – Taunton – Barnstaple service, whilst the reopening of Okehampton is a catalyst for extension to Tavistock.

A Green Improvement District (GID) coalition of Brackmills Industrial Estate, Delapré Abbey and the University of Northampton aims to reduce congestion and emissions in the triangle, to create a cleaner, greener area in which to live and work, and build the case for grant funding to progress reopening the railway track on Buryport Road. It would run from Brackmills to close to the town centre, passing the University at Waterside on Mid-Summer Meadow.

Waverley Council is re-running the Planning Application ([WA/2020/0004](#)) that would compromise the former railway corridor alongside the Wey and Arun Canal at Rushett Common, Bramley, which is now used as a footpath/cycleway. ERTA has long held the view that re-railing the corridor would serve the greater good as an alternative to more road usage. It has a public meeting scheduled for 26 March in Horsham (see Events below) at which all are welcome.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

In a conference call with BTPG on 2 March, GWR MD Mark Hopwood had some very bad news: Bedwyn's off-peak direct IET Paddington services will be permanently axed from May and replaced by diesel shuttle services to Newbury. The DfT told GWR to cut costs, so they have decided to retire older diesel trains in the West Country, and replace them with the three IET trains that serve Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury.

It will leave Bedwyn with the worst timetable since June 1992. Although the direct commuter service in the morning peak will be fairly good, there will be only two direct trains back in the evening. While some of the diesel shuttles will have decent connections to the electric service to Paddington, others result in journey times of around two hours. And 1024 will be only arrival in London between 0901 and 1152.

Ironically the Class 387s that run on electric to Newbury and diesel beyond will be redeployed to a non-electrified area of the network - circa £200m of rolling stock designed for electric traction unable to make use of it, while the Bedwyn siding extension to accommodate the IETs, which cost over £1m, will become a white elephant.

Tarka Rail Association

TRA supports the proposal by ACErail (Atlantic Coast Express or Atlantic Coast to Exeter) and the efforts of North Devon and Torridge District Councils to start feasibility studies on reinstating the Bideford – Barnstaple line, where it would join the Tarka line to Exeter. The proposals would also enhance and safeguard the Tarka Trail. TRA's new President, Andrea Davis, is well placed to help as Transport Lead for Devon CC, and Chairman of Peninsular Transport, the sub-national transport body for Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. Two key rail industry representatives have also been briefed and given supportive advice: Christian Irwin, Industry Program Director for NR Southwest, and Matt Barnes, Head of Strategic Planning for GWR, formerly Regional Development Manager.

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](#).

NEWS

Rf submitted a comprehensive [response](#) to the call for evidence on Great British Railways Whole Industry Strategic Plan. There is considerable scope for increasing the part rail can play to address the government's strategic objectives for the rail sector against current performance, so improving value for money for users, stakeholders and the taxpayer.

Rail fares hiked 3.8% on 1 March, based on the obsolete RPI measure of inflation. If CPI were used, fares would rise by only 2%. Rf spokesman Bruce Williamson commented: "If the government cared about the cost of living crisis, they would drop RPI and use CPI instead. They can afford to give motorists a break, by freezing fuel duty for 12 years on the trot. Why won't they do something similar for the hard-pressed rail traveller? Inflation this year is likely to hit 8%, so unless the government changes the formula, the average rail traveller will be bankrupted next year.

"They could take this opportunity not just to freeze fares as they've done with fuel duty, but to reform our insanely complex fares structure. Transparent, affordable fares would not only encourage a return to rail, but would give a boost to the economy and promote green, environmentally friendly travel."

The Railway Club Directory [website](#) has a new section for rail user groups. However, to keep the numbers manageable, it includes only those affiliated to Rf - another good reason to join! A full list of RUGs can be found [here](#).

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

A new round of the Community Rail Development Fund for accredited CRPs opened on 9 March. Get your bids in for any plans you have for Community Rail Week or summer leisure promotions.

Community Rail Week from 23-29 May will centre on encouraging people to travel by train. The strapline of "Give the Train a Try" will reach out to those who may not have considered taking the train before as well those returning, supporting both social inclusion and modal shift.

Several CRPs and volunteers, together with CRN and start-up tech company Window Seater, have launched a series of free immersive [audio travel guides](#) to inspire people to travel by train. They cover nine GWR lines, and draw on stories and insights collected through community rail.

CRN's [report](#) on Community Rail & Biodiversity, sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, explores the growing awareness of its efforts to support biodiversity gain, and connect people with nature. And a new [CRN briefing paper](#), sponsored by Northern, outlines how the concept of social value can be applied to Community Rail's increasingly diverse activities. It also highlights work within the rail industry, including the new Rail Social Value Tool being launched later this year.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Many rail fares, including season tickets, have risen by 3.8%, the highest annual increase for years - after a Clean Cities Campaign [report](#) put London, Greater Manchester and Birmingham at the bottom of a European league table for affordable public transport. Residents must expend 8-10% of their household budget on travel, compared to just 2% in Oslo.

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

The RAIB has published its [final report](#) into the derailment at Carmont in which three people died. At around 0937 on 12 August 2020, the 0638 from Aberdeen to Glasgow was returning to Stonehaven due to a blockage on the line ahead when it struck debris washed out from a drainage system that had not been installed correctly. The collision deflected the train to the left, so that it struck a bridge parapet, which caused the vehicles to scatter.

The train was travelling at 73mph, just below the normal line speed at that point. By 0900, some 30mins before the accident, route control was aware of four obstructions of the railway within 11mils of Carmont signal box, but no instruction was given to the driver or signaller that the train should run at reduced speed, or be used to examine the line. There was at the time no clearly defined process that required any such precaution.

NR Chief Executive Andrew Haines responded: "In the 18 months since the accident, we have inspected similar locations and drainage systems across the length and breadth of the country, and RUX-RMS-220318

the added insight the RAIB has provided will help us in our efforts. We also commissioned two independent taskforces led by world class experts to help us better understand extreme rainfall events, and how to better manage our cuttings, embankments and their drainage systems. We have invested tens of £millions towards improving the general resilience of our railway and how we predict and respond to such events. But this remains a multi-generational challenge, and there is still much to do.”

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the rail regulator, claims that train operators are profiteering from ticket refunds: the average fee is £6.96 per ticket whereas the estimated cost is just £3.77. In 2006, administration fees on refunds were capped at £10, but this was based on most applications being made in paper form. Stephanie Tobyn for the ORR said that with 92% of refund claims now submitted electronically, the cost to the operators has plummeted.

Pontrilas Timber in Abergavenny in Wales has received its first load of timber by rail since 2004. Felled in a forest in Bickleigh, south Devon, 320 tons were loaded onto eight Colas Rail wagons at Hackney Yard near Newton Abbot. After improvements to the sidings and the adjacent road in Abergavenny, Pontrilas Timber has an aspiration for loads of 720 tons across 18 wagons. And now Hackney Yard can take 44-ton HGVs, Aggregate Industries also has plans to use it.

To improve public transport connectivity in the area, Watford Borough Council has committed £150,000 to explore options for a Watford 2 Croxley Link (W2CL) using the route that the Met Line Extension (MLX) would have taken before London Mayor Sadiq Khan cancelled the project in 2017.

„,and finally

Sniffer dogs trained by Search Dogs UK are helping to track down metal thieves who cause major delays to rail services in the North West and the Midlands, and then to catch those who sell it on. Railway property is marked with SelectaDNA, a permanent synthetic spray with a unique scent that the dogs can detect. It is only visible under special police torches, so any stolen goods found illegally on sale by a scrap metal dealer can be identified.

Between 23 and 31 July, NR will replace the tracks through Penge Tunnel, between Brixton and Beckenham Junction in South London. It is said that Queen Victoria, the first monarch to travel by train, really didn't like travelling through tunnels, especially the 1.25 mile long Penge Tunnel. So an overground 'loop' was constructed via Catford so that Bromley - Victoria journeys could avoid it!

CONSULTATIONS

- Cotswold District Council: [Local Plan 2011-2031 Partial Update](#), closes 20 March
- Transport for London: [Surrey Quays station](#), closes 25 March
- Devon County Council: [Strategy 2021 - 2025](#), closes 31 March
- DfT: [Low Carbon Fuel Strategy: Call for Ideas](#), closes 3 April
- Luton Rising: [Luton Airport Expansion](#), closes 4 April
- Transport North East: [North East Rail and Metro Strategy](#), closes 11 April
- 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.

March

- Wednesday 23. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1000.
- Saturday 26. English Regional Transport Association, Unitarian Church, Worthing Road, **Horsham**, West Sussex, RH12 1Z, 1400.
- Monday 28. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1100.
- Tuesday 29. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

April

- Saturday 2. Rf East Midlands Branch AGM, Midland Hotel, **Derby**, 1230.
- Tuesday 5. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 10 May, 21 June, 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- Thursday 7. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 5 May, 9 June).
- Monday 11. Avocet Line Rail Users Group, venue TBN, 1900 (Also AGM 17 October).
- Monday 11. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930.
- Tuesday 12. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Saturday 23. Rf West Midlands Branch AGM.
- Saturday 30. Rf London & South East Regional Branch AGM, Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, 49 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AU, 1100.
- Saturday 30. English Regional Transport Association, The Swan, 1 Dunstable Road, Flitwick, MK45 1HP, 1500.

Further Ahead

- 9 May. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1100.
- 11 May. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900.
- 14 May. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, **Faversham**, 1400.
- 19 May. Friends of the Barton Line, No 1 Inn **Cleethorpes**, 1900 (Also 20 July (AGM) and 16 November at the White Swan Barton, 2000, and 15 September at No 1 Inn.)
- 19 May. Tarka Rail Association AGM, **Umberleigh** Village Hall, 1900.
- 21 May. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, **Beccles** station, 1400.
- 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.
- 5 October. Community Rail Awards, **Manchester** Central Convention Centre.

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

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