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Welcome to the Rail User Express

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UK heritage railways currently use some 25,000 tons of coal each year, but its future supply is now in jeopardy. So why aren't we producing our own? Far from helping to combat climate change, closing UK mines only to import coal from Kazakhstan or wherever is actually compounding the problem by adding all the hydrocarbons used in transporting it around the world.

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.

Rail Action Group East of Scotland

The latest [Rages Rag](#) has updates on the new stations at Reston and East Linton. It is hoped that Reston will open next month, but this has yet to be confirmed. Footfall at Dunbar is increasing, and there are discussions for the purchase of land to enable access to Platform 2 from the south.

Provision of much-needed additional capacity on the ECML through East Lothian, and the option of re-opening the Haddington branch, remain under consideration, whilst the newly-formed Tweed Valley Railway Campaign aims to establish a line between the Borders Railway and Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Ribble Valley Rail

Ribble Valley Borough Council has bid to restore services between Clitheroe and Hellifield on the Settle - Carlisle line, with the option of an extension to Garsdale (formerly Hawes Junction), whilst the Upper Wensleydale Railway Group is working to restore Garsdale - Hawes, with through trains to/from Manchester or Preston. Wensleydale Railway Association (Trust) aims to reinstate the line all the way from Garsdale to its preserved line at Redmire.

However, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is proposing to convert the 6mIs of track-bed between Garsdale and Hawes to a multi-user footpath/bridleway/cycle track. RVR invites you to use [this link](#) to object to the YDNPA proposal. **The deadline for objections is Friday 22 April.**

Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

When a Liverpool to Drax freight train failed shortly after 1600 at Brewery Junction, no trains could run from Manchester towards Rochdale. Shortly before 1700, it was diverted to Drax via Huddersfield. Many passenger trains serving the Rochdale area were cancelled, and some from Leeds were turned back at Rochdale. STORM suggests that NR re-instate a short link that could have bypassed the problem area. Owain Roberts, Northern Trains Regional Stakeholder Manager thinks it's a good idea, but would take significant funding to implement.

Northern Weekly Salvo – Paul Salvesson

This could be a good time for CRPs or station groups to explore opportunities to undertake revenue-generating services such as station maintenance, or refurbishing/restoring buildings. With DfT/NR/GBR also engaged at a senior level, a TOC could let out work to one or more CRPs in a given area to create a social enterprise – say Community Rail Infrastructure Services Ltd (CRIS). Each CRIS would be owned by the CRP/s involved, and perform a range of tasks that could evolve over time. A regional trial would make sense.

Harrogate Line Supporters Group

HLSG has strongly protested to Northern about the loss of three vital services in its new May timetable: the 0607 and 0633 Harrogate - Leeds, and the 2239 Leeds – Harrogate. The earliest arrival at most onward destinations will be an hour or so later (eg London from 0859 to 1000), destroying any likelihood of people using the train for long-distance journeys. The first service from Harrogate at 0656 is followed by four more in 49mins, including an LNER service. Reinstating the 0607 and 0633, and taking out the 0656 and 0714, would give a much more even spread and a better service overall. There is also a two-hour gap each way in the evening service.

Friends of the Barton Line

Performance has seen a slight dip, but the service is much better than the appalling disruption before December. EMR does seem to be working hard to provide a good service.

The FBL Secretary produced an enhanced version of the Barton line timetable and 1,500 fliers were distributed to homes close to stations along the line. Civic Society and Rope Walk posters at stations also encourage participants to come by train.

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

Wesley Paxton suggests that a Burton Upon Trent - Lichfield service could be extended southwest by reinstating the dismantled line from Brownhills to Walsall. A million or so Black Country residents would have a shorter and faster journey to the northeast, and be spared changing and congestion at Birmingham New Street.

Fen Line Users Association

7 February saw the restoration of Greater Anglia's 0618 service from King's Lynn to London Liverpool Street, and the first of its new Class 720s in revenue earning service on the Fen Line. Their introduction has met with mixed reviews. The ride over the notoriously rough section of track between Downham Market and Littleport is smoother and quieter, and acceleration is very impressive. However, with 3+2 seating, the central aisle is extremely narrow so that, for those with a fuller figure, the warning "Don't get stuck on the train" may take on a whole new meaning!

GA's Class 720 press release says "With this route now seeing new trains, it means the roll-out of our new suburban trains is now underway on all the routes..." But is an end-to-end journey of over 2hrs and nearly 100mls "suburban"? As part of the West Anglia Main Line, shouldn't the Fen Line be enjoying on-board catering and first-class accommodation?

English Regional Transport Association

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report shows that much of the environmental problem is generated by human activity, and that a sustainable future is not about doing business as usual; the way we do things is what matters. Environmental and land-use stewardship issues need local rail, to provide affordable, accessible, comprehensive alternatives to roads that just create more congestion and demand for parking. A recent [blogspot](#) sets out ERTA's ideas for East West Rail and a number of other projects.

An ERTA meeting in Horsham to discuss reinstating links to Guildford via Cranleigh and to Shoreham was well attended. The planning application on the canal scheme may have to be re-issued on a technicality. But whereas the canal has other routing options, the railway needs the corridor of the former track-bed, broadened to accommodate a fenced off cycle-way and footway alongside to create a 'green corridor'. The way ahead is to get councils and MPs onside. Then, once formal studies have shown what can be done, to turn to Government for support, funding and ultimately go-ahead for delivery.

Mr George Bathurst then gave his talk on the Windsor Link, and what was needed to plug the 300m gap between the Central and Riverside Stations, to better serve a top tourist centre. The scheme reached GRIP Level 2 on NR's 8-step ladder, but the system seems to throw up more conditions, costs and obstacles each time a box is ticked.

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Correction: the March issue referred to the redeployment of Class 387s to a non-electrified area of the GWR network. This should of course have referred to the bi-mode Class 802 IETs.

BTPG met with GWR senior management regarding the loss of the IETs to replace Castle Class HSTs that would need a refit and are heavy on fuel. Adding batteries to the 387 fleet to enable them to serve Bedwyn is not viable, and extending electrification beyond Newbury is not a short-term solution. GWR would very much like to return the IETs to the Bedwyn route, but that will require additional DfT funding to lease other trains for the Cardiff to Penzance service.

The May timetable is flawed with the loss of the 0831 direct to Paddington, the first off-peak service, and the 1907 Paddington departure becoming a '387', requiring a change at Newbury that doesn't work. Making it an IET direct to Bedwyn (perhaps by swapping a 387 with an IET on the Bristol line) would transform the whole service, but GWR has yet to agree to this.

Witney Oxford Transport Group

Oxfordshire CC has allocated £250,000 for a feasibility study on proposals for new rail links to Cowley, Grove/Wantage, and Witney, and double-tracking the North Cotswold line. With advice and guidance from Rf, WOTG is campaigning for a new branch to link Oxford and Eynsham with [Salt Cross Garden village](#), Witney, and Carterton for RAF Brize Norton.

Dartmoor Railway Association

The Dartmoor Line between Okehampton and Exeter that was reinstated last November continues to see journey numbers above forecasts. From May, the service frequency is increased to hourly, and the main station building is due to reopen. Though surprisingly unstaffed, the station will then have extensive facilities: an independently run buffet, tourist information, general waiting room, full lavatory facilities maintained by the buffet staff, and a large car park. A Community Shop manned by DRA volunteers will also be open on some days, along with their Railway Museum in the former Downside building, which Devon CC still owns, along with the station footbridge.

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

In the Spring Statement, motorists got a 5p cut to fuel duty. So what help was there for rail travellers? Nothing - just the usual inflation-busting fare increase. How will that help the cost-of-living crisis, or reduce our dependence on imported oil?

Rf [responded](#) to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee inquiry into public transport in towns and cities. There is considerable variability in the degree to which pre-Covid commuting has or might return. The loss of much of this market in some areas is a significant challenge, but also an opportunity for consistent all-day services, new approaches to fares, and a stronger focus on customer service.

Rf Honorary President Christian Wolmar argues in [Railwatch](#) that, far from a “betrayal”, the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) was actually an endorsement of the railway industry. In FY 2020/1, this was subsidised to the tune of around £17 billion, and will receive a similar amount this year. So the fact that the Government is prepared to commit large sums of money on top of that is a vote of confidence. And NR CEO Andrew Haines vehemently agrees. He is no enemy of the railway, but one of its biggest and most important supporters. His words have resonance and should be heard. Sometimes, it is sensible to agree with ministers, NR or even the DfT.

Rf Director Neil Middleton wonders if the [Expected Station Ticket Office Closures](#) are a wise move, when seen through viewpoints such as timing, inclusivity and attracting new passengers. He sets out eight ideas as to what might be done.

Rf NORTH WEST

Friends of Reddish South and Denton are celebrating Restoring Your Railway funding. The stations are currently served only by one Parliamentary, so the first aim is to have Manchester Victoria to Stockport passenger trains call. Later, tram-trains could run to Ashton, and from Rose Hill Marple to Stockport via Reddish South.

A new £80m station at Headbolt Lane, Kirkby, should open next year, but electrification will not be extended: new Merseyrail trains will use batteries to reach it. The station will also have Northern services from Wigan and Manchester. Meanwhile, the Liverpool City Region CA is working on plans for a new branch to Skelmersdale.

Rf YORKSHIRE

Building a new high-speed line from Manchester to Marsden as the IRP proposes will be very disruptive, as there is no alternative route: both the Hope Valley and Calder Valley lines are full. Instead, four-tracking the existing line from Manchester to Standedge tunnel as a stepping-stone would increase capacity with less disruption, but Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) is still required.

As well as its ticketing arm, Transport for the North (TfN) has now lost its NPR team. However, its total abolition would adversely impact making decisions on local services, as well as on taking a strategic approach to rail services in the North.

Northern’s new bi-mode (diesel plus battery) trains are expected to have only one toilet per 2- or 3-car set, whereas Transport for Wales’s 3-car Class 197s with similar bodysells will have two.

On journeys over 30 - 40mins, one toilet is not enough, as it may be out of order. With the growth in leisure travel, this is becoming an even more important consideration. Minimum standards for carriage interiors need to be laid down – possibly by safety and standards board RSSB.

RfY led the [response](#) to TfN's consultation on its draft Freight Strategy. Much more of Yorkshire's freight should go by rail, but needs a major increase in capacity: the Huddersfield line upgrade, Skipton to Colne, and another trans-Pennine line capable of handling standard W12 containers – Woodhead? Also, planning law should require all future large warehouses to be rail connected.

Rf EAST MIDLANDS

Two new freight terminals could be built on a 200-acre site at New Stanton Park south of Ilkeston, adjacent to the Erewash Valley (Chesterfield - Long Eaton) line. This is an underused asset with potential for regional services. No longer an HS2 interchange, Toton could be a regional hub station, served by an extension of the Nottingham tram network, and better bus, cycling and walking facilities linked to existing and proposed transport interchanges.

Rf WALES/CYMRU

Rf wants to know why almost all the early rail development is in South Wales. Enhancements in the North such as electrification of the main line, and reopening lines from Gaerwen to Amlwch, and Bangor to Caernarfon and beyond, are deferred until at least 2030.

Rf LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST

Rf asserts that extending the [Wealden Line](#) south from Uckfield is a transport solution to a housing problem. Population and thus housing growth will continue, so Rf's strategic advice is to join up land-use and transport policy by concentrating housing growth where it can most readily be rail-served. Its sole aim in engaging in local planning is for the Uckfield extension to be adopted as a policy objective, with a commitment to protect any defined route. Otherwise, decisions on developments may prejudice an optimal route for a new rail link.

Rf SEVERNSIDE

When it opens later this year, Portway will be the first new railway station in Bristol for 95 years. The £4.2m park-and-ride station will have a half-hourly service between Temple Meads and Severn Beach. The MetroWest project also aims to reopen the Henbury Line, with new stations at Henbury, North Filton and Ashley Down, and for a half-hourly service between Temple Meads and Gloucester via Yate, with a potential new station at Charfield.

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK

Clapham-cum-Newby Parish Council and the Friends of Bentham Station (FOBS) raised the funds for a defibrillator at each of their stations; the Leeds-Morecambe CRP then met the costs of their installation and electrical connection. Northern's East Area Stakeholder Team welcomed the idea, as the defibrillators will also support Bentham Line passengers and staff.

LMCRP met pupils, parents and staff from Hellifield and Giggleswick Primary Schools at their respective local stations to unveil 'Sheep on the Line' artwork created by the pupils during a rail education event at Carnforth Heritage Centre. Weather-resistant panels made by photographing the original artworks have been mounted on the platform fencing. A trail of sheep with the safety message 'Stay off the Track' now extends along the Bentham Line from Cononley in the east to Carnforth in the west, including Hellifield, Giggleswick and Clapham.

Building on last summer's campaign, CRN's Days Out by Rail from 1 - 31 July will draw on local knowledge and insights from members, and deliver inspiring ideas for days out, short breaks and longer stays through [Scenic Rail Britain](#).

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

With lower passenger revenues, costs across the rail network need careful scrutiny to assure the London and Edinburgh Governments that their decisions about investment in CP7 (2024-2029) will deliver value for money. To that end, ORR, the rail regulator, has published new [guidance](#) on how it will scrutinise NR's proposals, and advise the Governments on the funding and outputs for CP7.

NR has made a planning application to Fife Council to renew the 75-year-old Bawbee bridge over the River Leven, which is currently subject to weight restrictions. The A955 will close for a year in August; traffic will cross the river on a temporary bridge. NR is undertaking the work as part of the Leven Rail project, as the bridge sits above the site of the future Leven station.

With £5m of Restoring Your Railway funding, NR will lead on developing detailed designs and a full business case for new stations at Wellington and Cullompton, either side of Tiverton Parkway on the main line to Penzance. This stage should be complete by December 2023. Subject to approval of the business case and receipt of the necessary funding to build the stations, construction could start as early as 2024, with the aspiration for both to be open by 2025.

Following eight weeks of overnight closures to extend the rockfall shelter north of Parson's Tunnel between Dawlish and Holcombe as part of NR's £37.4m resilience project, GWR has returned its Night Riviera sleeper to a full service on Sunday to Friday evenings.

Anne Hindley laments the loss of rail services east of Doncaster. In May 2021, Northern halved the hourly stopping service to Scunthorpe, taking out key commuter trains. Even worse, and despite protestations to Northern and local politicians, in December the trains were replaced with buses, ostensibly until mid-February, but extended firstly to May, and now to December. Northern has also cut back Doncaster services to Hull, and it seems Sheffield, making connections difficult, whilst the TPE Manchester Piccadilly – Cleethorpes service via Scunthorpe has been reduced from hourly to two hourly, except at peak times.

On 25 March, Govia Thameslink Railway entered into a new National Rail Contract (NRC) with the DfT starting on 1 April, initially for a three-year period, with a further three-year extension at the Secretary of State's discretion. The commercial principles at the inception of the GTR franchise, and under the Emergency Response Measures Agreement, will continue to apply, with all fare revenue going to DfT, and GTR receiving a fixed management fee to deliver the specified services.

Work on Inverness Airport station is progressing well with a view to opening it in December.

Grangemouth hub in Scotland is increasing its rail freight capacity by creating a dual 775m siding.

A new refrigerated rail freight service usually runs on electrified line for all but four of the more than 415mls from Thames Haven near Tilbury to Coatbridge near Glasgow. However, the bi-mode capability of the Class 88 locos allows the train to be diverted to non-electrified routes if need be.

...and finally

The National Museum Wales claims that steam trains are "rooted in colonialism and racism", and has pledged to "explore how the slave trade linked and fed into the development of the railway infrastructure in Wales". So even though Cornish inventor Richard Trevithick had no direct links to the slave trade, the labelling on the replica of his 1804 steam locomotive that worked the Penyarden Ironworks in Merthyr Tydfil will be "interpreted" to make the connection.

CONSULTATIONS

- Transport Scotland: [Strategic Transport Projects Review](#), closes 18 April.
- Torridge District Council: [The Future of Northern Devon](#), closes 29 April.
- Tavistock Town Council: [Tavistock Plan](#), closes 2 May.

Please advise [Roger Blake](#) of any other consultation, eg that of a local transport authority.

EVENTS

Please keep your events coming, and update websites with any changes as soon as they are made. Stand-alone lists are helpful, as newsletters may be discarded. Also copy [Roger Blake](#), who maintains lists of [Events](#) and [Key Dates](#) on the Rf website.

Blob colour indicates the type of event:

- Rf events (RUGs are cordially invited).
- National & regional rail events.
- Local Group events.

April

- Saturday 23. Rf West Midlands Branch AGM, Priory Rooms, Bull Street, **Birmingham**, B4 6AF, 1000.
- Saturday 23. Rf Wales AGM, **Shrewsbury** station, 1400. Meet outside the BT Police office.
- Tuesday 26. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).
- Tuesday 26. Rf Yorkshire **webinar**, Integrated Rail Plan for the Midlands and North, 1900.
- 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, 1400.

May

- Thursday 5. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800 (Also 9 June).
- Monday 9. Rf Yorkshire webinar, **Online**, 1100.
- Tuesday 10. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Tuesday 10. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, 1930 (Also 21 June, 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)
- Wednesday 11. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900 (Also 13 July).
- Saturday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1030.
- Saturday 14. Cotswold Line Promotion Group AGM, Village Hall, **Honeybourne**, 1100.
- Saturday 14. Rf London & South East, Kent Division, The Parish Church of St Mary of Charity, Church Road, **Faversham**, 1400.
- Thursday 19. 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.)
- Thursday 19. Tarka Rail Association AGM, **Umberleigh** Village Hall, 1900.
- Saturday 21. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, **Beccles** station, 1400.
- Thursday 26. Sub-national Transport Bodies Conference, the Vox, **Birmingham**, B40 1NT.

Further Ahead

- 11 June. Rf Branches and Groups Day, Aston Court Hotel, opposite **Derby** station, 1100.
- 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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