



May 2022

### Welcome to the Rail User Express

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Apart from the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) opening at long last, and in time for the Jubilee, rail seems to be undergoing somewhat of a hiatus, with the DfT micromanaging what should be the preserve of the TOCs. We can but hope that this does not presage life under Great British Railways.

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 new station at Reston will open on 23 May, served by LNER and TransPennine Express. RAGES has created a [timetable](#) from the NR Enquiry website. As part of a "try the train" message, for the first week that Reston is open TPE is offering an Advance Purchase single fare of just £2.90 for travel between Reston and Edinburgh. However, its ongoing dispute with the RMT Union is limiting Sunday travel.

### Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines

Modern trains are often said to be too complex, and each TOC wants a different type of stock, so costly and time consuming type testing is required every time. But although technology moves on, basic systems need not change that often. Standardisation is common in many other areas - any USB device can work on any computer – so hopefully, GBR can move away from a situation where every train builder does their own thing, and nothing works with anything else.

[Rochdale Online](#) reports that, to improve the borough's links with Manchester and the wider city region, councillors have backed a motion to 'investigate' a proposal for new railway stations at Belfield, Slattocks, and at Heywood (close to but not affecting the East Lancs Railway station).

### English Regional Transport Association

ERTA suggests that a round table of councils, agencies and Government commission a study on the business case for reinstating rail links from Peterborough and Spalding to Boston, and from the Skegness line at Firsby to Louth and possibly Grimsby, with a loop via Mablethorpe.

A Greengauge 21 report, [Connecting East Lincolnshire](#), August 2021, suggests that such a service would complement and enhance the existing Nottingham – Skegness service, by opening up travel opportunities via the hub at Boston for flows such as Louth – Nottingham and Skegness – London.

Leicester is both a gateway to the East Midlands Region and a pivotal part of it. Northampton is also supposed to be part of the East Midlands, but has no direct rail link to Leicester. Reopening Northampton - Market Harborough would provide multiple links and serve numerous markets: supporting modal shift and a greening agenda along the A508 corridor and the M1; and directly linking Oxford/Watford - Milton Keynes - Northampton - Leicester and beyond. A curve at the southern end would allow direct running from Felixstowe to both the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) and the new one at Northampton.

### **Barking-Gospel Oak Rail User Group**

BGORUG salutes all TfL, Arriva Rail London and NR staff who have maintained the Goblin line service throughout a challenging period. Usage has remained relatively high compared to other lines, possibly due to the lack of alternative routes, and because many essential workers use it. Far from being the forgotten backwater of years gone by, it is now a busy, important part of London's rail network.

Planned cancellations in the evening and early morning when NR requires access to the tracks to/from depots for overnight maintenance mean that some trains have to "go to bed" earlier than scheduled and can't get out first thing in the morning. The opening of Barking Riverside later this year may ease the situation, as it will offer an alternative overnight stabling point.

Another bugbear is when a Stratford-bound train arrives at Gospel Oak just as a Barking train is pulling out of the bay platform, giving a crowd of disgruntled passengers an avoidable 15min wait. Now that the Junction Road speed restriction has been lifted, there is ample slack in the timetable to hold the departure by a minute or so to board passengers without running late.

Barking Riverside will provide a major new community with fast and easy transport links both across East and North London, and into Central London with a change at Barking. There is also passive provision for an intermediate station at Renwick Road. Most trains at Barking will switch from Platform 1 to Platforms 7/8, so to access the only lift people will have to go down the ramp, all through the subway and back along Platform 1, which is totally unacceptable at such a major transport interchange.

### **Chesham & District Transport Users' Group**

Issues with the wheel sets of the Metropolitan Line S8 stock led to a shortage of trains in service while they were inspected, so an emergency timetable operated for three weeks from 11 April. However, a normal service has now resumed.

The CTUG April meeting noted a 'Rail' magazine report that said TfL needed to plan for a £400m pa cut in its operating costs, and that "the door has been left open by government" for further rail fare increases on top of the 4.8% from 1 March. However, Gerry White of TfL hoped that service cuts might be avoided.

John Davies said that TfL funding was secure to 24 June, but beyond that things were uncertain, although TfL was more likely to cut bus services than rail. He outlined his ideas for service cuts to meet the required reductions in expenditure, in particular on the Met Line north of Harrow on the Hill, which was the least used part of the network and contributed most to its heavy losses. The majority of those present did not share his views!

Noise on the Underground was becoming a hot topic. On the Jubilee Line between Finchley Road and Baker Street it was sometimes deafening for passengers, and had given rise to an increasing number of complaints.

## Windsor Lines Passengers Association

WLPA is receiving complaints of overcrowding on short formation trains. The problems seem to be worse on Saturdays, when SWR ought to be attracting more leisure travel. The reasons are:

- The new Class 701s (sixty 10-car units and thirty 5-car units) are not yet in service.
- Eighteen of the thirty 707s have gone to Southeastern.
- The 442s have gone for scrap.
- As they are due to be scrapped, the 455s are not being fully serviced, but do need attention, which takes them out of service.
- The 456s have all been returned, and will probably be scrapped.
- The twenty-eight out of thirty-six 458s being converted back to 4-car units should have been upgraded by now to replace the 442s.

As a result, there are still 450s on the Windsor lines, when they should be in main line service.

The 701s were to have been introduced in December 2019, with the whole fleet in service by December 2020, but Alstom taking over from Bombardier led to a change in working practice. Many unfinished units were being stored at Worksop - some of the complex units had come off the production line with as many as 1500 faults, mainly to do with the electronics.

400 of the 750 carriages have now been completed; twenty 10-car trains are in store at Eastleigh or Bournemouth, and there are two training simulators at Clapham Junction, with another to be installed at Basingstoke. But ASLEF, SWR and Alstom have been consulting on a revised cab layout, so driver training is yet to start. The hope is for introduction of the 701s to start in September, but SWR will not give a date, and the whole fleet will not be in service until well into 2024!!

## Cotswold Line Promotion Group

Following submission of the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the North Cotswold Line Transformation scheme in January 2020, the Task Force responded to a DfT/NR independent review. The SOBC remains high value for money against a range of post-Covid demand scenarios. SLC Rail and SYSTRA are now developing the engineering, capital and operational cost, train service choices and train performance analysis to an agreed level of detail, with a preferred single option to emerge this summer.

GWR has signed a deal with Vivarail to test its trackside fast-charging technology in an operational setting on the West Ealing to Greenford branch. When the Class 230 train arrives at West Ealing, it will connect automatically to Fast Charge, and be fully recharged in 10mins whilst being prepared for its next journey. The train has a range of up to 62mls on battery power. If the trial is successful, it could pave the way for battery-only trains to run in passenger service on other branch lines.

After an absence of over fifty years, Sunday services are being restored to Hartlebury, with six West Midlands Trains each way to Worcester for the North Cotswold Line, and to the Chiltern Line at Birmingham Snow Hill and Moor Street. However, GWR is withdrawing its Brighton service in order to strengthen its Cardiff - Portsmouth service [*So is there the potential for a new through service from Brighton to Portsmouth, Southampton or even Bournemouth? – Ed.*]

## Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Following BTPG protestations regarding the withdrawal of the Bedwyn IETs and the replacement shuttle service to Newbury, GWR has managed to retain the 1907 service from Paddington direct to Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn, and after a further BTPG intervention, good connections off the 2003 and 2104 to Newbury. Also, the 0849 and 0948 departures from Bedwyn will have better onward connections, and the 0849 will be off-peak, so a Network Card can be used.

### Tonbridge Line Commuters

Southeastern responds to TLC requests for more services by passing the buck, saying that DfT would need to agree any change, and no funding is available. Any sense of entrepreneurial spirit has long since evaporated: the railways are now viewed simply as a drain on public resources rather than a public asset, let alone a viable business. The number of daily commuters may never return to pre-pandemic levels, so fewer trains are needed in the rush hour. But ongoing cuts to off-peak and weekend services make little sense, as the demand for leisure travel increases.

TLC's current remit stops at Tonbridge. However, the Redhill line is also a vital piece of railway, and TLC would love to see a Kent to Gatwick service, or direct trains to London Victoria restored. So it is seeking to expand to include the stations at Edenbridge, Penshurst and Leigh.

### Avocet Line Rail Users Group

The ALRUG Committee discussed reviewing its manifesto to set out what makes a good railway, and form the basis of any consultation with GBR. It would look at modal shift, passenger satisfaction and station standards, as well as decarbonisation, and information during disruption.

In an online discussion hosted by CRN, Rufus Boyd, Programme Director Passenger and Freight Services of the GBR Transition Team explained that, as well as designing its structure, the team is working on changes that government and the industry agree are needed: reform of ticketing and fares, investment in freight, recovering Covid revenue, and how to reduce rail spending by £1.5b in five years.

GBRTT is also working on a 30-year Whole Industry Strategic Plan (WISP). As well as operating trains, TOCs may continue to manage small stations, and also help to plan timetables, together with local stakeholders who know their area. [Rf's response to the consultation document is [here](#).]

### 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](#).***



A grand total of 36 nominations for a RUG Annual Award across all six categories were received from 15 groups and 7 individual campaigners across 11 of Rf's 14 branches, and covering all three nations of Great Britain. The judging panel of Rf Vice-Presidents are now out and about meeting as many groups and individuals as possible. Honorary President Christian Wolmar will present the Awards at the national AGM near Bristol Parkway station on Saturday 16 July. Some of the winners will make a short presentation about the activities behind their Award.

### NEWS

In the [journal](#) of the Royal Town Planning Institute, Roger Blake, Rf Director of Infrastructure and Networks, suggests that there is no need to wait for fresh policy to press for sustainable transport to new homes.

Responding to the Government announcing the sale of a million half price off-peak tickets, Rf spokesman Bruce Williamson was interviewed on [talkRADIO](#), Yorkshire branch Chair Nina Smith appeared on [BBC Radio York](#), East Anglia Vice-chair Chris Burton on [BBC Radio Cambridgeshire](#) and Dave Richardson of Rf Thames Valley on [BBC Radio Berkshire](#).

Rf has [analyzed](#) the impact on Britain's rail system of the Government's dash to nuclear power. Up to 8 new reactors could be approved on existing sites, which is significant in that they will already have rail connections. Construction requires huge amounts of material, and thus a single unified rail network. Transport consumes 40% of all fuel, so with just a 10% market share rail has the greatest potential to grow its demand and resilience. This is the background to Rf's campaign to double passengers and freight, which the existing network could accommodate with the right financial incentives to customers, and some significant schemes to address congestion points.

The North Somerset Railway CIC that campaigns for a rail service between Frome and Radstock invited Rf to be nominated as the recipient of any residual assets if the company were wound up. However, it owns a DMU being restored to main line standard with the aim of hiring it out to TOCs for route learning, so Rf could end up with an asset worth less than the cost of its disposal. Nevertheless, as nomination would enhance Rf's reputation, the Board agreed to the request, although it will monitor the CIC to ensure that it continues to be run prudently.

### **Rf LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST**

TfL's need for more fare income is a threat to the London Travelcard and its add-on to National Rail tickets. However, Rf Communications Director [Neil Middleton](#) doubts that their abolition would achieve its aim. Purchases are often about convenience and certainty: some passengers who lose that will find another way to travel, whilst others will seek and find a cheaper fare. Thus the Travelcard add-on should be retained and improved. To help Rf respond to a forthcoming consultation, please complete a short [survey](#).

### **EUROPEAN PASSENGER FEDERATION**

Rf is a member of the EPF, which is holding its annual [Conference](#) in Copenhagen on 10-11 June. It will focus on bringing forward best practice on four topics:

- How can public transport contribute to a greener future mobility?
- Cross-border public transport commuting
- Digital transition in public transport
- Involving the end-users in the development of public transport.

### **COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK**

The rail grant fund that CRN administers on behalf of the DfT to help community rail initiate and develop integrated sustainable transport in England or Wales is open for bids until 27 May.

Community Rail Lancashire is grateful to the Community Rail Development Fund for grants towards two Restoring Your Railway (RYR) bids: the SOBC for [Clitheroe – Hellifield](#) was submitted in April 2021, and for [South Fylde](#) in November 2021. It is now waiting to hear if these projects can progress to the development of a more detailed OBC.

CRL Access for All (A4A) studies for Burnley Manchester Rd and Accrington are bearing fruit. The lift scheme that forms part of the Levelling Up bid by Burnley Borough Council with support from Lancashire CC and CRL has been approved, while LCC has made a similar bid for Accrington. The A4A study for Langho on the Clitheroe Line, supported by Connecting East Lancashire, identified a range of improvements, some of which may appear in 2022.

A Leeds-Morecambe CRP Development Study of the 75-mile Bentham Line by consultants Stantec and AllanRail includes the Morecambe - Lancaster service; the interaction with routes such as Settle - Carlisle and the Airedale electric service; and connections to Cumbria and beyond. Over the last 20 years the number of journeys along the route has far more than doubled, so the Study looks at ways to continue this healthy growth over the next twenty. In particular:

- Early decarbonisation, with the use of battery technology and low-cost electrification of the Lancaster to Morecambe section
- Opportunities to increase the service delivery with a longer operating day
- The scope to improve the line's connections, and for new through and faster services
- Targeting the demand for active leisure travel and tourism, including the proposed Eden North Project in Morecambe.

To encourage people to Explore Lancashire by Rail, local company Huckleberry Films has made a series of four for CRL covering the Clitheroe, East Lancashire, South Fylde and West of Lancashire (Preston to Ormskirk) Lines, with a fifth in the pipeline. Another series of films that enables people to explore stations between Blackburn and Manchester via Todmorden before travelling is proving very effective in reducing anxiety about rail travel for autistic people and others.

### CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

CBT hailed the launch of the inaugural Great British Rail Sale as a major campaign success. With a million tickets available at half the normal price there were some genuine bargains - but only on specific routes and until 2 May. Even so, CBT hopes that it has demonstrated that when rail travel is more affordable, more people will choose it.

The Government wants to know what people think of its proposed targets for cutting air pollution. Well, in 2005 the World Health Organisation set air quality guidelines, and the UK Government is suggesting that we meet them - by 2040! The shift to electric cars and vans isn't happening fast enough. In 2021, they accounted for 12% of new car sales, but only one per cent of all the cars on the road.

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

Subject to final safety approval, Crossrail, aka The Elizabeth Line, will open to passengers between Abbey Wood and Paddington on 24 May, almost halving the journey time to 29mins. Services in the central London section will run every five minutes between 0630 and 2300, but Initially trains will not run on Sundays nor call at Bond Street. A full timetable will not be in place until May 2023.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has said he is "of a mind" to approve the development consent order to restore the MetroWest line between Bristol and Portishead, but needs more information on costs. The Planning Inspectorate approved the scheme's examination in late 2019, and Shapps received the report in July 2021. He should have decided whether to grant the DCO by October, but deferred for six months, citing environmental concerns; these have since been addressed. Somerset District Council now has until 30 November to respond to the latest issues. Shapps will then have until 19 February 2023 to make his decision.

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has warned of issues surrounding new timetables for the WCML and ECML planned for December 2022 and May 2023 respectively. Given the complexity of possible options and issues to resolve, key decisions for the ECML are needed soon, including extra platform capacity at Newcastle.

ORR has issued its annual [Business Plan](#) for 2022-23. As the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail begins to be realized, the sector is facing financial challenges and pressure on costs. The periodic review of NR will reach a crucial stage as the Secretary of State and the Scottish Ministers decide on funding

levels for the period 2024-29. However, planning for change must not distract ORR from its core purpose: protecting the interests of users as the independent rail regulator, including frontline activities such as health and safety inspection and enforcement, authorisations and approvals, and holding the rail industry to account on its commitments.

As part of the East Coast Digital Programme, NR has commissioned a new signalling system on the Northern City Line between Finsbury Park and Moorgate. After a bedding-in period for system testing and driver training, traditional signals will be removed; drivers will be signalled through screens inside their cabs. The line is expected to operate solely in this way by 2024.

[The Guardian](#) reports that Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has given three MPs “categorical verbal assurances” that the Golborne spur, to connect HS2 to the West Coast Main Line, will be removed at the second reading of the HS2 bill. However, Sir Peter Hendy’s [Union Connectivity Review](#) (p41) suggests that a link possibly south of Preston could shorten times to Scotland by a few more minutes, so Shapps can keep his reported promise and still deliver!

[New Civil Engineer](#) reports on NR’s East West Main Line strategic statement, which “uses the EWR configuration as a baseline from which the opportunity to expand the remit is explored” – between Cardiff and Norwich, and its integration with the WCML, Midland Main Line and ECML. The aim is to offer “a long-term vision which should guide decision-making ... and can be achieved either through bespoke, incremental interventions or as part of a larger future programme”.

On 29 April, as part of a trial that could see regular freight traffic return to the Cambrian line, the first since 2005, a Colas Rail train at Aberystwyth was loaded with timber from the forests of Ceredigion and Powys for transport to the Kronospan plant in Chirk, north Wales. Two NR Class 37 locomotives hauled the 700-ton load over the steep gradients on the line as it skirts Snowdonia. The trial took upwards of 16 lorries off the roads and saved a quarter of a ton of carbon dioxide.

Barry Doe has published the 52nd edition of his [National Rail Operators' map](#). Crossrail is now the Elizabeth Line; TPE extends to Saltburn; GWR no longer runs to Brighton or west of Carmarthen, but does now run to Axminster; CrossCountry has pulled out of Newquay; and TfW no longer operates between Wolverhampton and Crewe via Stafford.

*...and finally*

NR [videos](#) show an old bridge in Leamington Spa being driven down the A445. Then its 60-ton replacement is manoeuvred into place. The old bridge had a 20mph limit, but trains can cross the new one at full speed, cutting journey times between Leamington Spa and Nuneaton prior to the Commonwealth Games.

Bristol Parkway station, Britain's first, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Prospective customers were offered a lift to the station at a standard charge of 40p if they lived in the catchment area.

## CONSULTATIONS

- Hampshire County Council: [Local Transport Plan 4](#). Closes 26 June.

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.

## May

- Saturday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Kings Cross Station**, 1045 for 1100.
- 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.
- Wednesday 18. Action for Yorkshire Transport webinar, **Online**, 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, EX37 9AB, 1915.
- Friday 20. Rf Yorkshire webinar with TPE, 1300.
- Saturday 21. Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield Rail Users Association AGM, Stocksmoor Village Hall, Station Road, **Stocksmoor**, HD4 6XN, 1345.
- Saturday 21. East Suffolk Travel Association AGM, **Beccles** station, 1400.
- Thursday 26. Sub-national Transport Bodies Conference, the Vox, **Birmingham**, B40 1NT.
- Monday 30. Avocet Line Rail Users Group, Manor Hotel, **Exmouth**, 1900 (Also AGM 21 October).
- Tuesday 31. Levenmouth Rail Campaign, **Online**, 1830 (the last Tuesday of every month).

## June

- Thursday 9. Rf London & South East, Sussex & Coastway Division, **Online**, 1800.
- Saturday 11. Rf Branches and Groups Day, Aston Court Hotel, opposite **Derby** station, 1100.
- Tuesday 14. STORM, Blue Pits Inn, 842 Manchester Road, **Castleton**, OL11 2SP, 1400 (Also the second Tuesday of each month).
- Tuesday 14. Rf London & South East, Herts & Beds Division, **Online**, 1930.
- Friday 17. Friends of the Far North Line AGM, National Hotel, **Dingwall**, 1115.
- Tuesday 21. Chesham & District Transport User Group, Town Hall, **Chesham**, HP5 1EP, 1930 (Also 2 Aug, 20 Sep, 25 Oct, 6 Dec.)

## Further Ahead

- 13 July. Rf London & South East, Eastern Division, **Online**, 1900.
- 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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