

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

As always, feel free to forward RUEx to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources). If you want further details of any of the stories mentioned, look on the relevant website or, failing that, get back to me so I can send you the full text.

The [national list of Rail User Groups](#) on the Railfuture website was updated in November. Please take a moment to check entries for user groups that you know about. An internet search for a rail user group almost always throws up Railfuture's national list in the top ten results, so much sure your group is shown correctly!

We begin with a roundup of news from rail user groups around the UK. I'm grateful to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins – the ones that arrived in recent weeks are generally complimentary towards rail staff who have kept the trains running in appalling weather.

Erratum: In the last edition, I included an item from Mark Norton and wrongly credited him with membership of the Friends of the Far North Line. In fact, Mark is Convenor of the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group. Sorry!

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH

[New Somerset and Dorset Railway](#)

This campaign group was formed in March 2009, 43 years after the original S&D line from Bath to Bournemouth closed to passengers. The long-term aim is to restore a rail service over the complete route, but in the meantime there are different groups restoring parts of the S&D at various sites including Midford, Midsomer Norton and Shillingstone. Others on the route are doing things like historical research and promoting the use of cycle paths. There's a pressing need right now to raise awareness of the route's potential for reopening and to ensure that no further adverse development takes place on the trackbed.

You can support the project by paying an annual membership of just £5, and there are opportunities to get stuck into projects along the line.

**The New Somerset & Dorset Railway is affiliated to Railfuture. Its Chairman is also involved with Stamps for Charity, and is kindly helping Railfuture raise funds from members' old postage stamps.*

...and now news from our regular contributors...

[Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association](#)

The Chairman of SARPA begins his newsletter article by letting us in on a little secret: "the cost of the rural railways in Wales only amounts to less than half of one per cent of the UK rail budget."

The group has written to the Welsh Assembly Govt in protest about the proposed seating layout the Class 158 units resulting from the WAG-funded refurbishment programme, saying: "a quarter of the tables will disappear;

there will be more airline seating (some not aligning with windows) and leg room will be compromised.

For their September meeting, SARPA enjoyed a day out on the Talylyn Railway and were able to make use of the railway's meeting room.

"The Brigadier" reminds readers of SARPA's newsletter that their line owes its continued existence to the efforts of the Cambrian Coast Line Action Group who fought closure back in 1971, adding that campaigners are now faced with having to teach railway economics to a whole new generation of bean counters!

[Tarka Rail Association](#) (Exeter-Barnstaple)

Some of TRA's members were busy in the summer painting parts of the station structure at Barnstaple in Southern Railway green, while others began work on tidying the disused island platform. After completing a Risk Assessment and Method Statement, the necessary Site Access permit was obtained for the paint job; training and certification was necessary in advance of tree surgery on the island platform.

The group welcomes another enhancement to their service from the Dec 2010: a late evening train to Barnstaple on Fridays only, enabling rail users to enjoy an evening out in Exeter.

The TRA's well-illustrated newsletter has a cover price of 90p (free to members). The autumn edition includes a lively section containing readers' letters, including two that argue for faster end-to-end journey times by omitting stops at intermediate stations on certain services, as this would benefit the vast majority of travellers.

[Support the Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester Line](#)

A few of the comments in recent STORM bulletins: "The cost of bidding for a franchise is now around £4m per bidder – so rebidding for Northern will cost around £20m or 20 additional carriages." "I've often wondered why the guard waits until the train has departed before announcing where the train is going - surely much more useful to announce it just before it sets off." "The guard came to prepare to open the doors for Moston but the train ran non-stop to Rochdale - why was the driver not informed of the stopping order?"

We also read that the Friends of Littleborough Station are helping Northern organise Santa Specials, and that the Mytholmroyd Station Partnership is holding a "Station Sing", with a choir meeting three of the evening commuter trains and entertaining the passengers as they alight.

STORM advises any members wishing to complain by email about Northern's services to put the word "Complaint" in the subject line, otherwise the message may simply be logged as a "comment".

[Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association](#)

MCRUA reports that its 2010 series of music trains was even better than the previous year, with a dedicated following of around 70 per train – and the 2011 programme promises more trains than in 2010. The group welcomes the fact that two stations on its line have progressed from request stops to scheduled stop status in the Dec 2010 timetable change, made possible by a general improvement in performance over the route.

MCRUA has sent in its comments about the development of Altrincham Interchange, calling for adequate manning of the booking hall and the addition of lifts to the existing footbridge. Members of the group are urged to lodge their objections to the “misguided proposal to close Mosley Street Metrolink station” with the Dept. for Transport by the due date, 9 Feb.

[Furness Line Action Group](#)

Following the Gov't's spending revue, FLAG makes this wise observation: “Luckily, the commercially complex environment, which was one of the downsides of Privatisation, is now coming to the rescue of railways as the Gov't cannot make quick savings by cutting investment or services.” Later, commenting on a road scheme that escaped the cuts, FLAG says “we now have the bizarre situation that the Dep't for Transport are prepared to fund a road across Lancaster for £140m but will not fund an extra coach on the always-overcrowded 15:34 Lancaster to Carlisle!”

FLAG gives a cautious welcome to the formation of a Community Rail Partnership for the Furness Line, saying that such initiatives “duplicate, for only as long as funding is available, activities we have been performing free of charge for 25 yrs.”

The group has been consulting with Network Rail and train operators on the planned closure of Arnside Viaduct for a 16-week programme of works, and using its influence to ensure that a rail shuttle will operate over part of the line rather than the inconvenient replacement bus services originally proposed. Ongoing concerns for the group include overcrowding and low platform heights at many of their stations.

[Bedford Commuters' Association](#)

In explaining the rise in season ticket prices to their members, the BCA newsletter editor points out that the responsibility for the increase lies with the Gov't and not the train operators. The BCA has, however, taken the opportunity to lobby local MPs over the planned increase in fares to Moorgate and Barbican once the Dept. for Transport ceases to subsidise the “underground element” of the fares in March 2011.

In a meeting with First Capital Connect, the BCA discussed various issues including fleet reliability, disruption management and customer information screens – they also raised the issue of last-minute platform changes at Flitwick. In response to members' complaints about the poor internal state of East Midland Trains' Meridian fleet, the BCA has found out that the main problem is insufficient turn-round time at St Pancras. The BCA continues to make its views known on the regeneration plans for Bedford Station Quarter, and on the County's Local Transport Plan (although the Central Beds authority seems opposed to engaging with rail user groups on the matter).

[East Sussex Rail Alliance](#)

This umbrella organisation issued a press release welcoming the Office of Rail Regulation's decision to suspend controversial timetable changes that were due to start in December – they felt it was unfair for Brighton to have an improved service at the expense of other stations along the coast. “We hope that Southern will now sit down with us and look at how service improvements can be made where they are really needed.”

[Bexhill Rail Action Group](#)

BRAG reports that multiple test bookings on the Eurostar website have revealed that passengers travelling from Ashford to Brussels are often charged up to £60 more per return journey than passengers with reservations on the same services to/from St Pancras. Eurostar initially denied the problem, and then said it had been fixed when it hadn't. BRAG thinks this is unsatisfactory, adding “a direct service from Ashford to Brussels has only recently been restored - it is important for it to be shown to be a success.”

On Sunday 3rd October, simultaneous engineering blockades took place on all three routes out of East Sussex and passengers travelling to/from London were forced to use a replacement bus service in every case. BRAG expressed its concern via Passenger Focus. Network Rail subsequently apologised for the blunder, promising that there will be no similar clash in 2011.

[Windsor Lines Passengers' Association](#)

While commending the rolling stock on their line as “excellent”, the WLPA makes the point that the journey experience cannot yet be described as comfortable because of two issues that South West Trains need to resolve: overcrowding, and toilets all too often locked out-of-use. Overcrowding at weekends is exacerbated by SWT's policy of using 4-car formations instead of 8-car.

There's good news from Teddington Station, where unsightly barbed-wire fencing has been replaced by more appropriate loop-top railings after complaints from the WLPA and local residents.

[Cotswold Line Promotion Group](#)

While welcoming the announcement about limited electrification on the Great Western, the CPLG Chairman says the group need to watch that their line is not disadvantaged by perhaps having a diesel shuttle service from the point where the electric service terminates. The group is relieved that the redoubling scheme for their line has escaped Government cuts, and reports on a unique stage show in Charlbury called “Soundtracks” which was devised to celebrate the improvement works to the line. The musical show, “full of creativity, delight and surprise”, was funded by the BBC and could be repeated at other venues; snippets can be seen on the CLPG website.

Two other events in 2010 were a huge success: the 75th anniversary celebrations at Coombe Station involving the whole local community, and the group's Cotswold-Quantock Express railtour to Minehead by HST. The railtour planned for 2011 will celebrate both the completion of redoubling and the 150th anniversary of the line between Gt Malvern and Hereford.

The CLPG committee has had the opportunity to comment on First Great Western's draft timetable for the post-redoubling era, and has visited the company's depot in Reading to view the refurbishment work being undertaken on the Turbo train fleet.

[Rail Action Group, East of Scotland](#) (RAGES)

During the recent adverse weather conditions, RAGES has been keeping its members up-to-date on a daily basis with the travel arrangements in their area, including explanations as to why certain trains are unable to run. Not content that services to Dunbar were temporarily suspended, RAGES harangued Network Rail and the train operators for a speedy resolution, and eventually contacted local politicians on the matter. This may have done the

trick, as the offending infrastructure suddenly unfroze and services between Edinburgh and Dunbar resumed.

[Railfuture Yorkshire Branch](#)

Commenting on the Government's announcement about new rolling stock, the Branch seeks a clear indication of how many trains will be available for their area, adding "As for hand-me-downs, we can only hope that they will receive a full overhaul after so many years intensive service elsewhere."

We also read in the Branch's winter newsletter that, during the remodelling of Scarborough station, passengers were treated in a diabolical way, with no thought given to maintaining a shuttle rail service for the resort and poor information at York about the alternative travel arrangements. Service arrangements during the Goole swing-bridge closure also come in for criticism.

Here's an interesting trend: Years ago, when word processing was a novelty, editors would sprinkle their newsletters with cartoons dragged from the clip art library. Now nobody does it. Hurrah! 😊

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

ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGIES

These draft RUS documents are now out for consultation:

	<u>Response by</u>
Scotland (2 nd generation)	13 Jan 2011
Northern (2 nd generation)	14 Jan 2011
London & SE (2 nd generation)	18 Mar 2011
W Midlands & Chiltern	4 Feb 2011
W Coast Main Line	11 Mar 2011

These draft RUS documents are expected soon:

Rolling Stock & Depots	Early 2011
Stations	Early 2011

Railfuture's London & SE Branch is planning a Regional Gathering in the spring (open to all rail user groups) to discuss the London & SE RUS. Please register your interest with the [Branch Chairman](#).

OTHER KEY DATES - from Transport Briefing

The interim findings of Sir Roy McNulty's [Value For Money rail study](#) were made public early in Dec 2010, and specific proposals to bring down costs will be presented in Apr 2011. The Transport Secretary expects to publish his proposals for reforming the rail industry by Nov 2011. He is also due to announce a final decision on **the Intercity Express Programme** and **further Great Western electrification** early in the New Year.

An open competition for a 2-year contract to run the **East Anglia** franchise for two years will be held early in 2011. The current National Express franchise expires in Oct 2011.

Short franchises are also expected to be let for the **Southeastern** and **Thameslink** networks where the current arrangements are due to end in Mar 2014 and Apr 2015 respectively. The replacement franchises would run until Thameslink Programme is completed in around Dec 2018.

A 14-year franchise for the **West Coast** will run from April 2012 until the planned opening of High Speed 2 in 2026. In

late 2012, a 15-year franchise to operate **East Coast** services is scheduled to begin.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND GUIDANCE

In January the Gov't will publish detailed guidance on the operation of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, for which £560m has been set aside in the 4-yr period to 2014-15. The guidance will invite local transport authorities in England (outside London) to apply for funding to support the cost of a range of sustainable travel measures.

Packages might, for example, include measures that promote walking and cycling, **encourage modal shift**, secure better traffic management, improve road safety and **improve access and mobility for local communities**. The criteria will include meeting the core objectives of **supporting economic growth** and **reducing carbon**. – *DfT press release*

FOLLOW RAILFUTURE ON FACEBOOK

Robert Forsythe has, for the time being, been added to the Administration Team for the [Railfuture Campaigners group on Facebook](#). **He invites all Railfuture and rail user group members to join the Facebook group** which is used to share information on this popular social networking website. Any active member of Railfuture who is able to contribute to the Admin Team would be particularly welcome.

Incidentally, Robert is a member of the [Tyne Valley Line Rail Users Group](#), and is involved in the Tyne Valley Line Community Rail Partnership. He and his librarian wife Fiona recently entrusted their vast collection of travel and transport publicity ephemera to the National Railway Museum in York, where it is now housed in "The Search Engine", the NRM's research and archive centre.

HOW WAS YOUR TRIP ON EUROSTAR?

The European Passengers' Federation has a questionnaire on its [website](#) which allows you to comment on all aspects of a journey abroad involving Eurostar. EPF plan to analyse and report passengers' experiences on a monthly basis.

COUNCIL FUNDED RAIL SERVICES

In the last edition of Rail User Express, I relayed an appeal from Railfuture's Passenger Committee for details of any local authority that subsidises rail services. Andrew McCallum (Secretary, Railfuture Thames Valley) wrote to say that Oxfordshire County Council fund some services on the Oxford-Bicester line under an agreement which expires in March 2013.

FOCUS ON DISRUPTION

[Passenger Focus](#) published its *Delays and Disruptions* report on 1 Dec 2010; this is mainly about passengers' perceptions of delays and disruptions, and how they were handled by the rail industry. PF has also been monitoring passenger information during recent snow disruption and has published findings on its website. – *PF website*

- - -

The latest Railway Herald reports that the Office of Rail Regulation is to send teams around the country during any further severe weather. They will monitor how TOCs communicate information to travellers and the effectiveness of arrangements. They intend to publish good practice as well as the problem areas. – *thanks to STORM for this item*

NEW STATION PROPOSALS

In November, **Wandsworth Council** granted planning permission for [yet another] scheme to redevelop Battersea Power Station put forward by Real Estate Opportunities which includes a pledge of £203m towards a two station extension of the Northern line south from Kennington. A new Tube station is to be located at the power station site with another at Wandsworth Road to serve the eastern part of Nine Elms and the surrounding area. – *Transport Briefing*

Kent County Council has published proposals to build a new High Speed 1 station in east Kent as part of a package of transport improvements intended to stimulate the economy. The local authority is backing plans for Thanet Parkway which it claims would accelerate development of Kent International Airport at Manston while improved line speeds between Ashford and Ramsgate would benefit all local rail users. – *Transport Briefing*

Durham County Council's cabinet will be asked to approve further consultation and investigation into proposals for the new station at Sea View South, in Horden. – *Hartlepool Mail*

Merseytravel have been told their Government funding is to be slashed to just £11.4m, compared to the £32m it received this year. This effectively means that plans for the Maghull North station have hit the buffers, at least for the foreseeable future. Councillor Mark Dowd, chairman of Merseytravel, said the maths speak for themselves. "We were pushing for two new stations, one on the Wirral and one at Maghull North. They were both costed at about £7m each. What can you do when you are left with £1.9m to spend? - you can put up a new bus stop or something." – *the Sefton & W Lancs Champion*

PORTILLO RETURNS TO YOUR TV SCREEN

Michael Portillo makes another five rail journeys across Britain following Bradshaw's Victorian Railway Guidebook, every weekday night from Mon 3 Jan to Fri 4 Feb 2011 at 6.30pm on BBC2. The five journeys (one per week in five stages) are: Brighton to Cromer, Ledbury to Holyhead, Newcastle to Melton Mowbray, London to Hastings and Ayr to Skye. – *thanks to Graham Collett for alerting us to this*

DECENTRALISATION AND LOCALISM BILL

The Coalition Govt's new Bill seeks (among other things) to lift the burden of bureaucracy and empower communities to do things their way – by creating rights for people to get involved with their communities and to direct the development of those communities.

The Bill will give communities powers to **save local assets threatened with closure**, by allowing them to bid for the ownership and management of community assets. The Bill will also give local residents the power to instigate, via a petition, **local referendums on any local issue**. An easy-to-read [Essential Guide](#) to the Bill is available for download. – *communities.gov.uk website*

CUT OUT BUREAUCRACY

The Communities and Local Government department has launched a new website where charities and community groups can ask for help in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles to their work. Called [Barrier Busting](#), the site allows you to submit queries about regulations that could hinder you in your work, such as by-laws or health and safety rules. – *thirdsector.co.uk website*

STUDENTS BRIGHTEN UP WESTCOUNTRY STATIONS

The *Volunteering in Plymouth* project has, over 5 years, involved 300 students in over 3,000 hours of volunteering to tidy up, paint, build planters and fill them with flowers at more than a dozen stations on branches. As well as earning credits towards their degree courses, students get training in the safe use of tools, first aid, health and safety, and disability awareness (a number of volunteers were themselves disabled). In an increasingly competitive world for graduates, volunteering skills stand out on CVs! – *article in Cotswold & Malvern Line News*

STATION INVADED BY CAROL SINGERS

Hundreds of surprised train travellers stopped in their tracks when a choir broke into song for an impromptu Christmas carol concert at Sheffield Station. The 'flash mob' choir delighted travellers with a rousing five-minute medley of Christmas carols in the forecourt of the station. After the singing was over the 82 choir members dispersed as suddenly as they had gathered, leaving rail passengers bemused and delighted. – *Sheffield Telegraph*

AND FINALLY *this from Railfuture's Christmas Cracker...*

Q Which website discloses little-known rail fares ...to the great embarrassment of train operators?

A Ticky-leaks! *Ho ho ho.*

**** *Merry Christmas!* ****

EVENTS

Thu'out 2011 [European Year of Volunteering](#)

Tue 4 Jan [SARPA](#) meet in the Sportsman, Severn St, Newtown from 19:00.

Thu 13 Jan [Friends of the W Highlands Lines](#) meet in the Partick Burgh Hall, Glasgow from 19:30 with guest speaker from the [Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Assn.](#)

Thu 20 Jan [Coastway Division](#) of Railfuture SE meet at Lewes Arms, Lewes from 18:00.

Wed 12 Jan Greater Manchester ITA seminar, Manchester Town Hall from 14:00. [Book your place.](#)

Wed 12 Jan [Eastern Division](#) of Railfuture SE meet in Stratford from 18:30.

Sat 22 Jan [Railfuture Yorks Branch](#) meet in Saltaire.

Wed 26 Jan [Chingford Line Users' Assn](#) AGM in Walthamstowe from 19:30 with guest speakers.

Tue 2 Feb [SARPA](#) meet in the Hobbs Room Library, Shrewsbury from 18:00.

Thu 10 Feb [Friends of the W Highlands Lines](#) meet in the Partick Burgh Hall, Glasgow from 19:30. Steam theme.

Fri 11 Feb [ACoRP](#) conference "Community Rail = Big Society" in Lewes, E Sussex.

Sat 19 Feb [Kent Division](#) of Railfuture SE meet at the URC, Tonbridge from 14:00.

Sat 19 Feb [ESTA Lowestoft](#) meet in Saxmundham.

Sat 26 Feb [Railfuture East Anglia](#) meet in Cambridge.

Thu 3 Mar [Coastway Division](#) of Railfuture SE meet at Lewes Arms, Lewes from 18:00.

Tue 8 Mar [Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail User Group](#) meet at Melbourn Village College from 19:30.

Wed 9 Mar [Eastern Division](#) of Railfuture SE meet in Stratford from 18:30.

Sat 12 Mar [European Passengers' Federation](#) conference and AGM, Barcelona.

Sat 19 Mar [ACoRP Community Rail Day](#) "National Network – Local Service" involves handing out goodies to rail users.

Sat 19 Mar [Ribble Valley Rail](#) AGM in Clitheroe from 14:00.

Sat 23 Apr [Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line](#) AGM in Settle from 12 noon.

Sat 7 May [Railfuture/RDS](#) AGM, Brighton.

Sat 7 May The North Eastern Express Raitour from Cheshire stations to Darlington, Durham and Newcastle organised by [Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Assn](#)

16-22 May Railfuture members' group travel visit to Munich.

More events on the [Railfuture](#) and [ACoRP](#) websites.

Please support Britain's number one advocate for the railways and rail users!

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, contact: david.harby@ntlworld.com

Messages scanned by Norton Anti-Virus software.

Please say if you would rather not receive these messages or if another person in your organisation would like to be included in the distribution list.

This bulletin has been sent by
Tony Smale, Railfuture Rail User Group Liaison Officer
e-mail: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk phone: 01929 462116
63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham, Dorset BH20 6DD

Our websites:

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk
www.railfuturewales.org.uk www.railwatch.org.uk

The Railway Development Society Limited is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 5011634.

Registered Office:- 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND