

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.

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.

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

For details about group
affiliation to Railfuture,
contact [David Harby](#)

GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH

**The North
Pembrokeshire
Transport
Forum**

[website](#)

The Forum, set up in 2000, is an independent association funded by membership fees and donations. It aims to promote public transport in a corner of Wales popular with tourists. The main railway line of interest is, of course, the route to Fishguard with its ferry link to Ireland. Overcrowding on the line's 2-car trains is an issue of concern; the group is also pressing for more trains to Fishguard. The Forum is a member of the Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association

A separate Community Rail Partnership, the [All Points West CRP](#), promotes travel on all lines west of Swansea; they say: "The railway in our area is an underused facility - more than ever, trains travel on time, and really are a viable alternative to the car." The CRP is planning a series of promotional events for 2011 with the theme "A town and its railway" – it will include exhibitions and pamphlets using collections of old photos, and it is hoped that youngsters can be involved.

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

**East Suffolk
Travellers'
Association**

[website](#)

During consultations about an Action Plan for the centre of Lowestoft, ESTA was pleased to have the support of the East Anglia Branch of Railfuture in stressing the importance of keeping the station at its present location and securing certain improvements. ESTA continues to work with local councillors and MPs to keep the issue of the Beccles Loop in the media – if built as part of the 2012 resignalling scheme, the passing loop would allow an hourly Ipswich-Lowestoft service. The group has now met with all four newly-elected MPs in their area and look forward to constructive dialogue with them over the next four years.

Members of ESTA held small exhibitions at local libraries in the autumn to promote the new hourly timetable on the East Suffolk Line. Meanwhile the group has drawn the attention of relevant bus and train operators to the fact that bus/rail connection times at Halesworth are now less than ideal. Another issue of concern is the lack of Fast Ticket machines at minor stations, meaning that those wishing to travel on cheap advance fares have to drive 20 miles or more to collect their tickets - ESTA suggests that ticket machines could be sited within supermarkets or that conductors could exchange the on-line booking confirmation for normal tickets, and would appreciate the views of others on how to address the problem.

Can you help? →

**Dornoch Rail
Link Action
Group**

[website](#)

DORLAG examined the Draft Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland, and found it had a "woeful lack of detail on what to do about the rural lines, the Far North Line in particular." The group urged its members to respond by the due date (13 Jan) and thanked Railfuture Scotland for its strong support on behalf of rail and the Dornoch Rail Link.

Commenting on transport spending cuts in Scotland, DORLAG is fearful that the Freight Facilities Grant funding, which has been applied with great effect on the Far North Line, will be suspended, and that passenger services may be reduced adding "we will fight like lions if any threat to our services arises". On a brighter note, the group welcomes the news that the UK Department for Transport has agreed that the direct Inverness/Aberdeen to London rail services should continue – a campaign success for all those involved!

**Stourbridge
Line Users'
Group**

[website](#)

SLUG welcomes the long-overdue redevelopment of Stourbridge Town station and forecourt to create the new Stourbridge Interchange, with slight reservations concerning the inconvenient location of temporary bus stops during the rather lengthy construction period. Meanwhile, SLUG officers are compiling a comprehensive guide to bus connections at Stourbridge Line stations which will be posted on the SLUG website.

The group had the opportunity to contribute to London Midland's timetable development, the Brierly Hill Action Plan (an ideal opportunity to press for a re-opened rail link from Stourbridge to Brierly Hill), and Wotershire's Local Transport Plan (LTP3). The committee feels that, in the present economic and political climate, its campaigns may need to be rearranged in priority with the emphasis on safeguarding the present level of service.

**Peterborough-
Ely-Norwich
Rail Users'
Group**

[website](#)

PENRUG notes that next May's "Eureka" timetable for the East Coast Main Line doesn't leave much flexibility to adjust timings on the Liverpool-Norwich service; the group had warned about this during the consultation stage, saying: "It is important to see the railway as a whole." Elsewhere in their bulletin we read that PENRUG advocates a holistic approach to engineering blockades so that at least part of the rail network remains open; they also point out that Sunday can be one of the busiest days of the week for rail travel. Another demand is for timely and accurate information to passengers ahead of planned engineering work and during disruptions.

**Support the
Oldham-
Rochdale-
Manchester
line (STORM)**

[website](#)

STORM's weekly news bulletin to members has been full of horror stories about inadequate and unreliable rail-replacement bus services. A particular problem recently was that the last bus on Sundays from Manchester to Rochdale was departing over an hour before the train that it replaced. After a letter on the subject from a STORM member had been printed in the local press, the group was pleased to announce that Northern had agreed to put on a later journey.

**South
Hampshire
Rail Users'
Group**

[website](#)

In the latest edition of "Hogrider", SHRUG comments that the closure of travel centres across the South West Trains network, along with reduced ticket office hours, has made it much more difficult for passengers to get information, leading to fare overpayments, probably on a huge scale. The group also has evidence that it's leading to unacceptably long queues at ticket windows, with some travellers becoming impatient and angry. Commenting on the fact that season ticket prices have been allowed to rise by an average amount in January, SHRUG highlights a study by *Private Eye* which warns: "some operators may be profiteering by applying higher increases for more-popular journeys and lower increases for less-popular ones. Increasing profits in this way is against the rules."

SHRUG is busy putting together its response to the London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy document, and has distributed some "interim thoughts" to members in order to provoke debate.

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

RAIL FARES UP AGAIN – BUT WORSE TO COME...

...this was the headline of a press release issued by Railfuture at the end of December.

"Inflation plus 1% is only an average fare rise - some fares will definitely rise much more than this" said Railfuture Chairman Mike Crowhurst. "And from 2012 to 2014, rail fares will go up 3% above inflation every year, which we think is hugely unfair. I don't think motorists or airline passengers will be suffering price hikes like this. Rail fares in Britain are already amongst the highest in Europe, and we think this will just drive even more people on to the roads, which will result in even more congestion and pollution. So this will have an impact on car drivers too. The government claims to have a green agenda, so it must not discourage people from using the greenest form of transport. During the election, they said they would end the war on the motorist. Now it looks like they're declaring war on the rail passenger. You can't cure overcrowding by pricing off demand."

Railfuture is calling for some changes to the way transport is taxed. "We need a level playing field. For instance, why is air travel exempt from fuel duty when rail isn't? The rail industry pays a huge amount back in tax to the government, at least £1.4 billion, which only contributes to the high cost of rail fares. Also, the government uses the RPI inflation figure instead of the lower CPI, which further increases fares"

The forthcoming McNulty report will identify efficiency savings in the region of £1 billion. "It's important that these savings are passed on to the passenger, not the Treasury. We know that the government is trying to reduce the taxpayer's contribution to the running of the railways, which is understandable, but we think they're going too far. There are many reasons why the wider community benefits from a decent rail network, and it's in everyone's interest that passengers are not priced off the railway."

The Campaign for Better Transport has weighed in to the debate with an initiative called Fair Fares Now. CBT president Michael Palin, was the first to sign up to the campaign, which they hope will hold the Government to its promise to make train fares fair. You can join the campaign by signing up [here](#).

RAILFUTURE CALLS FOR HS2 ROUTE RETHINK – capacity not speed!

A separate press release from Railfuture earlier in December contributed to the debate on High Speed Rail with the comments: "We're pleased that the Government is pushing ahead with planning a High Speed Rail route ... but there is a pressing need for increased capacity on the railways."... "We welcome the intention to create a network to serve the north west, north east, and Scotland, but this masterplan should include all UK regions and be determined in detail now."... "We urge full and thorough consultation on a much wider choice of routes for the first stage." The statement goes on to make the point that: "It is expensive, unnecessary, and environmentally destructive to plan a route for train speeds up to 400 km/h, when no other country has lines equipped for speeds of more than 320 km/h, and very few above 300 km/h."

THE NORTH DESERVES BETTER – thanks to Frank Salt (STORM) for spotting this

Last month Philip Hammond announced that, contrary to the previous plan, a link between HS2 and the Chunnel line, HS1, will be established. But it will be a slow, single-track line through the inner London suburbs – enough, so the Department of Transport says, to meet the small demand for a through route to Europe from places outside the south-east. If the dominance of London is ever to be challenged, and if social and economic divisions are to be bridged, then the north needs to demand rather more. – *from an article in The Guardian*

SOUTHEASTERN HIGH SPEED CELEBRATES FIRST BIRTHDAY

More than 7.2 million journeys have been made on Britain's first domestic 125mph+ train service during its first year of operation. Train operator Southeastern says the number of passengers using its High Speed service between London St Pancras and Kent has continued to grow from week to week. The company reports that 16% of the journeys made on Southeastern High Speed routes are by passengers who previously did not travel by train. – *Transport Briefing*

REFORMING RAIL FRANCHISING: Government response to consultation and policy statement

Railfuture and a number of rail user groups sent in written comments in response to the Government's consultation document on the future of rail franchising published last year. On 19 Jan 2011, the Govt. published the results of the consultation in an easy-to-read [response document](#) (title as above). The response document considers each aspect of franchising (franchise length; service quality etc), and for each sets out (i) what was proposed (ii) a summary of consultation responses and (iii) the revised govt. policy. From this, it is a simple matter to identify issues that are important to your line (eg overcrowding or performance monitoring) and see if the revised policy reflects your own particular concerns. You will see from the document that franchise lengths of between 15 and 22.5 years are to be the norm, with the proviso that forthcoming infrastructure changes such as the opening of HS2 may necessitate franchises shorter than 15 years. In general, there is move away from the policy of "one size fits all", with the recognition that what is appropriate for one franchise might be inappropriate for others. Thus rail user groups remain free to argue for special clauses as each franchise comes up for renewal.

INTERCITY WEST COAST FRANCHISE CONSULTATION

A [consultation document](#) about the InterCity West Coast franchise was also published on 19 Jan by the Department for Transport. The document informs stakeholders of the award process, the aims and objectives for the franchise and the proposed base-franchise specification. It is expected that the bids will be returned in autumn 2011, with the successful bidder being announced in late 2011. The new franchise is expected to start on 1 April 2012. Rail user groups are asked send comments in the first instance to the Department for Transport and also provide copies to Passenger Focus as appropriate. The deadline for responses is 21 April 2011; earlier replies are welcome. – *DfT website*

C2C FRANCHISE EXTENSION

The Department for Transport granted National Express Group an extension to its C2C branded Essex Thameside rail franchise on 23 Dec. Previously due to expire in May 2011. The franchise will now run for a period of "up to two years to 26 May 2013". – *Transport Briefing*

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT WHITE PAPER

The Coalition Government's white paper entitled "[Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon - Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen](#)" was published on 19 Jan together with bidding guidance for the new 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund'; both documents can be viewed on the DfT website. Introducing the white paper, Transport Minister Norman Baker said "This White Paper sets out how we can encourage the uptake of more sustainable modes at local level, and the unprecedented £560 million we have allocated in our new 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' will support this. Our commitment to helping local authorities with this vital agenda is reaffirmed by the amount of money we are making available. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund forms part of a wider picture of more streamlined and simplified funding to local authorities. This will give local authorities more power and flexibility to meet local transport needs." – *DfT website*

CHANGE TO PPG13

An amended version of Planning Policy Guidance 13 was published on 3 Jan 2011, but only to reflect changes to parking standards and charges. PPG13 as published in Apr 2001 sets out the objectives to integrate planning and transport at the national, strategic and local level and to promote more sustainable transport choices both for carrying people and for moving freight. – *from a press release entitled "Pickles and Hammond to end the war on motorists" on the communities.gov.uk website*

AN END TO DISCOUNTED SENIOR RAILCARDS?

From April, administration of senior travel concessions, in those parts of England where there are 2-tier authorities, will pass from District to County Council. Counties are, of course, having to reduce expenditure across all departments and most will therefore take the opportunity to cut back on any extensions to the statutory minimum travel concession, the off-peak bus pass. At risk are therefore subsidised senior railcards and any free local rail travel arrangements.

Abolition of NHS Primary Care Trusts may also spell an end to "healthy travel choice" initiatives which were set up in partnership with local authorities. Happily, community rail partnerships and rail user groups will be continuing to promote walking and cycling as part of the public transport experience.

BISHOP LINE GETS COMMUNITY RAIL STATUS

In January, Rail Minister Theresa Villiers announced that the Bishop Line between Darlington and Bishop Auckland will be designated as a community rail service. Ian Bevan, Managing Director of Northern Rail, said: "The community rail partnership for the Bishop Line is already doing a great job and designation will enable it to go from strength to strength. It will also assist in identifying innovative ways of developing the line to the benefit of local people and visitors to the area." To date, 17 lines in England with their services have been designated as Community Rail lines. Additionally, 10 English rail services have been designated as community rail services. – *Dept. for Transport press release*

FUNDING PROBLEM FOR SUNDAY SERVICE ON THE BISHOP LINE

After my request for information about local authority funding of rail services in a recent Rail User Express bulletin, Angela Thirkill of the Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership kindly wrote to say that

Sunday services on the Bishop Line are funded by a local council, but that this funding is under threat. The Community Rail Officer for the line, Bob Whitehouse, then got in touch to explain the problem: "Durham County council (which included Darlington at the time of the agreement) entered an agreement with the then operator to provide a service. Darlington then became a unitary authority and a gentleman's agreement was made to pay Durham a proportion of the costs. Then the Chancellor struck and Darlington cannot afford to pay, so Durham are now negotiating with train operator, Northern."

WATLINGTON AHEAD OF ITS TIME

Railfuture Board member, Clara Zilahi, writes to say that the media interest in David Cameron's "Big Society" gave her the opportunity, some while ago, to write a letter to the Eastern Daily Press recalling a time when it was easily possible for local people to bring about the changes they wanted. The example she cited was of the people of Watlington in Norfolk who resented trains going through their village without stopping. They raised funds of around £800, and set about excavating the remnants of the old platforms and restoring the station to workable condition under the supervision of a railwayman in his spare time. In 1976, with the work completed, British Rail agreed to stop trains there, and Watlington today is a large and growing commuter village with an hourly train service! "Could such a thing happen today?" wonders Clara.

WEMYSS BAY STATION – *an inspiring example of station adoption*

Since the launch of ScotRail's 'Adopt a Station' scheme in 2005, over 100 out of 343 stations in Scotland have been adopted, with initiatives including murals, coffee shops, bookshops, a toy library and community meeting rooms. An inspiring example is Wemyss Bay Station, 30 miles west of Glasgow and named as the Best Adopted Station in Scotland by Passenger Focus within a year of the formation of the local Friends group. The Friends were also named as Best Station Adoption Group at the 2010 Community Rail Awards.

The group has over 250 members and has transformed three empty station rooms into a bookshop and art gallery, ploughing money raised into station refurbishment. They persuaded Network Rail to embark on the restoration of the spectacular grade A listed station and reintroduced the floral displays that made the station famous in Edwardian times, when thousands of visitors used to pour off the train onto the boats to Bute. "We are very proud of our station," said Nancy Cameron, Chair of the Friends. "It was so sad to see the building become neglected and empty." – *from an article in ACoRP's Train Times*

CLUB 55 RETURNS

Arriva Trains Wales's Club 55 ticket for over 55 year olds is again available from 9 Jan to 9 Apr for £15 (less £2 for senior and disabled railcard holders). And ScotRail are running their Club 55 offer again: anyone over 55 (unspecified proof needs to be carried) can buy a return ticket between any two stations in Scotland for £18 until 31 Mar. – *thanks again to Frank Salt (STORM) for spotting this*

... and finally, some websites worth looking at ...

MCRUA LAUNCHES ITS RAILTOUR WEBSITE

The Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association is pleased to announce the launch of its new [Railtours](#) website. Take a look and you'll find full details of MCRUA's next Railtour to Darlington, Durham (for Beamish) and Newcastle. Included is information on the tour destinations so that you can plan your day better; you can also book online using a Debit Card, Credit Card or PayPal.

MCRUA points out that travellers on the north east railtour will be following the route of one of Michael Portillo's Great British Railway Journeys, and in a canny piece of marketing they are offering Michael's new book, which accompanies the TV series, as a prize to anyone on its database who visits the Railtours website and correctly answers a simple question.

CAR FREE WALKS – *spread the word about walks from your line*

If your rail user group has already devised walks from stations, why not upload one or two of them onto the [Car Free Walks](#) website? On their revamped website, Car Free Walks offer hundreds of bus-

or rail-based walks for people who love the great outdoors but want to reduce their impact on the environment. The website includes facilities for letting others know of a walking event on your line. Several rail user groups and community rail partnerships have already taken advantage of the regional Links pages to direct people to walks on their own websites.

TRAIN DELAYS – *the promise of compensation at the click of a button!*

[TrainDelays](#) is a website that enables you to get compensation for delays to your journeys. They match the delays to your journeys and let you know which ones can be claimed for, so all you have to do is print and post the forms!

CHEAP TRAIN TICKETS – *read tips from others and upload your own*

You can share tips about saving on the cost of train tickets via the [Cheap Train Tickets](#) website. A separate Cheap Train Tickets Guide on the website brings together dozens of tricks and tips produced by “in-house ticket saving enthusiasts”. Tips include information about split ticketing, and there’s a special page for disabled travellers.

EVENTS

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

Tue 1 Feb [Railfuture London & SE](#) branch committee meet Grays Inn Rd London from 18:30

Wed 2 Feb [SARPA](#) meeting at Hobbs Room Library, Shrewsbury from 18:00

Thu 3 Feb [Travelwatch NorthWest](#) Conference in the Mechanics Centre, Manchester from 10:30

Thu 10 Feb [Friends of the W Highlands Lines](#) meet in Partick Burgh Hall, Glasgow, 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 from 14:15.

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.

Thu 10 Mar [Friends of the W Highlands Lines](#) meeting in Partick Burgh Hall, Glasgow from 19.30.
Theme: Friends of Wemyss Bay Station

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 19 Mar Railfuture Yorkshire and Railfuture Lincolnshire AGMs

21-27 Mar [Climate Week](#) – hold an event to highlight the ecological advantages of rail.

Sat 2 Apr [Bus Users UK](#) AGM in Hove Town Hall from 11:00

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 [Peterboro-Ely-Norwich Rail Users’ Group](#) AGM, Thetford

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

Sat 14 May [ESTA Lowestoft](#) AGM at Aldeburgh.

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

Sat 21 May [Cotswold Line Promotion Group](#) AGM, WI Hall, New St, Moreton-in-Marsh from 10:30.

Thru’out 2011 [European Year of Volunteering](#)

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

This bulletin has been sent by
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