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Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

We begin with a roundup of news from rail user groups, ranging from the "Far North" of Scotland to South West England. Thanks to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

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

Please note: I've just updated the national list of Rail User Groups on the Railfuture website (go to www.railfuture.org.uk, select "Links", then "Rail User Groups"). Please take a moment to check entries for user groups that you know about.

+++ GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH : Rail Users Ireland +++

Rail Users Ireland was set up in 2003 as an independent, voluntary body to represent the thousands of rail users across the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland; annual membership costs 10 Euros. The organisation has parallels with Railfuture in that it engages and assists independent rail user groups, and is a member of the European Passengers' Federation. The committee of RUI welcomes the recent opening of the rail line to Dunboyne on the north west outskirts of Dublin, but has many reservations about the level of service offered (no late evening trains; poor off-peak service for intermediate stations, etc), many of which had been flagged up by RUI at the public inquiry phase. Ongoing campaigns include full integrated ticketing between bus, tram and train in Dublin, and extension of the Dublin rapid transit via a new city-centre interconnector tunnel to the Kildare, Drogheda and Maynooth lines - RUI is arguing the case for a short term solution to interconnecting these various lines, making use of the existing Phoenix Park tunnel which is currently not used for passenger trains.

... next, news from our regular contributors (starting in Scotland and working south) ...

The most important campaign issue for the Friends of the Far North Line is the reopening of Conon Bridge station. It was understood that the planning and design stages were complete, and funding was in place, but the HITRANS budget has now been split up among five separate authorities (four of whom have no interest in Conon Bridge) and the money is no longer ring-fenced for transport projects. FoFNL also takes issue with the £1.1m price tag for the station, arguing that modular construction techniques could reduce costs. The group continues to press for a passing loop on the line between Inverness and Muir of Ord, which is at capacity for much of the day and about to get busier with an expected increase in freight traffic.

I enjoyed having a go at the "station anagram" quiz in the Far North Line newsletter. See how many of these you can guess:

Drum of Rio / Bare Nick / Day Rag / Scald Corset.

Friends of the West Highland Lines have observed a succession of film crews on the line this year, recording scenes for TV programmes such as Songs of Praise (Aug), Secret Britain (Sept), Countryfile (various episodes this autumn) and Michael Portillo's second series of Great British Railway Journeys (for early 2011). FoWHL takes issue with the assertion in Secret Britain that Corroon is "hardly used". Not true! - "it can be quite busy with climbers and walkers" (not to mention TV presenters!). ScotRail operated an experimental Sunday train from Edinburgh to Oban in the summer, but FoWHL felt there was a lack of marketing of this service; a decision about its

future is awaited. On the subject of dubious marketing, the Society noted that ScotRail's leaflet promoting the scenic splendours of its Ft William-Mallaig service depicts the interior of a Class 170 (not used on the line!!) showing a young girl concentrating on her drawing book (thus oblivious to the view!!). The Society's Strategy Office takes a page in West Highland News to make the case for an additional train each day to and from Oban, this being the main port for the Western Isles ferry. A forum for rail user groups has been established within the HITRANS partnership involving Friends of the West Highland, Far North and Kyle lines and the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group.

To illustrate the strong case for reopening stations at East Linton and Reston, the Rail Action Group East of Scotland quotes figures for the patronage of recently reopened lines and stations in Scotland taken from the October edition of Railfuture's magazine "Railwatch"; the Railwatch article explained that the achieved patronage is invariably much higher than the original forecast. Official consultations into rail services in South East Scotland are nearing completion, and RAGES was tasked with gauging public opinion about a possible local rail service between Edinburgh and Newcastle, encompassing the proposed new stations at East Linton and Reston; the exercise involved organising public meetings and publishing findings. The recent Scottish Rail Conference gave RAGES representatives a further change to raise campaign issues such as a later evening train on Saturdays to Dunbar and Berwick.

Selby and District Rail Users' Group is angry that redeployment of resources on Northern Rail means that the morning commuter train from Selby and Milford to Leeds arrives after 9am: "while appreciating Northern's need to fill their trains, it seems a strange strategy to alienate a market of proven growing commuter demand only to give extra services to well-served York-Leeds commuters." The group hosted a public meeting in October to discuss the timetable changes. Eight SADRUG members visited Network Rail's Northern Control at York in August, giving them a better understanding of issues such as balancing the needs of passengers against the requirement to get trains in the right place for subsequent services following any disruptions. In September, a visit to the Siemens engineering depot was arranged as another "membership" benefit. Last year, events were organised to mark the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the railway to Selby, and 2011 sees another local anniversary: 100 years since the opening of the Selby-Goole line (alas, now closed); the group is asking its members to share their memories of the service.

In its review of Network Rail's Northern Route Utilisation Strategy, the Huddersfield, Penistone and Sheffield Rail Users' Association feels that no allowance has been made for passenger growth on its line - the rolling stock replacement plan sees a capacity increase of just 2 passenger spaces per train! - HPSRUA will be responding to this consultation with more realistic forecasts. The group is also looking through the Metro Railplan Study for West Yorkshire, and feels that it is short on any specific ideas for the Penistone line. Members of the HPSRUA committee attended a workshop organised by Northern trains to examine how the timetable might develop over the coming years, with the opportunity to suggest both short- and longer-term improvements. In its response to the consultation about Reforming Rail Franchising, one of HPSRUA's suggestions was for common branding across the network to reduce the cost of repainting trains and stations each time a franchise changes hands. After its campaign for improvements to stations at the W Yorks end of the line, HPSRUA is pleased to see signs of activity at three of the stations as contractors begin work on CCTV cameras, a cycle shed and renovations to buildings and platforms.

A view expressed in the Autumn edition of Ribble Valley Rail News is that, instead of wasting millions on the refranchising process, why not give Northern ("who are doing a great job") a 20-year franchise and use the money saved to spend on new trains? Members will be helping out with

Santa Specials on 11th and 18th December, and the RVR committee already has some events planned for its silver jubilee celebrations in 2011, ranging from a film evening to a trip on a steam railway. Top of the list of campaign priorities for RVR is said to be the redoubling of the line between Blackburn and Bolton. However, one member wants to know why Blackburn's traditional station clock has been relocated to Manchester Picadilly of all places, while its original home has to make do with a second-hand digital clock "which hasn't shown a digit in anger for over 6 months" - apparently, spare parts are now impossible to source.

The committee of the North Cheshire Rail Users' Group has worked hard over the past year to make sure the group's 20th anniversary celebrations were a success, and members are thanked for their support. Network Rail originally advised NCRUG that the cost of reinstating the Halton Curve was acceptable and did not present a barrier to progress, but after the spending review there is a need to look at costs again to see if the figure can be reduced. Northern Trains had generously donated two travel tickets to NCRUG: one was raffled raising over £50 and the other is to be used as an incentive for members to pay their £6 annual subscription in good time. The volunteers at Frodsham Station have been continuing work on the previously derelict "stationmaster's garden", which includes garden planting and artwork for the boarded up station-house windows, with assistance from primary school children and youth groups as well as High School pupils as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association thinks that Network Rail's "Northern Hub" planning document seems obsessed with radial routes from Manchester and ignores circumferential options such as a rail service via the Frodsham-Runcorn Curve which would improve access to Liverpool Airport. SCRUA has also spotted a problem with Merseyrail's schematic map which shows Wrexham in the bottom left corner while other places which are, in reality, further away appear to be much nearer to the centre of the network - their suggestion that lines west of Chester should be redrawn with Wrexham shown as a more prominent interchange has been taken up by Merseytravel for future editions of the map. Elsewhere in SCRUA's "Severn Dee News" we read that Friends of Chirk Station sponsored the design and painting of murals for both platform shelters by pupils of a nearby school. The newsletter's book-review page includes a piece about Railfuture's new book "Britain's Growing Railway, An A-Z Guide" - thanks for that, chaps!

Lowestoft-based East Suffolk Travellers' Association says that the new timetable for their line from December is less than perfect, nevertheless the group will be promoting some of the more positive aspects of it when they man information stalls at local libraries this autumn. The committee continues to meet with Suffolk MPs, taking the opportunity to spell out the importance of rail investment such as the proposed passing loop at Beccles, for which Suffolk County Council has now committed money. In its submission to the Secretary of State for Transport about the future of rail franchising, ESTA's main point was about ensuring a balance between accountability and innovation: "operators must be required to provide a minimum service level without being micromanaged, but must also have enough scope and flexibility to try out new ideas" - a news release was issued to local media after the submission was sent in. Ipswich Cycle Group is currently looking at issues surrounding the carriage of cycles on trains, and ESTA will be assisting them by collecting the experiences of those members who regularly take their bikes on the train.

Felixstowe Travel Watch has also been examining details of the December timetable, and notes that there will be an earlier Sunday train from Ipswich, an improvement the group had been seeking. The summer months is the busiest time for the group, when their Tours programme is in full swing and the meetings for the autumn need to be arranged. Members are used to looking out for a red spot on their mailing envelope which means that their subscription remains unpaid - at £3 for the year (£4 for families), it isn't exactly expensive! After adopting the new name "Felixstowe Travel Watch", the committee is offering a prize for one of its members to come up with a new logo for the

group.

Another group looking at Dec 2010 timetable changes is the Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association - they particularly welcome the news that most Ipswich-Cambridge services will be upgraded to 2-car Class 170 units, something the group had campaigned for. Another of their aspirations, an hourly service between Ipswich and Peterborough, has not been possible at this timetable revision and MARPA will keep up the pressure to obtain this enhancement. The sorry state of the station at Bury St Edmunds is a continuing cause for complaint (platform lights that need cleaning, peeling paintwork and errant vegetation are mentioned) - the group offer to help in any way they can. In September, MARPA assisted Railfuture East Anglia in carrying out a passenger count at Dullingham Station, and later on in the Winter newsletter, the editor kindly commends group affiliation to Railfuture, pointing out that Railfuture was instrumental in setting up MARPA and indeed many other RUGs.

Stan Sabberton produces an interesting little newsletter for the Gunton Station User Group in Norfolk, and in the Autumn edition we read that the group's foreboding ten years ago that Gunton should have been rebuilt with a longer platform has proved true: the increasing use of 3-car units now makes boarding and alighting awkward for passengers. It is noted that Gunton Station saw a 17% increase in passengers in 2008/9 compared to the previous year.

According to the Hertfordshire-based Association of Public Transport Users, First Capital Connect are entitled to put up regulated fares by an average of 5.8% in January, and the group argues that all fares should rise by an equal amount rather than penalising some travellers with a higher increase. FCC has written to APTU advising that both Harpenden and Leagrave stations will be gated by next spring, and the group has replied with a suggestion about the location of one set of gates. Two APTU committee members recently toured the works in progress at Blackfriars station, and in the October newsletter they tell us exactly what's going on and warn that the station will be closed from 20 Nov 2010 to 16 Jan 2011.

The Cambridge Heath and London Fields Rail Users' Group takes issue with official passenger statistics which show a decline for both stations. From its own counts CHLFUG knows that patronage continues to grow strongly, with many passengers now using Oyster which doesn't show up in the figures from the Office of Rail Regulation. They say even more would use the stations if a better service were provided on Sundays. The group is aware that Oyster has helped to boost passenger numbers, but the whole system is undermined when Oyster readers are out of action (one in particular for more than a year!).

After some of the stations on South West Train's hit list (for reduction of booking office opening hours) were rerieved, the Windsor Lines Passengers' Association continued to argue the case for three stations where ticket sales were only marginally different from the criteria set by the train operator. The group is also asking for a dedicated window at Richmond Station for "complicated" ticket purchases. There's been a good response to the appeal by the WLPAs committee for a station representative for each of the stations in its area - the plan is to contact reps about twice a year to ask if there are any local issues. An interesting article in the group's recent newsletter compares rolling stock currently in use on the line (the Class 450) with early, wooden-bodied electric units. Although longer, the 8-car "450" has fewer seats than 8 cars of wooden-bodied stock; furthermore, the "450" is more powerful and weighs about half as much again as the early 8-car set.

The Haslemere Rail Users' Group used the recent consultation process about Reforming Rail Franchising to make a strong case for more passenger involvement in the quality of service provided on the Portsmouth line. In their response to the Dept. for Transport, HRUG quotes various examples of the erosion of service levels since the South West Trains franchise was awarded. The

group comments that the available channels of complaint appear not to bring about any improvements, and that passenger satisfaction surveys covering a whole franchise may not pick up localised extreme disquiet such as that felt by Haslemere commuters. HRUG believes that Haslemere travellers have a human, moral and commercial right to be involved in the service being provided. The group says that service levels must be set out in a contract that should be available for public scrutiny and recommends that there should be no more than 5 years between performance reviews, which must include input from relevant rail user groups and passengers.

Along with a copy of the HRUG consultation response, the group's secretary sent me a message urging widespread support for more consultation rights for rail users and due consideration of passengers' rights.

"The best judge and jury of how a train company is performing are the passengers using the services." - quote from Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive

The South Hampshire Rail Users' Group also took the opportunity presented by the Rail Franchising consultations to talk about the shortcomings of the present South West Trains franchise. SHRUG points out that, "despite years of appalling performance, [the SWT franchise] has remained in the hands of a single operator longer than any other." At the start of its submission to the DfT, SHRUG observes: "The fact that franchising needs to be reviewed every four years inevitably raises questions about whether the process can ever be optimised". The group's ongoing dossier, "South West Trains - The Extraordinary History of a Franchise", now runs to 27 pages!

The Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership in Hampshire report that the Friends of Swaythling Station put together a programme of nature walks for the spring and summer, and are busy at the station planting up flower beds and keeping down the litter - currently they have a problem finding water on site for the garden watering. A station volunteer group has now been formed for St Denys, and as part of a local community project, a group of youngsters from St. Denys Primary School recently undertook a survey of people using station to find out their views about the train service and the station facilities. In recognition of their efforts, one lucky pupil (and family) won a family rail ticket kindly donated by South West Trains. The CRP also tell us that cycle gullies have been fitted alongside the steps on the footbridge at Chandlers Ford station; the metal gullies enable cyclists to wheel their bikes over the bridge and can be fitted retrospectively to any existing flight of steps.

Looking at the Dec 2010 timetable changes, the Bexhill Rail Action Group are concerned about the increase in journey times along the East Coastway line (on top of the delays that occur due to units dividing and attaching at Haywards Heath) and have made representations to Southern and to local MPs. A local add-on fare exists for Eurostar journeys via St Pancras, and BRAG has campaigned for a similar facility to be made available via Ashford - they now understand that this option will go live in January 2011. On the subject of cross-Channel journeys, BRAG has made contact with the Deutsche Bahn project team and will be amongst the groups lobbying for new DB services to Germany to call at Ashford International, with through ticketing. In a novel bid to raise funds, the group is offering commercial enterprises the chance to exhibit their logo and weblink on the BRAG website for an annual fee of £40.

The next major project for the Avocet Line Rail User Group is to coordinate community

celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Exeter-Exmouth line on May 1st 2011, for which several events are planned, perhaps including a special train. ALRUG is hoping their membership will reach the magic 150 figure for the anniversary! At the group's AGM in October, guest speakers from First Great Western gave a presentation about developments affecting the line, including rolling stock upgrades, new station help points and a new booking office at Exeter Central. Stop press: according to Rail magazine, the Exeter Central scheme has just been deferred.

...and now news from Railfuture Branches and Committees...

Two applications for grants from Railfuture's Fighting Fund have been received so far in 2010. One was to fund some leaflets for the Oxford-Cambridge campaign, and the other is towards a study by a consultancy into reopening a line in the West Midlands. Railfuture's branches and its affiliated rail user groups are eligible to bid for funds - see website for details.

At their summer meeting with representatives of the Association of Train Operating Companies, members of Railfuture's Policy, Lobby & Campaigns Committee argued strongly that passengers with Advance tickets that missed their trains should be allowed to upgrade to the appropriate walk-on fare instead of having to purchase a completely new ticket, especially as the full impact of restrictions on Advance purchase are often not properly explained at the time of purchase. The ATOC managers remained unpersuaded, but did accept that training of booking office staff could be improved. The Railfuture team were able to raise a number of points of concern, mainly about ticketing but also about seat layouts, overcrowding and on-train catering.

Railfuture's paper entitled Much For For Much Less, a response to the Government's spending review, achieved a high level of coverage in the media with articles in popular magazines such as Rail as well as specialist journals, most notably Rail Technical Magazine. The full text of the paper can be seen on the Railfuture website.

Railfuture's London & SE Branch welcomes the proposed conversion of the Watford - St Albans Abbey line to light rail operation, seeing opportunities for extensions of the line, possibly incorporating road running. At the very least, attempts should be made to terminate trams nearer the main line platforms at Watford Junction and closer to main road bus stops at the St Albans end. The Branch also recommends that the line is fully integrated with Oyster Pay-As-You-Go ticketing. In June, the Branch's Coastway Division undertook an all-day passenger count at Bexhill station and found that observations broadly matched figures from the Office of Rail Regulation; last year's count at Rye came to a similar conclusion.

The Welsh Branches of Railfuture have been commenting on how the Welsh National Transport Plan should be monitored, suggesting (among other things) five indicators to measure progress towards disabled accessibility and four indicators for integrated transport. The Welsh Branches' own "Rail Wales Plan" caused quite a stir in the media and one commentator was quoted as saying: "The great thing about groups like Railfuture is they come up with ideas which are off-the-wall but make people think in a different direction." The committee is contacting those Welsh Assembly Members that expressed an interest in its Plan with a view to getting more formal backing or possibly arranging a forum in the Senedd building.

Railfuture West Midlands is collecting evidence about the manning of stations in its area. It is felt that London Midland has run down their staff numbers to such an extent that many stations in the W Mids were no longer staffed in the evenings. The Section 55 notices displayed at these stations clearly specified they should be open from "first train to last train" so this appears to be a breach of the franchise contract. If you're local W Mids station is closed at certain times due to lack of staff, please email details to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk and I will pass on your message.

Peter Cousins asks on behalf of Railfuture's Passenger Committee if any rail user groups know of services in their area that receive local authority funding. He is aware that Bristol City Council subsidises service enhancements on the Severn Beach Line and that various W Mids authorities pay for additional services on the Chase Line. If anyone knows of other authorities that help to fund rail services, please respond to ruglink@railfuture.org.uk.

And finally, this from the website of the Hackney Gazette...

Transport bigwigs from across the UK are meeting in Shoreditch this weekend (ie 13 Nov) to discuss how the railway network can be developed. The rail transport pressure group Railfuture has organised the event with the theme of 'Britain's growing railway'. Event organiser Keith Dyll said: "With the East London Line having recently reopened, we felt Shoreditch was a fitting location. This is our annual rail re-openings conference which is an opportunity for rail experts to exchange ideas, and we'll be exploring opportunities for further line re-openings across the country".

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

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND

In late September, transport minister Norman Baker announced plans for a new Local Sustainable Transport Fund intended to encourage local transport authorities outside London to develop packages of measures that support economic growth and a reduction of carbon emissions. Grants will also be awarded to projects that deliver cleaner environments, improved safety and increased levels of physical activity. Schemes could include encouraging walking and cycling, initiatives to improve integration between travel modes and end-to-end journey experiences, better public transport and improved traffic management schemes. – from Dept for Transport press release

REGIONAL GROWTH FUND

Applications for the first round of grants from the government's £1.4bn Regional Growth Fund are now being accepted after ministers published a White Paper on Local Growth setting out a new approach to rebalance the economy and drive sustainable growth. The fund has been set up to drive private sector job creation in regions which are expected to suffer from government plans to slash public sector spending. More specifically, the RGF will support delivery of transport infrastructure that will in turn trigger private sector led economic growth as part of a wider investment. A Local Growth Plan detailed in the white paper sets out new ways of increasing confidence to invest by creating incentives for local authorities in England to promote business growth, including a new system of tax increment financing (TIF), which will enable local authorities to borrow against future increases in business rate revenues. - Transport Briefing

RAIL CAMPAIGNERS BACK PLAID POLICY

Rail campaigners in Wales have welcomed the news that Plaid Cymru is considering adopting some of its ideas for developing the railways. Plaid wants to take over the franchise in Wales currently being run by Arriva Trains Wales and put it in the hands of a not-for-profit company when the present franchise ends in eight years' time. "This is brilliant news, it's virtually what we suggested last year" said John Rogers, from the pressure group Railfuture Wales, who originally proposed the idea. "Plaid have confirmed to us that this is going into their next manifesto. We think this would be a step towards a better Welsh railway network. It would allow £10 million a year extra to be used to invest in more trains for more frequent services throughout the country, rather than going towards Arriva Trains shareholders". - Railfuture press release

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT'S BUSINESS PLAN – from Transport Briefing

Reform of Network Rail and preparations for High Speed 2 are among the actions and milestones pencilled in for next year according to the Department for Transport's Business Plan for 2011-2015, which will be updated annually.

- The government's new rail franchising strategy will be published in Dec 2010.
- A consultation on the high speed rail strategy and route of the initial London to Birmingham phase is scheduled for completion in Jul 2011.
- Dec 2011 should see the completion of outline engineering design for the London-Birmingham high speed line and a draft environmental impact assessment.
- A high level vision for a sustainable railway is set for publication later this month and will be followed by detailed proposals (incl reform of Network Rail) by Nov 2011.
- The government's response to the McNulty report on the value for money of railways in the UK and accountability structures is expected by Apr 2011.
- For local and regional transport schemes, bids for the new Sustainable Transport Fund will be invited from next month with a Local Transport White Paper promised for Jan 2011 and details of the initial projects to be supported by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund pencilled in for Oct 2011.

SECRETARY OF STATE SETS OUT TRANSPORT PRIORITIES

The settlement Transport received in the Spending Review (£18bn of rail investments, £4bn in Highways Agency investment, and £6bn on local transport investments) demonstrates the Coalition's commitment to prioritising the projects that will support economic growth and job creation. The settlement also included over £750m to fund the development of our plans for a national high speed rail network over the Spending Review period, with the bulk of capital expenditure occurring after 2015 - when, on our plans, the public finances will be back in balance ... High speed rail will be an unbeatable option for inter-urban travel with none of the hassle of short-haul flying. ... We intend to announce the package for consultation, including a preferred route between London and the West Midlands, a corridor preference to Leeds and Manchester, and

detailed plans for links to Heathrow and HS1, later this year. The consultation we will be launching in the New Year will be as comprehensive, inclusive and wide ranging as possible; an opportunity for everyone to make their views clear. It will cover both the Government's overall high speed rail strategy and the route of the initial London-Birmingham phase of High Speed 2. We will analyse the no doubt numerous responses, and publish our response, setting out our proposed way forward, in Dec 2011, with the aim of getting the first hybrid Bill for the London-Birmingham route to Royal Assent by the end of this Parliament - from the speech by Philip Hammond MP, at the High Speed Rail Conference on 4 Nov 2010 (DfT website)

ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY PROGRAMME

The draft West Midlands & Chilterns RUS was published in Nov 2010 with the West Coast RUS following in Dec 2010. Three "Second Generation" strategies are expected by the end of 2010, starting with the Northern RUS in Oct. The next part of the Network RUS (covering Stations and Depots) is also due to be published soon. Finally, a new Network RUS on Tram Trains is now planned. Network Rail's Electrification RUS had demonstrated very clearly the benefit of incremental extensions to the network. – Peter Cousins

Mark Norton of Friends of the Far North Line writes: "Network Rail have published a draft second-generation RUS for the Scottish railway system. This captures some good improvements for railways, but says next to nothing about the line to the Far North, including Caithness and Sutherland! We need to change this." (Consultation on the Scotland RUS will end on 13 Jan 2011 with the final version of the document expected to be published next summer).

CULL OF TRANSPORT QUANGOS

Six quangos which report to the Department for Transport will be axed as part of a government drive to abolish 192 quasi-autonomous non-government organisations: Cycling England, Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), Renewable Fuels Agency (RFA), The Railway Heritage Committee, The Commission for Integrated Transport, and BRB (Residuary) Ltd. One further body - Passenger Focus - will be retained, but substantially reformed to focus on the core role of protecting passengers while reducing costs to taxpayers. Surviving transport quangos are: the British Transport Police Authority, Channel Tunnel Section 1 Finance PLC, Civil Aviation Authority, Directly Operated Railways Ltd, High Speed Two Ltd, London and Continental Railways Ltd, London and Continental Railways Finance PLC, Northern Lighthouse Board, Office of Rail Regulation, Passenger Focus (Passengers' Council), Traffic Commissioners and Deputies, and Trinity House Lighthouse Service. – Transport Briefing

RAIL GROWTH DEFIES ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

New trading figures from one franchise operator suggest that rail is continuing to shrug off the effects of the economic downturn. Stagecoach has announced that its rail franchises in Britain produced 'like-for-like' revenue growth of 6.5 per cent in the 24 weeks to 17 October, but that

Virgin Rail, in which it has a 49 per cent interest, grew over the same period by 15.2 per cent. The revelation of growing revenue may fuel protests from rail users and unions over the prospect of sharp fare rises. - Railnews

EAGLE TO SHADOW TRANSPORT

Maria Eagle, MP for Garston and Halewood in Merseyside, has become shadow transport secretary following Labour leader Ed Miliband's announcement of the new shadow cabinet.

DISUSED WATERLOO EUROSTAR PLATFORMS COST £4M TO MAINTAIN

The cost of mothballing Waterloo International Station over the last three years has been £4.1m. The figure was obtained by the Liberal Democrat group on the London Assembly under the Freedom of Information Act. The only income for the former Eurostar terminus has been £60,000 for filming and theatre productions. It had been hoped the platforms could have been used for South West Trains suburban services, but this would require considerable track work on the approach to Waterloo. The platforms are owned by BRB (Residuary) Ltd – one of the quangos due to be abolished. – Rail Professional

NATIONAL COMMUNITY RAIL DAY - thanks to RVR News for this item

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships is trying something new for 2011: a co-ordinated event on a single day (19 Mar 2011) with the theme "National Network - Local Service". In previous years, there have been unco-ordinated events spread over a number of days which have consequently failed to attract national press coverage. Supported by the Association of Train Operating Companies, this "fun" event is open to all community rail partnerships, station adopters etc and will involve giving out local produce to travellers either on the train or at a station - a good opportunity to explain how community rail supports the local economy.

LACK OF ACCESS AT WELSH TRAIN STATIONS

A report published by the Welsh Assembly equality of opportunity committee has found that more than half of Welsh train stations are not fully accessible to disabled people. Disabled people from throughout Wales have shared their experiences with the committee by providing written evidence and case studies. The report has found issues such as footbridges being the only method to access platforms, unreliable lifts, understaffing in stations and large gaps between the platforms and trains. Through taking these issues into account the report claims that only 16% of stations have partial access to the platforms for wheelchair users, and 34% no access at all. A Network Rail spokesperson said: "We are currently working with the industry to invest around £85m to improve stations in Wales by 2014, and part of that includes funding from Department for Transport to improve disabled access. - BBC news report

CHEAP TRAIN TICKET ADVICE

Maybe you've stumbled across this already, but it's new to me: the website

www.moneysavingexpert.com has a step-by-step guide which will show you how to slash the price of rail travel - from the website's Home page, click on the "Travel" tab, select "UK Travel & Motoring", then click on "Cheap train tickets". Most of us know many of the recommended tricks already, but its good to see them all listed in one place (and of course, there are tips that you won't find on the rail industry's own "Best value fare" website).

TWO PROJECTS COMPLETED ...

A £5m project to upgrade capacity on the Heart of Wales rail line has been completed. Work to modernise five passing loops on the line will increase capacity and provide a more robust diversionary route for trains between Swansea and Bridgend. It's also been announced that major construction work for the Airdrie to Bathgate rail reopening project is complete, according to an update from Network Rail; through services from Helensburgh and Milngavie in the west to Bathgate and Edinburgh in the east will use the new stretch of line from 12 December with the start of the winter rail timetable. - Transport Briefing

... AND ONE GETS UNDER WAY (but note the price tag!!!)

Work has started on Buckshaw Parkway station in Lancashire. The new £6.8m station, expected to open in autumn 2011, will serve the Buckshaw Village development on the site of the 395-acre former Royal Ordnance factory at Euxton near Chorley. The new station is a joint venture between Chorley Council, Lancashire County Council, Network Rail and train operator Northern Rail. Built to Network Rail's modular design, the new two platform station - on the same Manchester to Preston line as Chorley station - is expected to be used by 450,000 passengers a year and will be operated by Northern Rail. Parking on the northern side of the station will have space for 204 cars including 10 spaces for disabled users. A pedestrian bridge will link the two platforms. - Transport Briefing

FUNDER FINDER

There's some good advice for voluntary organisations on how to get grants for projects on the website funderfinder.org.uk. The website includes guidance on how to apply for a grant, and a very long A-Z listing of charitable trusts that award grants - click on any one of the names to be taken to the trust's own website.

OFFER FROM IAN ALLAN PUBLISHING

Rail user groups with their own websites can apply to Ian Allan Publishing to promote the company's products on their sites and earn a generous commission of 5%. The company says "this provides web site owners with the opportunity to develop a potentially very significant additional stream of income promoting quality products that are in high demand - getting started is easy and free!" For details, log on to www.ianallanpublishing.com, scroll down to the foot of the page and click on "Affiliates".

EVENTS +++ EVENTS +++ EVENTS

Sat 20 Nov The Kent Division of Railfuture London & SE meet at Earl's in Earl St, Maidstone from 14:00.

Sat 20 Nov HPSRUA meeting at Stockmoor Village Hall from 14:00 with guest speaker from Kirklees Council.

Mon 22 Nov Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association holding a public meeting at St Mary's Catholic Club, Wrexham from 19:30 with guest speaker from Arriva Trains Wales.

Thu 25 Nov Railfuture NE Branch meeting, Newcastle, with guest speaker Adrian Shooter of Chiltern Railways.

Sat 4 Dec Railfuture East Anglia meet in Bury St Edmunds.

Tue 7 Dec Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association meeting from 19:00 at Welshpool Pinewood Tavern.

Wed 8 Dec Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail User Group meet at Meldreth from 20:00.

Thu 16 Dec Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Assn meeting at St Leonard's Church Centre, Victoria Road, Bedford.

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Thu 13 Jan & Thu 10 Feb Glasgow Branch of FoWHL meet in the Partick Burgh Hall from 19:30. Themes to be announced.

Sat 22 Jan Railfuture Yorkshire Branch meeting in Saltaire.

Fri 11 Feb ACoRP conference "Community Rail = Big Society". Venue to be announced.

Sat 19 Feb Provisional date for ESTA Lowestoft spring meeting in Saxmundham

Sat 26 Feb Railfuture East Anglia meet in Cambridge.

Thu 10 Mar Glasgow Branch of FoWHL meet in the Partick Burgh Hall from 19:30. Theme: Friends of Wemyss Bay Station.

Sat 19 Mar Ribble Valley Rail AGM in Clitheroe from 14:00.

Sat 19 Mar ACoRP Community Rail Day - events around Britain

Sat 7 May Railfuture AGM, probably in Brighton.

Sat 14 May ESTA Lowestoft AGM in Aldeburgh

More events on: www.railfuture.org.uk - select "Links" then "Events".

See also: www.acorp.uk.com/diary

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

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