

Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2009 10:21 AM **Subject:** Railfuture Rail User Express, 21 July 2009, copy #1

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

We begin with a roundup of news from rail user groups around the UK.

Thanks to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins.

Please note: I'm happy to receive items by email to save postage.

Common themes this month are: various funding sources for rail schemes; calls for faster journey times; booking office opening hours; the inconvenience of locked waiting rooms; plus volunteers looking after railway assets – and winning well-deserved awards.

As always, feel free to forward this message to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources).

+++ GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH : The **Bexhill Rail Action Group** +++

BRAG was formed in 2005 in response to a proposal by the rail authorities to abandon through train services from the Bexhill area to London Victoria via Haywards Heath. Following their successful campaign on this issue, BRAG continues to fight for improvements to rail services in the Bexhill and surrounding area including: greater use of the Marshlink route via Ashford and faster services to London. Journey times to/from London are slower now than in the days of steam for Bexhill residents; the fastest journey time is 1 hour 52 minutes off-peak, with many rush-hour trains taking well in-excess of two hours. BRAG meets once a month at the offices of Hastings Direct in Bexhill and new members are always welcome; membership costs £5/yr. For more details, see <http://www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk/>

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

The **Friends of the West Highland Line** welcomes the addition trains in the summer Sunday timetable but would still like to see services to Oban improved all the year round. In their magazine, there's news that the Grade 2 listed building on the platform at Arisaig has been renovated and officially opened as a meetings room available for use by rail interest groups. Gordon Gaughan who runs the welcoming café at Crianlarich Station was pleased to receive an award for second place in First ScotRail's "Adopt-a-Station" competition. FoWHL member Geoffrey Evison received an "Adopter of the Year" award; he is currently refurbishing Upper Tyndrum signal box and looks after the appearance of three other stations on the line. John McCormick, FoWHL's Strategy Officer, presented his document entitled "West Highland Tourism & Rail Development" at a meeting with Transport Scotland. The paper contains 10 principal recommendations such as: better marketing of the Caledonian Sleeper; measures to improve line speed; and extension of the Over-60s concession so that it covers travel on the West Highland Line, at least in the low season. Elsewhere, there's an account of the transformation of a Mk 1 coach from a static café into a luxury holiday coach with spectacular views based at Loch Awe; for details, see www.scotlandrailholiday.com And finally, a late news item just received from the Secretary: an article about the West Highland Line in the Sunday Post dated 19 July gives extensive coverage of FoWHL..

The **Dornoch Rail Link Action Group** has started to work with a freight company and the Caithness & N. Sutherland Regeneration Partnership with the purpose of making a coordinated campaign for major improvements to the Far North Line. Potential freight traffic includes timber and wood products, and palletised goods via a terminal proposed for Georgemas Junction. The Pentland Firth seabed leases and associated developments (including tidal power schemes) would be generating hundreds of local jobs and bring further traffic to the railway. At a joint meeting in June, the Regeneration Partnership contrasted the improvements to the A9 trunk road with a lack of development to the rail link, resulting in a serious disparity between road and rail journey times. Dorlag will be lobbying the Scottish Government vigorously for improvements in signalling, line speed and rolling stock as well as their main campaign aim: the building of a rail short cut at the Dornoch river crossing.

The Harpenden-based **Association of Public Transport Users** has been given a draft of the December 09 timetable from First Capital Connect. There are some adverse consequences arising from changes to services on other lines including an increase in Wimbledon loop services; APTU was able to raise their concerns at a meeting held with FCC managers in June. The group has been following up a number of other issues which affect commuters, including the

accessibility of Circle Line platforms at Kings Cross and the problem of ticket gates that chew up season tickets. London TravelWatch has just contacted APTU and other stakeholders with the news that extensive negotiations with FCC have led to significantly better proposals from the company about reduced booking-office opening hours: – all FCC stations are to retain their booking office facilities and will remain staffed although the exact booking office opening hours may change, with the added proviso that they must remain open where they meet the Secretary of State's agreed minimum level of 12 ticket sales per hour. Full details of the agreement can be seen at www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/3836/get.

Some more good news about staffing levels: the **Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users Group** tells us that Norfolk County Council has secured the retention of some staffing at Attleborough and Wymondham, where the booking offices were threatened with closure. In their newsletter, PENRUG warns its members that the printed timetable leaflet for their line is difficult to follow and gives false information, including trains listed which don't exist! In an analysis of service levels, the group believes that any extra taxpayer-funded trains on the UK network should be prioritised on a value for money basis, and feels that extra services on the Birmingham-March-Cambridge corridor would come high on the list.

Earlier this month, the **Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association** took their stall to the Community Rail Day at Llangollen Station during Eisteddfod Week. Elsewhere in SCRUA's July newsletter, we read that (i) the local Community Rail Partnership has published a Line Guide expressly for businesses which has proved to be a useful discussion tool at business forums and (ii) Shropshire County Council is to offer a senior railcard to eligible residents for £5/year as an alternative to the national bus pass. (iii) SCRUA is angry that the car parking charge at Chester has gone up in these recessionary times to £4.70/day with no apparent improvement to the facilities.

The **Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association** has conducted a study into rail commuting in Shropshire and the Borders, comparing services available and prices for monthly season tickets using information from the National Rail Enquiry Service. SARPA found that passengers from different towns in the region pay different prices for monthly season tickets that bear no relation to distances travelled. At the extremes of the range, passengers at Church Stretton have to fork out £129.10 for their 12.75 mile commute to Shrewsbury whilst those from Newtown (Powys) at 33.75 miles from Shrewsbury pay only £107.20. Generally fares on the Marches line running North to South through Shropshire between Crewe and Hereford were higher than those on lines running east to west from Birmingham to Wrexham/Chester and Aberystwyth. Of the 75 different fares analysed, 9 of the highest 12 (as measured by price per distance travelled) were found on the Marches line. Church Stretton had the most expensive commuting fares overall whilst Gobowen was found to have the cheapest. Commenting on the patchy provision of commuting services and the wild fluctuations in fare levels, SARPA Chairman Gareth Marston said in his press release: "Clearly these findings further reinforce the need for reform of the ticketing system on our railways. The TOCs are following an agenda of their own rather than encouraging rail travel and helping reduce emissions and congestion. It seems pointless having season ticket fares on the Aberystwyth and Crewe-to-Shrewsbury lines because a commuting service is not provided, and even more perverse that passengers from different towns pay different rates to travel similar distances on the same trains".

Although the normal train service on their line will be suspended until the end of August, the **Cotswold Line Promotion Group** is wholeheartedly supporting the works to redouble 20 miles of the route; the group has been out and about with their stand explaining the development to local residents. The CLPG's special high-speed-train trip to Torbay on 9 May, organised jointly with First Great Western, was a huge success with over 350 tickets sold and the hope of another charter next year. An extraordinary increase in membership by 51 is largely attributed to people joining in order to get tickets at bargain rates for the Torbay trip. The launch of a new, illustrated walks book entitled "From the Thames to the Wye" (price £7.50) is planned for September – copies can be obtained from Ray Jones at rhj@phonecoop.coop. Also there has been an encouraging response to the offer of a CD containing the group's first 100 newsletters. A picture on p14 of the current, full-colour magazine shows a line of miserable passengers standing in the cold in front of a locked waiting room – a common sight across Britain where waiting rooms are available only when the station is staffed. *Perhaps the item below could provide the answer...*

Nearly three years ago, Rail User Express contained a report from the **Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group** about a novel, anti-vandal waiting shelter at Walthamstow Queens Road which locks automatically at 2130 and unlocks again the next morning (but anyone inside can still get out). Transport for London's trial was hailed a "great success", so perhaps we should now be campaigning for this auto-locking device to be fitted across the rail network.

Meanwhile, the **Barking-Gospel Oak** group is following the debate about electrification of their line with interest, noting that it represents best value for money compared to any other infill scheme in Britain. With the DfT and Mayor of London arguing over funding, BGOLUG fails to see how the decision makers can continue to prevaricate when the case for electrification is so compelling. In a press release issued on 17 July, BGOLUG welcomed the news that the High Court had upheld Waltham Forest Council's attempts to provide a footpath linking Walthamstow Central rail

station with Walthamstow Queen's Road station through a new housing estate - the group has been campaigning for the link for around 15 years!

...next news from Railfuture branches and committees...

Railfuture delegations have recently held meetings with the Secretary of State Andrew Adonis, Liberal Democrat transport spokesman Norman Baker MP and the Conservative spokesman Stephen Hammond MP. Further meetings are being sought with ATOC to discuss their reopenings report 'Connecting Communities', and with rail professionals Chris Green and Peter Hall who are working to improve station facilities.

Railfuture's **Passenger Committee** met with Passenger Focus and were given copies of their report 'Designing the Future'; this document concurs with many of Railfuture's findings; for example: that a majority of passengers preferred trains with a higher proportion of tables. The Committee welcomed the recent initiatives by Passenger Focus to involve local Rail User Groups at an early stage in the Route Utilisation Strategy programmes.

The **London & SE Branch of Railfuture** has created a bulletin board hosted by YAHOO! - this will enable Branch members to keep in touch with regional transport issues and to take part in discussions; it also opens up the chance for collaborative working on spreadsheets and policy documents. The Branch has been deluged recently with formal consultations on policy documents including the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy, and Rail Utilisation Strategies for both Kent and Sussex. Because of its geographical size, the Branch holds Divisional Meetings around its area, including: Coastway, Kent and Eastern. Representatives from relevant rail user groups are welcome to attend these meetings.

To coincide with the issue of the West Midlands Regional Rail Development Plan, **Railfuture West Midlands Branch** has released a leaflet entitled 'from traffic jams to a Railfuture in the West Midlands'. Doubling as a membership recruitment leaflet, it highlights three lines that could be reopened for passenger traffic (Camp Hill line, Sutton Park line and the 'Godiva Line' extending the existing Nuneaton – Coventry service southwards to Leamington Spa with new stations at Kenilworth and Ricoh Arena). The leaflet also calls for work to begin quickly on electrification of the lines radiating from Snow Hill station. The West Mids Rail Plan can be downloaded from www.centro.org.uk, and the consultation runs until 11 Sept 09.

Gerry Clarke of Portsmouth Ferryport was a special guest at a committee meeting of **Railfuture Wessex Branch**. Gerry was instrumental in setting up a successful 10-week trial, conducted by DB Schenker, of container transshipments via a low-cost, road-to-rail facility at Fratton. Unfortunately the economic downturn means that road transport now easily undercuts rail on all types of load, but they're hopeful of future rail traffic, waste paper shipments being one possibility. Now, I don't usually cover freight issues in Rail User Express, but I'd like to share one comment from Gerry: contrary to popular belief, he found that dealing with the EU for grant assistance was much easier than applying through the UK Government in its various guises (the SRA then DfT Rail)! After Gerry's presentation, thoughts turned to the suggestion of carrying out station surveys locally to check facilities and identify any deficiencies. Items to check might include: signage, parking spaces, platform accessibility, staffing, toilets, help point and so on. Has any other group conducted a systematic survey of this kind? Do you have a checklist which you could share with Wessex Branch? If so, could you kindly email it to me at ruglink@railfuture.org.uk – Thanks!

A reminder that Railfuture would like to hear from Rail User Groups around the UK that are planning, or have recently completed, passenger counts at stations on their patch. The aim is to present a coordinated analysis across the network for comparison with official statistics. Once again, please contact me at ruglink@railfuture.org.uk.

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

VOLUNTEERS TEND NETWORK RAIL ASSETS

In the last Rail User Express, I quoted from the Tarka Line Association's magazine about taking out a "lease" on a disused platform at Barnstaple. An industry insider responded to this story with the following information: "The Tarka Line Association has a 'licence' agreement with Network Rail to improve the disused Barnstaple platform – it is *not* a lease (i.e. they don't have property rights). The Three Rivers Partnership has the same arrangement for their disused platform at Chandlers Ford, and did their first work day on 31st May. Another scheme for a disused platform - at Frome on the Heart of Wessex line - is part of an award submission by the Partnership to the Network Rail Partnership Awards. There are now 15 such schemes whereby voluntary groups look after disused Network Rail land, with another 10-15 in the pipeline. They vary in size from a lamp room in Norfolk to 3½ miles of former branch line in South Wales."

RAILFUTURE RESPONDS TO COLLAPSE OF EAST COAST FRANCHISE

“The National Express statement of intent to withdraw from the East Coast franchise comes as little surprise to anyone. All that, however, is now in the past. A new franchise is to be let and Railfuture welcomes the concern expressed by the Secretary of State to use the opportunity to secure better passenger services and facilities. We hope that the opportunity will be taken to reinstate some of the restaurant services which were withdrawn and to reverse the car parking price increases and other penny pinching measures. It is important that passengers are not deterred from using the service by confusion over its future, and we welcome the government's commitment to keep the service running as usual. This episode has shown up some of the deficiencies in the franchising system, in particular the impossibility of accurately forecasting future passenger demand. There are lessons to be learned and we look forward to contributing to the full consultation which Lord Adonis has promised on the franchise specification.” - *Railfuture media release*

TICKET BARRIERS REJECTED

Controversial plans for ticket barriers at York Station were thrown out by councillors, following a fiery meeting at the city's Guildhall last week. Campaigners erupted in applause as a City of York Council planning committee voted six to three against an application by National Express East Coast. The committee ruled the barriers, which would have been put up across the station concourse, would have a “serious adverse effect” on the Grade II listed building. A spokesman for the firm said it was “very disappointed” with the decision. He said the company would now take the committee's comments on board and consider its position. — *York Press*

RAIL ENQUIRIES OUTSOURCED TO INDIA

National Rail Enquires is to outsource all calls to India in a cost-cutting move that puts more than 100 jobs at risk. Call centre staff in India already handle about two thirds of the calls to the train times hotline, with the remaining enquiries fielded in South Yorkshire by employees of Ventura, a UK business. The Association of Train Operating Companies, which runs the services, said the group's UK contract was coming to an end and that it was more cost effective to outsource the remaining calls to India. It added that service levels would not be compromised by the move, with customer satisfaction equal for calls both to the UK and Indian centres. The move comes after the number of calls to the hotline has fallen 25% in the past year as passengers plan their journeys online rather than over the phone. Only 7 per cent of enquires are now telephone-based. - *Times Online*

NOVEL FUNDING PROPOSAL FOR TUBE LINE EXTENSION

Transport for London, Wandsworth and Lambeth Councils and Mayor Boris Johnson have asked the Government for permission to raise funds for the planned extension of London Underground's Northern Line from Kennington to Battersea Power Station. The funding would come through **tax increment financing**, a fund-raising method that has not been used in Great Britain before but is fairly common in the USA. It is hoped to fund the £850 million scheme with money raised through the sale of council bonds, which are then repaid via an increase in business rates when the regeneration is completed. — *Railway Herald*

SMITHAM TO BENEFIT FROM NATIONAL STATIONS FUND

Smitham railway station in Surrey is to be rebuilt using money from the **National Stations Improvement Programme**. The existing station building will be demolished and replaced by a new modular unit constructed using a stainless steel column and roof structure. Work on the scheme will start in the autumn and is scheduled for completion by early 2010. The existing station building was built more than 100 years ago and the structure and facilities need replacing. The station will get extra seating for passengers, more bicycle parking facilities and step-free access between the entrance and platforms for passengers with reduced mobility. The National Stations Improvement Programme is a £150m Department for Transport backed rail industry scheme to enhance 150 medium sized stations in England and Wales. Typically, the initiative responds to the key needs of passengers, to provide safe, secure and comfortable stations, and provide suitable information. — *Transport Briefing*

ANOTHER STATION GETS THE HARRINGTON HUMP

Another platform hump is to be installed, this time at St Albans Abbey station, enabling easier access and exit from trains for passengers with small children and pushchairs, the elderly or those with heavy luggage. Working with Hertfordshire County Council, the Department for Transport and train operator London Midland, Network Rail has designed a variable height platform to help bridge the gap between the platform and trains. The station becomes the second in the country to get a modular Easier Access Area, otherwise known as a ‘Harrington Hump’ after the station in Cumbria where a successful trial of the system took place earlier this year. The hump can be designed, built and

installed for around one tenth of the cost of raising an entire platform. – *Railway Herald*

EUROPEAN CASH FOR EAST ANGLIAN RAIL LINK

A project to upgrade a rail line linking East Anglia to the Midlands has been awarded £8m of European funding. The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) said the money had been provisionally allocated to the scheme but will be confirmed in September. The project will allow more freight to be moved by rail from the ports of Felixstowe, Suffolk and Harwich. It would also avoid the existing and congested rail route via north London. The upgrade could also see the removal of speed restrictions imposed on heavy freight trains on the cross country route between Ipswich and Peterborough. EERA added that it may create opportunities for more passenger services into and out of London on the Ipswich to Peterborough route. – *BBC News website*

FIRST GREAT WESTERN EXITS REMEDIAL CHAPTER

Train operator First Great Western has met demands laid down by the Department for Transport requiring it to significantly improve performance and reduce train cancellations. Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis said latest cancellation figures showed the rail firm had met the criteria set out in a Deed of Amendment to the FGW franchise terms which was put in place by former transport secretary Ruth Kelly. Lord Adonis said the criteria in the Deed of Amendment for the end of the Remedial Period were met by the train operator in relation to the four-week rail reporting period ending on 27 June 2009 with cancellation figures now within the agreed threshold. As a result, First Great Western's remedial period has now formally ended. - *Transport Briefing*

RAIL LINKS ESSENTIAL FOR ECO TOWNS

In his announcement on 16 July about the four shortlisted Eco Towns (Whitehill-Bordon, St Austell Claypit, Rackheath nr Norwich & North West Bicester), the Minister for Housing and Planning, John Healey MP, included this comment: "Good transport links are essential to the success of any new community. Three of the four eco-town locations I am announcing today are well located for rail transport. For the fourth, Bordon, I am announcing funding support for the next stage of feasibility work, working with Hampshire County Council, to establish if restoration of a rail link can be achieved sustainably and subject to a sound business case." – *Govt website*

SIGNS COULD TELL DRIVERS TO TAKE THE TRAIN

The Government's determination to promote a low carbon economy is expected to form part of the biggest overhaul of the country's road signs in 40 years. Detailed proposals are currently being examined by ministers which are intended to persuade drivers that they could reach town and city centres quicker if they allowed the bus or train to take the strain. Options include electronic traffic signs with live information which would be updated according to the time of day, telling them how long it would take to drive into town and the estimated time to complete the same journey by train or on a bus with a dedicated lane. Fixed signs directing motorists to the nearest station could also be installed on the motorway and trunk road network. The review is still at an early stage and no decisions have yet been taken. – *The Telegraph*

ELECTRIFICATION MOVES UP THE AGENDA

After repeatedly rejecting the case for further electrification of Britain's rail network, ministers have in recent months reversed their stance, accepting that electrifying lines could reduce costs, improve performance and further boost the environment credentials of train travel. The first lines expected to be electrified are the most heavily used parts of the Great Western Main Line from London Paddington to Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea, and the Midland Main Line north from Bedford, where the wires currently end, to Kettering, Leicester, Nottingham and Sheffield. However, Network Rail's draft utilisation strategy on electrification recommends upgrading many additional routes. Currently only 40% of Britain's National Rail network is electrified, including most of the south east of England, and the main lines from London to Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as the Merseyrail network around Liverpool and the Glasgow suburban network. Large scale railway electrification has not been undertaken within the UK for more than 15 years. The programme currently being developed is expected to cost at least £1.5bn and envisages electric trains replacing diesel rolling stock on the Midland and Great Western main lines between 2014 and 2024. – *Transport Briefing*

STATION TRAVEL PLANS

The 2007 Rail White Paper encouraged train operators to work with local authorities and Network Rail in pilot projects to develop travel plans, similar to business and school travel plans, for various types of stations. There were significant

hurdles to jump before the pilot scheme – involving 31 stations – got the green light. Funding would have to come out of existing investment programmes and, while schools and business are largely individually managed, the railways have a web of stakeholders. At this early stage it is clear that station travel plans are being highly innovative in order to meet nationally set targets for CO2 reduction, customer satisfaction, an increase in sustainable travel to and from stations, and an increase passenger numbers particularly off-peak. From one-hour bike hire schemes to “three-for-free” car-sharing initiatives, there is a high level of creativity. There have been improvements from every possible angle, with changes to signage, better access, cycle security, banishing chaotic forecourts, providing step-free pedestrian access, a new eco-friendly station building, and even gardening and art projects. ATOC believes the station travel plan provides a promising template to bring stations and travel into the 21st century. – *DfT Smart Moves newsletter*

NATIONAL PASSENGER SURVEY

Passenger Focus has published Official Statistics on passenger satisfaction with rail travel from the National Passenger Survey for spring 2009. PF consult 50,000 passengers a year to produce the NPS - a network-wide picture of passengers' satisfaction with rail travel. Passenger opinions of train services are collected twice a year from a representative sample of journeys. Passengers' overall satisfaction and satisfaction with 29 specific aspects of service can, therefore, be compared over time. See www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/nps/content.asp

MORE PDF CONVERSION SOFTWARE

You may remember from a previous RUEx bulletin that George Jones of **South Cheshire Rail Users** recommended we use CRUTE software to convert newsletters to .pdf format for distribution on line. Now Peter Radford of **Chelmsford Commuters and Rail Travellers** has written to say: “There is an alternative that I have used very successfully for some time, although, having moved to Microsoft Office 2007, it is no longer necessary. That alternative is ‘PDF Creator’ which is freely downloadable from Software Forge (Google finds them). It installs on a Windows system as if it were a printer, so that you can generate .pdf files from any application that has the ability to print. I hope you find this useful.” – *Thanks Peter!*

TELL THE WORLD WHAT’S ON

If you want to bring your special event to the attention of internet surfers, you can post details free of charge on a new website called “woZZon”, which claims to be “the largest event listings database in the UK.” Launched in March 2009, woZZon can be used by anyone - venue owner, charity event organiser, p.r. agency or whatever. “It’s a fantastic way to get noticed for free. Users can add, amend and update their own events and there is also a rating and comments facility available for everyone else to use.” Lastly, a reminder: email info@passengerfocus.org.uk to publicise your event on the Passenger Focus website.

...and finally our own regular woZZon feature...

EVENTS +++ EVENTS +++ EVENTS

Wed 22 July National Express stakeholder event in the North East – details: murphy.martin@btinternet.com

Thu 6 Aug The date when ACoRP post shortlisted entries in their Community Rail Awards competition on their website: www.acorp.uk.com

8-16 Aug *Manchester Museum of Science & Industry’s Transport Festival.*

Sat 5 Sep PENRUG meet at 1100 in Ely Methodist Church with speakers: Heather Bolt, former Chairman of Norfolk Rail Policy Group and Alan Neville, who manages March and Ely stations.

Thu 17 Sep National Transport Conference 2009 entitled “Connections Through Investment” at QEII Conference Centre, London. Details: www.govnet.co.uk/transport/transportmedia

Fri/Sat 25/26 Sep ACoRP Community Rail Awards & Festival, Carlisle - details: www.acorp.uk.com

Wed 4 Nov ACoRP conference “Sustainable Transport & Tourism” at Cardiff Parc Hotel.

Sat 14 Nov Railfuture Rail Reopenings Conference “Building on Success”, at St John the Baptist Church Hall in Corby from 11:00 to 16:30. Speakers: Jim Bamford of Notts CC & E Mids Rail Forum, Stephen Abbott from TravelWatch E Mids and Colin Elliff from the Woodhead project, plus speakers from Corby Borough Council and ACoRP. Fee only £20 (includes buffet lunch).

... and in 2010...

Sat 20 Mar European Passengers’ Federation AGM and Conference at Malmo, Sweden.

Sat 24 Apr Bus Users UK AGM in Nottingham

This bulletin has been sent by Tony Smale, Railfuture Rail User Group Liaison Officer

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