

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users



INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the main events for Harborough Rail Users (HRU) over the year to November 2023. Economic pressures have continued throughout the year, with high inflation and interest rates dampening confidence. Meanwhile, the Covid pandemic has largely receded, and, despite the continuing industrial disputes, ridership has continued to recover on the railways. Electrification work has also made good progress and, as I write this in November 2023, is nearing completion on the section through Market Harborough. The year also ended with good news on two rail-related campaigns: ticket office closures and Day Travelcards.

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Harborough Rail Users is an independent voluntary group that seeks to represent all users of Market Harborough station, whether regular commuters or occasional travellers. Though small, HRU is a formally constituted organisation with an elected Committee, but there is no formal membership and no subscriptions. Anyone genuinely interested in the station and train service at Market Harborough is welcome to get involved.

The HRU Constitution requires a minimum of two Committee meetings to be held between AGMs. Since the last AGM, on 24th November 2022, the Committee met:

- On 15th May 2023; an open meeting at the Sugar Loaf pub, to discuss recent and continuing further work at the station, various matters to do with train services, electrification progress, and fares – especially Transport for London's threat to withdraw Day Travelcards. Unfortunately, however, this meeting was not quorate, so had no executive authority.
- On 7th November 2023: at the Three Swans Hotel. Topics covered included preparations for the AGM, aspects of the train service, plus campaign successes regarding ticket office closures and Day Travelcards.

Most HRU business is conducted by email. This has remained very active throughout the year, both within the group and in its dealings with EMR and others.

HRU is a group member of independent national rail campaign organisation Railfuture. We are grateful to Railfuture for making their Zoom licence available to us for this year's AGM.

THE PAST YEAR

At our AGM in 2022, we reviewed our five main campaign topics. Set out below are developments and HRU's activities regarding each of these in turn.

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

TRAIN SERVICES AND FARES

Strikes: December 2022 and into 2023

The year started very badly indeed, with a series of industrial disputes resulting in strikes and overtime bans. Not only was EMR affected by the national disputes involving the three main rail unions, it also had its own separate disputes with depot staff members of the Unite union. Though EMR did provide a service on most strike days, it operated at a reduced (hourly) frequency and only between about 07:30 and 18:30. On 11th December 2022, we sent an open letter to Harborough MP Neil O'Brien, calling for an end to the various parties' claims and counterclaims and for intervention to bring all the disputes to a swift end. We shared this, with an accompanying press statement, with the local and rail press. The story was the front-page lead in the *Harborough Mail* on 22nd December.

There were further strikes in the spring. One of these, on Saturday 18th March, coincided with planned engineering that closed the line between Leicester and Kettering for the weekend. Nonetheless, EMR ran quite a good service, with trains from St Pancras to Corby and to Kettering, and trains north from Leicester, with buses covering the gap. Unfortunately, the published timetable omitted all the buses to Market Harborough from both Leicester and Kettering! We raised this with EMR and it was swiftly resolved.

There was some good news in March, when it was announced that the disputes with Network Rail had been settled. However, the RMT strikes against train operators have continued.

Following the local elections on 4th May, control of Harborough District Council changed from Conservative to a Lib-Dem + Labour + Green 'traffic-light' coalition. The opposition Conservative group tabled a Motion for the full Council on 24th July condemning the rail strikes, and placing blame solely on the unions for the economic and other damage they were causing. The Motion called upon the new Leader of the Council to write to the unions to this effect and asking them how they intended to end the disputes. While welcoming the Council's interest and concern, we in HRU are strictly neutral and independent in political matters. We therefore wrote to both Councillor Phil Knowles as Leader of the Council and Councillor Phil King as the Opposition member who had tabled this Motion, pointing out that we in HRU had publicly expressed concern about the strikes back in December. We criticised the Motion as one-sided; all parties, including the Government, must take responsibility. The credibility of the Council in sending such a letter depends on it recognising that all parties have a part to play. Following an amendment to the Motion, the Council resolved that the Leader send an amended letter to the Rail Delivery Group, expressing the Council's concern and calling upon the RDG to meet with the Secretary of State for Transport and the trades unions with the aim of resolving the dispute. We were pleased to see this more balanced approach, but at the time of writing, the disputes remain unresolved.

One unexpected implication of the strikes took place right at the beginning of the year under review, two days after the 2022 AGM. On 26th November 2022, there was an ASLEF strike by drivers, resulting in all scheduled passenger trains that day being cancelled. However, a steam-hauled excursion train, headed by LMS Pacific 46233 *Duchess of Sutherland* came through Market Harborough on a special from Ealing Broadway to York and back. Hauling a

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

long train of maroon-liveried and Pullman coaches, she made a fine sight – despite being piloted by a diesel locomotive.



Steam soliloquy. 26th November 2022. Steam locomotive Duchess of Sutherland hustles its special train through Market Harborough at 09:17 on its way from Ealing Broadway to York. It came back south at 20:35. Sadly, an ASLEF strike cancelled all regular service trains, but that meant all passenger trains through our station that day were steam-hauled.

Photo: Steve Jones

The return run came through at 20:35. By this time, darkness shrouded the train as it stormed through the station, taking a run at the gradient up Desborough bank. The clouds of white steam reflected the glow of the engine's fire, giving the illusion of flames leaping and dancing above the cab. Rather atmospheric! This special was the only passenger train through Market Harborough on 26th November. In turn, this meant that all passenger trains through our station that day were steam-hauled. Informed sources tell me this was the first time this has happened since 1957!

New timetable: 22nd December 2022

There was little change in our timetable in December 2022, though we lost our first northbound train of the day; the 05:34 to Sheffield. This train started from Kettering but was vulnerable to diversion via Corby because of overnight electrification work. EMR therefore altered it to start from Leicester. We acknowledged that this made sense, but we want to see early morning and late evening trains reinstated once the electrification is complete.

New timetable: 21st May 2023

The new timetable brought about no material changes for our train service, but we did lose our bus connections to and from Kettering at the beginning and end of the day. The two early morning buses to Kettering were withdrawn because of reportedly very low usage. However, we did have an approach from a commuter who needs to be in London for 06:30 and this was his only way to achieve that. The loss of the bus connections caused him some hardship and we approached EMR about this, both to suggest that a taxi rather than a full-size coach may be more cost-effective, and to seek compensatory arrangements for the affected commuter. Unfortunately, our representations were unsuccessful.

Similarly, the three late evening buses from Kettering were also withdrawn. The effect was to bring our last evening departure from St Pancras forward from 00:15 to 22:35; a significant curtailment of the service and one that precludes attending evening events in London. It also caused hardship for shift-workers who cannot catch the 22:35 from St Pancras. Again, we made representations to EMR, so far again without success, and we shall continue to do so.

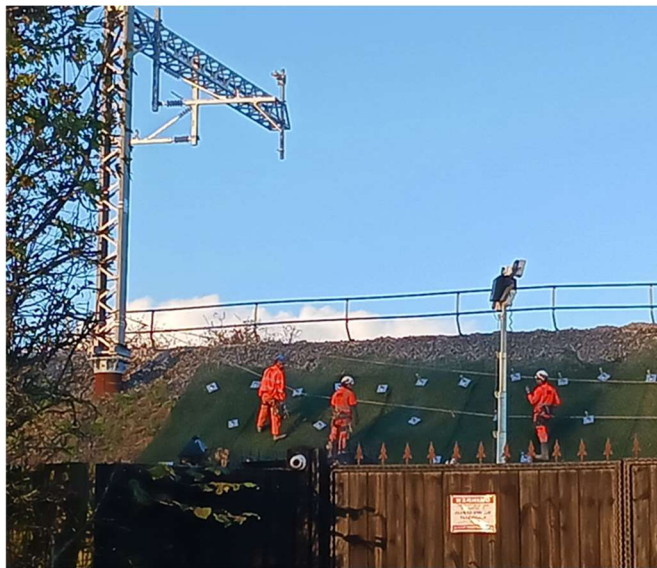
HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

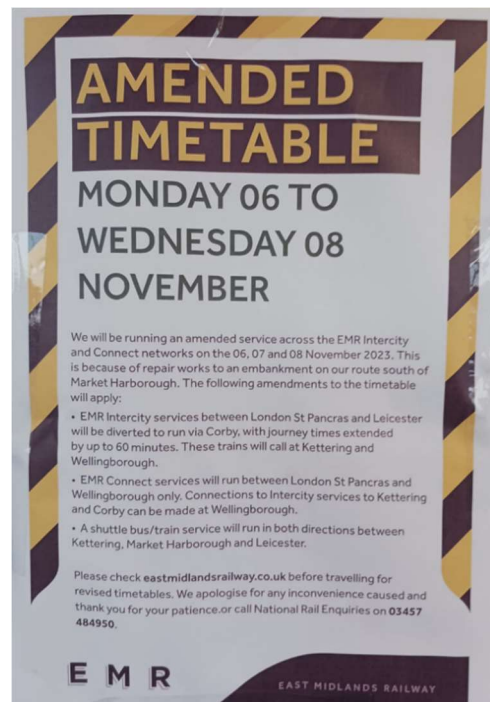
Braybrooke landslip: November 2023

A landslip between Braybrooke and Little Bowden seriously disrupted train services in early November. It affected the embankment on the 'down' side, closing the down (northbound) line on Thursday 2nd November. For a time, the up line (southbound) remained open for a reduced service, but this, too, was later closed. Network Rail worked hard to stabilise the embankment with soil-nails driven into the embankment and netting on the surface. Replacement buses were provided between Leicester, Market Harborough and Kettering to connect with trains diverted via Corby. The line reopened to traffic on Thursday 9th November.



Nailing it. Network Rail engineers stabilise the west side of the embankment near Braybrooke with soil-nails and netting on 7th November 2023.

Photo: Steve Jones



Replacement buses

Engineering work has been a regular feature of the year, and with it the use of replacement buses to and from Kettering and Leicester. Though there has been a generally good service of replacement buses, there were problems with inconsistent departure points from Market Harborough. The buses are meant to use the new bus stop at the main car park entrance, but too often they have left from the station forecourt instead. People have missed their bus as a result. We took this up with EMR and the problem appears to be resolved. There have been similar problems at Leicester, with buses departing either from London Road or from the station car park, and a lack of staff on hand to direct passengers.

A pleasing modest success has been EMR's agreement to re-time the last replacement bus from Leicester to Market Harborough on Saturday 25th November 2023 from 21:35 to 21:51. This will enable it to connect with a train from Sheffield that is due into Leicester at 21:41. We took this up with EMR when one of our Committee spotted it in the online journey planners.

As an aside, the bus arrangements are not ideal at Kettering, with buses departing from round the corner on Northfield Avenue. We are aware of cases where the bus has not arrived as

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

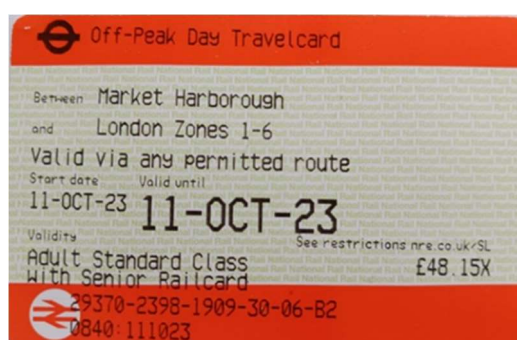
Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

scheduled and waiting passengers have gone back to the station to enquire, only to find that the bus has arrived and departed in the meantime. We have suggested that Corby may be a better option, as the bus interchange there is much better.

London Travelcards

The threat to London Travelcards reappeared in early January with news that Transport for London's (TfL) draft 2023 Business Plan included consideration of withdrawal from the Travelcard Agreement with the Train Operating Companies. Though only affecting Day Travelcards, not seasons, this was still of considerable concern to us, as Travelcards are popular with day-trippers as well as part-time commuters. We urged retention of the Day Travelcard, especially given that the whole question was in the context of the Government's funding settlement for Transport for London.



We recognise that pay-as-you-go with contactless bank or Oyster cards makes paying TfL fares easy. However, a Travelcard from Market Harborough not only gives unlimited travel around London, it also removes the evening peak time restrictions for the journey back. Moreover, it is eligible for Railcard discounts. We responded to TfL's 'engagement' (not a consultation), questioning the folly of withdrawing Day Travelcards. A significant campaign across many user groups and others soon emerged, and TfL extended the response deadline from 23rd May to 6th June.

On 21st July 2023, however, TfL gave the required six months' formal notice that Day Travelcards were to be withdrawn. The statement from TfL also stated that the decision was reversible, subject to discussions with the Department for Transport, the Rail Delivery Group and the train operating companies, provided the solution would allow TfL to meet the requirements of their Government funding agreement.

On 25th October came the very welcome news that such an agreement had been reached and that the Day Travelcard would remain.

Penalty Fares

Monday 23rd January saw the maximum penalty fare for ticketless travel increase from £20 to £100 plus the cost of the single fare applicable to the intended journey. This followed a directive from the Department for Transport to EMR and other train operators. Accompanying this, ticket barriers at Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough came into operation, though these have not, as yet, been installed at Market Harborough.

Ticket Office Closures proposal – July 2023

This became the national rail campaign of the year! In July, the Rail Delivery Group, at the behest of the Government, proposed the closure of nearly all station ticket offices in England, with the details for each station being handled by each train operating company (TOC). EMR proposed to close our ticket office, reduce station staffing hours at the beginning and end of the day, but otherwise have staff on hand to help passengers with ticket issue other than

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

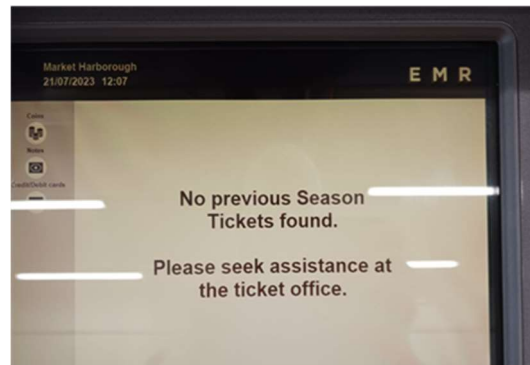
Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

through the ticket office. A three-week consultation was launched via national watchdog body Transport Focus on 5th July. We publicised the proposals locally, and expressed concerns about this, including:

- Availability of all services currently provided by the ticket office, such as Advance tickets, Season tickets and Photocards, Railcards, Ranger and Rover tickets, and ticket refunds
- Reduced staffing hours at the station
- Accessibility and equality implications: for example, many elderly and disabled people are uncomfortable with or unable to use online ticket purchase, mobile apps, etc, and may struggle with self-service ticket machines
- Potential reduction in the availability of other station facilities, such as the waiting rooms, toilets, and the footbridge lifts.
- Assistance with the car park barriers – which are monitored from the ticket office.

Staff would still be available to assist passengers, but we were also concerned about the implications for them if the ticket office were closed. Would they be expected to be on their feet all day in the booking hall as well as their duties on the platforms? In any case, our station team are already multi-skilled, undertaking various customer-facing duties around the station.



Ticket machine, Market Harborough 21st July 2023

We do not oppose modernisation where that brings improved customer service. Nonetheless, we submitted a formal response to Transport Focus on 24th July and copied this to Harborough MP Neil O'Brien, who also took up the campaign. We encouraged others to submit their own responses, with a poster on our noticeboard, some media activity, and via direct approach to various contacts. We shall never know whether this was effective but, among EMR's stations, Market Harborough had the third highest number of station-specific objections with 310, trailing only behind Beeston (332) and Chesterfield (340).

There was a massive public outcry, and the consultation was hastily extended to 1st September. By the close, there had been 750,000 responses nationally! On 31st October, Transport Focus issued their report, objecting to all the proposals. The Government swiftly abandoned the plans, much to the relief of all concerned.

ROLLING STOCK

EMR's small fleet of Class 180 units was withdrawn from the May 2023 timetable change. We expressed concern to EMR about a reduction in our Intercity fleet just as overcrowding was becoming a regular problem. They responded that, though the four Class 180s were being withdrawn, they were 'resource-hungry' in terms of maintenance. Their withdrawal would free up depot staff to allow more care and attention to be given to the remaining Class 222 'Meridian' fleet, thus enabling more intensive use. Otherwise, there has been no change for

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harbrough Rail Users

us, though the new Aurora bi-mode trains are now under construction, with the first of them now on test.



Class 180 in the shadows. One of our small fleet of these trains prepares to depart from Market Harbrough with the 15:57 to St Pancras on 7th March 2023. Note the absence of overhead wires at the station. Photo: Steve Jones

Though the Meridians are soon to be replaced, their Standard Class seats are all to be re-upholstered and re-covered as they are getting quite shabby. This will be done during routine maintenance, such that the trains will not be taken out of service for this work. It will prepare them for their new life elsewhere once they leave our line. We have also raised with EMR the sometimes excessive ratio of First to Standard Class accommodation, though some has been reclassified so as better to reflect demand.

We now await further news on the deployment of our new fleet, with particular reference to overcrowding.



Class conflict: Adjacent seats in First Class, marked as Standard Class and First Class respectively, on a service from Market Harbrough to Nottingham on 4th September 2023. This was clearly a mistake, but EMR have reclassified some First Class accommodation for Standard Class use, to ease overcrowding.

Photo: Steve Jones

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

ELECTRIFICATION

Good progress continues to be made with the Kettering to Wigston ('K2W') phase of the electrification of the line. It has involved some major work, including rebuilding of several bridges, lowering of track under others, for example in Great Bowden, as well as the overhead line equipment itself. The line through the station saw the overhead wires installed in April and early May 2023.

At the time of writing, authorisation for further sections beyond Wigston to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield is still awaited. We had thought this would be one of the obvious schemes to compensate for the Prime Minister's cancellation of HS2 beyond Birmingham in his Conservative Party conference speech, but that was not to be. We still consider electrification of the Midland Main Line to be an essential piece of levelling-up for the East Midlands.

We were pleased to learn, however, of approval for the upgrade of the 1980s electrification and power supply south of Bedford for 125mph where track conditions allow. This is now under way; it is important if our services are to maintain current timings to and from London while running on electric power.



Taking the up line down a bit. Work in progress on lowering the up (southbound) line through Great Bowden on 12th November 2023. The picture is taken from Main Street, looking south to the footbridge at the recreation ground, under which track is being lowered to give clearance for the overhead wires.

Pictures: Steve Jones



On the same day, a mile or so further north, a bridleway bridge just outside Great Bowden was replaced. The telescopic crane in the left background is lowering a concrete bridge section into place beyond the A6 bypass bridge in this view looking south. The electrification masts and small fittings are in place, but the wires are yet to be installed.

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

MARKET HARBOROUGH STATION

Though it is four years since the station was rebuilt at platform level in 2019, further residual works have taken place during the past year.

Forecourt layout revised – April 2023

On 6th - 7th April, the station forecourt layout was altered. The mini-roundabout was removed, and the 'teardrop' turning circle for taxis was reinstated near the main building. More short-stay parking spaces were provided on the space previously occupied by the temporary toilet cabin on the east side of the site. The new arrangements are a definite improvement in this rather constrained location. We have been complaining for some time about the inadequacy of short-stay parking at the station; the five new spaces go some way towards addressing this. However, though still in place at the time of writing, the black plastic pods for casual parking of bicycles were threatened with removal, to free up another parking space for contractors' vehicles. We made strong representations about this, as there needs to be provision for cyclists whose usage does not warrant obtaining a cycle hub key. Without it, cyclists will just chain their bikes to anything fixed, and could create a nuisance or hazard in doing so. We have also taken this up with Harborough District Council. We also continue to press for more short-stay parking on the main car park side of the station, where provision is woefully inadequate.



The station forecourt after remodelling in April 2023. The white car in front of the building is in the 'tear-drop' turning circle for taxis. On the right are the newly designated short-stay parking spaces, with a walking route marked out in yellow for the cycle hub. The bent bollards in the foreground bear witness to the tight layout for road vehicles! Photo: Steve Jones

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

Butterwicks Café

On 18th April, it was announced that local bakery firm Butterwicks had taken over the station café unit. Work was well under way in early May following replacement of an external window, and the café opened on Thursday 8th June 2023. The previous café, 'The Engine Room', had closed during the Covid pandemic and the retail unit in the booking hall then remained empty. We wish Butterwicks all success with their new venture at the station.

Station usage

Around the end of November each year, the Government's Office of Rail and Road (ORR) publishes annual data on rail passenger numbers. Unfortunately, figures for 2022-23 were not yet available at the time of writing this report. It will be interesting to see the extent of the post-Covid recovery in usage at Market Harborough.

Station adoption: Market Harborough in Bloom

Market Harborough in Bloom Volunteers (MHiBV) continue their efforts to add a little colour to the station, by means of floral planting. Given a shared interest in the amenity and appearance of the station, I have joined their team of official 'station adopters'. On a sweltering 14th June, 13 'barrier boxes' were installed on the railings at various locations on the platforms. More tidying up around the station took place in early July, including a 'Community Action Day' with EMR, Network Rail and DfT colleagues helping with weeding the gravel area behind Platform 2 on 10th July. This was in preparation for judging on 11th July for East Midlands in Bloom. There was further activity for Britain in Bloom judging on 1st August. On 20th September came the news that the planting at the station had won the Judges Award '*for high impact colourful and ingenious solutions to difficult conditions and compliance with safety regulations*'.



In early July, EMR replaced all the poster cases around the station, including the HRU noticeboard. Another one was installed alongside, for MHiBV. At the same time, a memorial plaque for the late Cedric Ashton, a well-known local figure and 'fifty years a railway commuter', was installed next to our noticeboard. I had been involved along with MHiBV in the procurement of this, kindly funded by EMR.

TRAIN SERVICE CONNECTIVITY

This was agreed as an extended scope for our watching brief on the proposals that emerge from time to time for the reopening of the line to Northampton; see further below. We wish to see good connections at Bedford with East-West Rail towards Oxford and Cambridge when

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

that line opens. Improved services from Leicestershire to Manchester and Leeds also remain an aspiration.

In terms of the existing network, we seek better connections at Leicester for travel to Birmingham. Sub-national transport body Midlands Connect has plans for four trains per hour between Leicester and Birmingham; this level of frequency would provide much better connections. We also contacted EMR over inadequate provision for passengers on the Nottingham – Newark route following a train cancellation on 8th May. Though not directly an HRU matter, services such as this connect with our trains, and it is important to recognise that many rail journeys involve a change of trains onto or from other routes.

Market Harborough to Northampton Line reopening?

Though not an active campaign topic, HRU maintains a watching brief regarding the proposals that emerge from time to time for the Northampton line, which finally closed in 1981. We would not oppose it, of course. On 11th March, the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) held a public meeting at the Methodist Church Hall on Northampton Road to gauge public opinion on the idea. Over 30 people were present, of whom I was one. Apart from significant opposition from a West Northants Councillor, there was broad support, though much concern about the possible loss of the Brampton Valley Way. It was, however, a self-selecting audience. Greater focus is also needed on the exact purpose of the route. Local traffic would not be sufficient to justify it, but as part of an inter-regional link it could be valuable.

Another similar meeting was arranged by ERTA on 30th September, this time in Northampton. HRU Committee member Tim Murray and I attended. This identified that a detailed feasibility study had been undertaken by Network Rail in 2020, so there is some official interest, but it remains at best a long-term aspiration. The outcome of the meeting was that the idea is worthy of further pursuit and a specific campaign organisation may be formed. To my knowledge, however, this has not yet happened. I think it is fair to say that, as the line does not feature in the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan, its only real hope is for it to be adopted by the DfT or England's Economic Heartland as a strategic link between the Midland and West Coast Main Lines. We wait and see...!

MEETINGS WITH EMR

HRU's constitution requires at least one meeting per annum with the train operator.

EMR Stakeholder Conference – 23rd January 2023

I attended this annual event, held at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in Nottingham. As well as giving useful updates on various aspects of EMR's business, these events provide valuable opportunities for networking with colleagues from other rail user and station friends groups and Community Rail Partnerships. EMR reported that passenger numbers are roughly back to pre-Covid levels, but revenue remains somewhat below. Premium business travel and season ticket



HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

sales have not recovered to the extent that 'leisure' travel has. The structure of the rail industry has changed following Covid; train operators are essentially paid to operate the service, with the Government taking the revenue risk.

Meetings with EMR's Stakeholder Manager:

24th March 2023

At EMR's invitation, I met with Laura Etheridge, their Stakeholder Manager, in Market Harborough on 24th March. I was also present in my Railfuture role, along with the Chair of Railfuture's East Midlands Branch.

This was for a general catch-up; I am aware that similar meetings were being held with other user groups and similar organisations throughout the EMR area. We discussed a wide range of topics, including the recent management buy-out of EMR's owning company Abellio; the new Department for Transport National Rail Contract for EMR from October 2022; changes in the May 2023 timetable, including the withdrawal of the Class 180 trains; and the then anticipated reopening of our station café.

21st July 2023

A similar meeting with Laura took place at The Coal Yard café on St Mary's Road, with fellow HRU Committee members James Bourne and Tim Murray also present. Topics discussed included the loss from the May timetable of the early morning and late evening connecting buses to and from Kettering; stop orders to cover for cancelled trains; the ticket offices closure plans; cycle access and parking at the station; overcrowding on trains; and congestion at the ticket barriers at St Pancras.

These meetings are always cordial and the discussions open and honest. However, it is clear that EMR's room for manoeuvre is limited by their tight contractual relationship with the DfT.

OTHER

Travelwatch East Midlands (TWEM)

I am the HRU rep on TWEM, which is a consultative forum and watchdog body for all modes of transport in the East Midlands. However, TWEM has not met for some time, so, beyond remaining in occasional contact by email, there is nothing to report for the past year.

Harborough Transport Action (HTA)

This is a subset of the Sustainable Harborough Community, a collaboration of environmental groups and concerned individuals in the Market Harborough area aiming to effect change at every level in terms of the environment and the climate crisis. Transport has a major part to play, and public transport, including rail, is part of that. I am involved in this, partly on HRU's behalf. HTA is also working with the new Neighbourhood Forums across the town, seeking to influence the transport elements of the future Neighbourhood Plans. One proposal under tentative consideration is a direct footpath and cycle way between Great Bowden Station Road and the station via the new car park. There is much to be done, but the idea is gaining some momentum.

HARBOROUGH RAIL USERS

Annual General Meeting 23rd November 2023

Annual Report of the Chair of Harborough Rail Users

Another aspect of my involvement in HTA is membership of Leicestershire County Council's Passenger Transport Users Group, formerly the Bus Services Users Group but with a widened remit now including rail. This informs the County's 'Enhanced Partnership' Forum and Board; the partnership being between the County and the transport operators. I attended the most recent Forum meeting, on 21st September, and raised the need for better integration between rail and bus services at the County's stations.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Despite much disruption both from industrial disputes and engineering work, the past year has seen our station and train service continuing their recovery from the shock of the Covid pandemic. The 'new' station has become well established following the substantial rebuild in 2019. Harborough Rail Users continues to keep an eye on developments affecting the railway locally, and we are pleased to have played our part in some recent campaign successes, not least regarding the ticket office. The next big thing, of course, is the completion of electrification in a year or so's time, and the new train fleet coming into service thereafter. At that point, we hope to see restoration of the recent curtailments of our train service at the beginning and end of the operating day.

We have also developed our links with other local community and transport groups, flying the flag for local rail users but doing so as part of a bigger coalition of interests.

As in previous years, I remain grateful for the willingness of EMR, Network Rail and others to discuss various matters, and for the support of the local MP and Councillors as we continue to seek the best for all local rail users.

Finally, as always, I am very grateful for all the help and support given by the HRU Committee through the year.

Steve Jones

Chair

Harborough Rail Users

23rd November 2023

<https://www.harborough-rail.org.uk/>
feedback@harborough-rail.co.uk

Harborough Rail Users is an independent voluntary group that seeks to represent all users of Market Harborough station, whether regular commuters or occasional travellers.

We campaigned successfully to retain the half-hourly train service in the previous East Midlands Trains franchise, and we aim to ensure that Market Harborough's rail users continue to be well served.

All pictures © Steve Jones.