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## Line Complete - And Northumberland Is On Board

With Bedlington and Northumberland Park now open, the first phase of the Northumberland Line is complete, and soaring passenger numbers show the railway is already becoming part of everyday life.

*What was once a campaign slogan is now a lived reality. In the space of five weeks, the Northumberland Line gained its final two stations for this phase: Northumberland Park opened on 22nd February, followed by Bedlington on 29th March, bringing the initial reopening programme to completion.*

For passengers, that means a line that now stretches from Ashington into Newcastle with all planned stations for this stage in service. For the region, it means something bigger: a project once talked about in hopeful terms is now changing how people travel, connect and think about rail in Northumberland.

Northumberland Park adds a valuable Metro interchange and better access to places such as Cobalt Business Park, while Bedlington has seen passenger trains return for the first time in more than 60 years.

And the public response has been emphatic. More than one million journeys have already been made on the Northumberland Line since services returned in December 2024, a figure that underlines just how strongly this railway has been embraced. Success on that scale does more than justify the investment, and sharpens the case for what comes next: more capacity, better integration and continued ambition for the line's future. The railway is back. The demand is there. And after years of waiting, Northumberland has a line that feels not just reopened, but reborn. **Continued on Page 2.**



SEN RUG Chair Dennis Fancett at the opening of Bedlington Station - Credit Andrew Carmichael

## This Issue:

Line Complete!  
PAGE 1

The Last Two Pieces fall  
Into Place  
PAGE 2

Editorial  
PAGE 3

What's in a Name?  
PAGE 4

SEN RUG in Action  
PAGE 5

Great British Railways  
PAGES 6 - 8

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The first train arrives at Northumberland Park from Ashington on Sunday 22nd February 2026.  
 Photo Credit: Andrew Carmichael

## **The Last Two Pieces Fall Into Place - The openings of Northumberland Park and Bedlington did more than add two stations. They completed the first phase of a railway brought back through years of persistence, patience and public demand.**

**For all the excitement when the Northumberland Line re-opened in December 2024, there was always a sense that the job was not quite finished.**

The trains were back, passengers were piling on, and the line was already proving its worth, but two important stations were still missing. That is why the openings of Northumberland Park on 22nd February and Bedlington (the place where malleable rail was first patented, giving birth to the railways) on 29th March 2026 mattered so much. They did more than add two more stops. They completed the first phase of a railway that has been fought for, argued over and waited for over many years.

**Northumberland Park finally gives the line its vital Metro connection - a practical link that makes the railway more useful for everyday journeys across the region.**

Northumberland Park was always about

more than geography. As the fifth station to open, it finally gave the line its key Metro interchange, linking national rail into the Tyne and Wear Metro network and opening up easier journeys across the region. It also brought obvious practical benefits: around 12 minutes to Newcastle, around 23 minutes to Ashington, Pop card readers, step-free access by lift, and a useful connection for commuters heading to Cobalt Business Park. In a project built on the idea of making everyday journeys easier, Northumberland Park was one of the most important missing links.

Then came Bedlington, and with it a real sense of completion. When the first passenger train pulled in shortly before 8.30am on 29th March, it was the first time in more than 60 years that Bedlington had been properly restored to the passenger network.

The new station brings full accessibility, bus links, cycle access, parking, shelters and ticket machines, but it also brings

something harder to measure: a feeling that a proud railway town is back where it belongs.

**For Bedlington, the first train's arrival was more than an opening day moment; it marked the return of passenger rail to a town that had waited more than 60 years.**

The opening ceremony, with schoolchildren, local people and a brass band, seemed to capture that perfectly.

It did not happen without frustration. SENRUG, which began campaigning in 2003 and set out phased reopening plans as early as 2005, kept the pressure on as the project rolled forward in stages. Even after the line itself opened, the group was still pressing for Bedlington and the "all-important" Northumberland Park interchange to follow, having understood both were originally expected later in 2025.

Bedlington in particular proved awkward, with public reporting blaming unexpected problems including a water pipe beneath the planned car park and collapsing old stonework.

Northumberland Park had its own challenges too, with tough winter weather, limited space and work close to homes.

And, of course, campaigners are not done yet. SENRUG continues to press for the next steps: extending the line beyond Ashington to Woodhorn and Newbiggin, and creating the Morpeth-Bedlington-Choppington link that would make the reopened railway even more useful.

So yes, this phase is complete. But the story of the Northumberland Line still feels very much alive.

### **NEXT PUBLIC MEETING**

**WED 8<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 19:30  
 MORPETH TOWN HALL**

**SPEAKER: GRAHAM  
 MEIKLEJOHN**

**HEAD OF REGIONAL  
 DEVELOPMENT, STAKEHOLDERS  
 & COMMUNITIES @  
 TRANSPENNINE EXPRESS**



SEN RUG Chair Dennis Fancett gives a speech at the official opening of Bedlington Station. Photo Credit: Geoff Stainthorpe

## Editorial: Back on Track - And Moving Forward

**A long-fought campaign delivers a railway people are already embracing - and makes the case for what comes next, impossible to ignore.**

Dear Readers,

**This spring, it finally feels real.**

After years of campaigning, setbacks and steady persistence, the Northumberland Line is up and running - no longer a concept or a plan, the line has become part of everyday life for many.

With Northumberland Park Station opening in February and Bedlington Station following at the end of March 2026, this first phase is now complete. Trains are moving, stations are busy, and communities are once again connected by rail.

For SENRUG, it's a moment to pause and take stock. Since 2005, the group has kept this vision alive through consultations, business cases and countless conversations that, at times, must have felt like they were going nowhere. But they did go somewhere. They got us here.

***The reopening of Bedlington and Northumberland Park marks a major milestone for the Northumberland Line. But with passenger demand already exceeding expectations, the focus now turns to capacity, connectivity and the next phase of the journey.***

And the response has been immediate. Passenger numbers have already exceeded expectations, with more than a million journeys recorded in a relatively short space of time. That tells its own story.

People are using the railway because they need it. Because it works. And because, for many, it should never have gone in the first place.

That success does, however, bring its own pressures. Anyone who has travelled at peak times recently will know that capacity is already being tested. The move towards more four-car trains is not just welcome, but necessary if the line is to keep pace with demand.

But this is not the end of the journey. Far from it. SENRUG's campaigning continues, rightly focused on what comes next: extending the line to Newbiggin, reinstating the connection between Morpeth and Bedlington, and pushing for POP smart fares to reach Morpeth.

These are the next practical steps. Steps that would make a real difference to how people use the railway every day.

As we look forward, there is also reason this year to look back. 2026 marks the centenary of the General Strike, bringing renewed attention to the

Cramlington Train Wreckers incident, one of Northumberland's most remarkable and controversial railway episodes.

On 10th May 1926, local miners tried to stop what they believed was a strike-breaking coal train, but accidentally derailed part of the Flying Scotsman near Cramlington. No one was killed and only one passenger was slightly injured, yet eight miners received prison sentences many saw as wildly excessive.

A century on, the story still speaks of hardship, solidarity and anger.

It's a striking reminder that railways in this part of the world have always been tied up with people's lives, their work and their sense of place. That, perhaps, is the thread that runs through everything. The Northumberland Line was brought back because people cared enough to keep pushing. And now it's here, the job is to make sure it grows, improves and delivers on what it has already begun.

**Marc Stewart - Newsletter Editor**



The Derailed Flying Scotsman - Credit: Creative Commons

## What's In A Name?

### Why station names matter more than people think - and how Bebside ended up with a name that still doesn't quite fit.



Article Photo Credits: Geoff Stainthorpe

By Dennis Fancett

#### I'm a great believer in naming stations after the locality they actually serve.

Coming from London, I can remember the days when Charing Cross Underground station was on the Embankment rather than at Charing Cross main line station. Strand station, meanwhile, was at Charing Cross main line station, with Trafalgar Square simply across the road. Confused tourists trying to get from Charing Cross to Trafalgar Square would walk down Villiers Street to the Underground station of the same name, believing it to be the nearest, take the Tube one stop to Trafalgar Square, and end up exactly where they had started.

That, of course, was a quirk of history. The lines had been built by different companies, each choosing its own name for essentially the same location.

#### You would never design a system with such confusing names. Or would you?

The opening of the Jubilee Line gave London Transport, as it then was, the opportunity to merge Strand and Trafalgar Square into one station and rename the combined station Charing Cross, which was where it actually was, while similarly renaming the former Charing Cross Underground station as Embankment. Obvious enough, perhaps, but still a very confusing process for regular commuters and tourists alike.

But just as one problem was solved, another appeared. City Thameslink station opened on the national rail network. It isn't in the City, and nor

could anyone be certain that whatever company won the franchise to run trains on the line would continue to use the word "Thameslink" in its name. And, just to complete the confusion for international visitors, the station is absolutely nowhere near City Airport. It is, however, at Ludgate Circus. Would that not have been a more appropriate name?

So it was with some disappointment that I learned, a couple of years ago, just as the Northumberland Line project was about to achieve financial sign-off, that the station which is essentially at Bebside was to be called Blyth - Bebside.



As far as I am concerned, it is not in Blyth. Well, alright, it lies within the old Blyth Valley boundary, but it is not within the town of Blyth itself by any stretch of the imagination.

SEN RUG, of course, has separate proposals to create a new rail link from the airport that would actually go to Blyth, pretty much to the site of the former station, between the Community Hospital and Morrisons. When that campaign succeeds, we will have two Blyth stations nowhere near each other. For this reason, SEN RUG now refers to the station that really would be in Blyth as "Blyth Town Centre".

Back to Bebside. The station, with its footbridge across the A189 Spine Road, also serves the Cowpen estate, arguably a larger community than Bebside itself.

Perhaps we should have taken a leaf out of the French book. Metro and RER stations serving two communities are simply given the names of both. Using that formula, the station could quite

easily have been called Bebside - Cowpen.

However, the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson seemed keen to announce that the investment he was being asked to sign off was going into Blyth. By that stage there was too much water under the bridge to revert to SEN RUG's original name for the route, "The Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Line". So that, we suspect, is how the station that is not in Blyth came to be called Blyth - Bebside.

We at SEN RUG certainly did not want to raise queries, or indeed any issues, that might have delayed - or worse, completely derailed - the much-needed financial sign-off.

#### In that context, a station with the wrong name seemed a small price to pay for getting the whole project over the line.

But do we detect a hint of rebellion from the Council's own road signs department? There are a few traffic signs referring to "Blyth Bebside Station", but a significant number simply say "Bebside Station" (see photos).

#### Maybe the message on the misnamed station has not quite sunk in.



## SEN RUG in Action: Campaigning, connecting & keeping the pressure on for better rail services

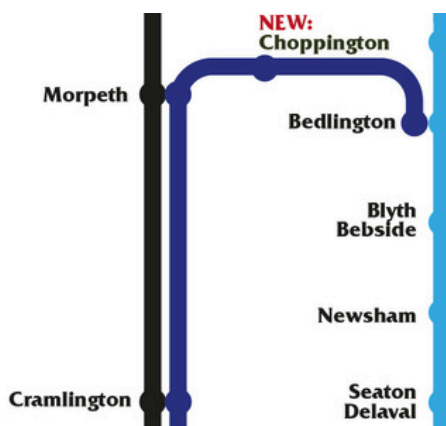
### The Link That Still Makes Too Much Sense to Ignore

Now that the first phase of the Northumberland Line is complete, attention is naturally shifting to what comes next. One of SEN RUG's clearest and most practical next asks is the **Morpeth-Bedlington link**: a local passenger service using the existing freight line between the two towns and connecting directly into the reopened Northumberland Line.

SEN RUG has been pressing this idea for years and, in its January 2025 response to the North East Mayor's Local Transport Plan, described it as a suggested delivery by 2027. In simple terms, the proposal is that the existing local service between Newcastle and Morpeth should be extended on to Bedlington instead of trains sitting idle in the Morpeth siding before heading back south again.

What makes the campaign so compelling is that it is not a fantasy scheme needing miles of new railway. SEN RUG points out that the route from Morpeth to Bedlington is already a fully operational and maintained freight line, used as a diversionary route for long-distance trains including LNER Azumas.

In its formal 2023 request to Northern, the group argued that trains currently waiting 22 to 37 minutes at Morpeth could comfortably make the run to Bedlington and back during that layover. The prize would be real and immediate: a public transport journey between Bedlington and Morpeth cut from about 30 minutes to around 10, plus a direct rail link from Bedlington to Cramlington for jobs, shopping and hospital access.



## NEWS

There is a wider point here too. This is exactly the kind of scheme that helps turn a reopened railway into a proper network. SEN RUG says the service would also strengthen links to Northumberland Park and Ashington, while a future station at Choppington could support regeneration in one of the county's more disadvantaged areas. Longer term, the group wants a short section of double track bi-directionally signalled near Bedlington to make the operation even smoother and reduce level-crossing closures. Even in January 2026, the Morpeth-Bedlington link was still being discussed by SEN RUG with senior council figures as one of its "Quick Wins" and short-term priorities. It remains one of those rare campaigns that feels not just desirable, but obvious.

### Sunday Trains That Miss One of the Most Useful Stops

**Some rail campaigns are about grand visions and major infrastructure. Others are about a small, sensible change that ought to have happened already.** SEN RUG's campaign for Sunday Northumberland Line trains to call at Manors falls firmly into the second category.

On paper, Manors is one of the line's most useful city stops: the Northumberland Line website describes it as the final station before Newcastle Central, close to the Metro, Northumbria University and Halls of Residence, the Quayside and Ouseburn. Integrated Pop fares even place Manors in Zone A alongside Newcastle. In other words, it is exactly the sort of place people should be able to reach easily on a Sunday.

Yet the current timetable tells a different story. Northern's published Northumberland Line timetable for 17th May to 12th December 2026 shows Sunday Northumberland Line services running between Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth Bebside, Newsham, Seaton Delaval, Northumberland Park, Newcastle and, for many trains, Metrocentre - but with no Sunday calls at Manors in either direction.

That is the oddity at the heart of the campaign: the trains pass through, the station matters, and still the stop is missed out.

SEN RUG has been warning about exactly this sort of issue for years. In its 2021 timetable response, it argued that all local Northern services between Morpeth and Newcastle should stop at Manors, and by autumn 2025 it was describing the failure to serve Manors on Sundays as "nonsensical".

Why does it matter? Because stations are only useful if trains actually stop at them when people want to travel. Sundays are not some marginal afterthought: they are when people head into the city for study, work, shopping, sport, food, culture, the Quayside Market and nights out.

SEN RUG's longer-term answer is that Manors needs redevelopment so it has the capacity for all local services to call, with easier Metro interchange, proper level access and, ultimately, more track capacity through the station. But the short-term ask is far simpler than that.

Just stop the trains. For a campaign group that has spent years fighting for rail to serve real journeys, this is one of the most grounded arguments of all.

### Competition Time!

As mentioned in our **Chairman's Blog on the SEN RUG website**, the latest public meeting, held in Morpeth on 17th March, welcomed Stuart Jones, Managing Director of Lumo, Hull Trains and First Rail Open Access.

The event was well attended and described as an interesting, informative evening, with a lively question-and-answer session. Before the meeting, our Chair was also pleased to introduce Stuart to Cllr Wearmouth at County Hall. SEN RUG is grateful to Stuart for giving up his time to speak to members and supporters and for their competition donation: **two tickets to Edinburgh, Falkirk or Glasgow.**

To enter, answer this question after reading the aforementioned blog: Which former Rail Minister was invited to the opening of Bedlington Station?

Send your answer by 31/05/26 to [editor@senrug.co.uk](mailto:editor@senrug.co.uk).

## What Could Great British Railways Do For Us?

In this personal reflection, SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett weighs up what Great British Railways could improve, where caution is needed, and what passengers should realistically expect

Article Photo Credits: Geoff Stainthorpe

**There are some people who have always believed that re-nationalising the railways will make things better, but without being able to explain exactly why.** Equally, others are adamant it will make things worse, again without offering any specific logical reasons. For many in either camp, the view tends to flow from political instinct rather than practical evidence

***At SENRUG, as an apolitical group, we have always tried to avoid taking a fixed position on ownership. We prefer to judge the railway by outcomes.***

Nevertheless, with Great British Railways moving steadily into full operation and more train companies coming under its umbrella, it feels worth at least trying to take an objective look at what may improve, what may deteriorate, and what is unlikely to change. These, however, are my personal views. SENRUG remains neutral on the question.

### Train Operations

In the short term, it is difficult to see why very much would change.

***New ownership alone will do little to prevent staff sickness, outdated working practices, broken rails, signalling failures or bad weather.***



When West Midlands Trains moved into GBR on 1st February, Managing Director Ian McConnell said: "Together, we can drive performance by sharing best practice and accelerating innovation." That sounds sensible enough, but it is hard not to ask why such sharing was not happening already. Rail companies have had operations centres embedded within Network Rail control rooms for years. They all know that when one operator is delayed, others suffer too. Surely it has long been in everyone's interests to work together and learn from one another. If that has not been happening properly, we should ask what has been preventing it.

Longer term, some have suggested that public ownership might trigger a brain drain, with the best railway managers

leaving for the private sector. I find that argument rather unfair on some of the excellent senior people we had in the final years of British Rail. Chris Green of Network SouthEast springs to mind, though there were many others. If GBR can create the right culture, there is no reason why innovation should not thrive. The Covid period also brought into rail a number of people from the aviation sector. Trains may not travel quite as fast as planes, but one hopes some of that appetite for high standards of customer service has come with them.

### Disruption Management

If the GBR umbrella makes little immediate difference to day-to-day operations, I do think it ought to bring real benefits in the way the industry responds when things go wrong.

On my return journey from Totnes to Morpeth last summer (22nd May, for anyone who likes precision), there was a signalling failure at Northallerton and all operators' trains were badly delayed. We reached Newcastle more than two hours late, and our train was terminated there rather than continuing to Edinburgh as planned. The last local train had gone, and in any case we would have missed the last bus from Morpeth station. So taxis were clearly going to be needed. We were assured they would be waiting at Newcastle. They were not. Eventually, a rather weary group of about 100 passengers found a member of LNER staff. A few more minutes were then lost while he told a colleague to make sure the taxis were charged to CrossCountry's account rather than LNER's. We were organised into groups for Newcastle suburbs, the Tyne Valley, the Durham Coast, Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Edinburgh. But surely the counting of passengers and destinations could have been done on the train and phoned ahead, so the right number of taxis were already in place rather than everyone standing around on the concourse for another 20 minutes.

To add to the absurdity, as the taxis began to arrive, an LNER train pulled in behind us, also badly delayed, but still running through to Edinburgh and calling at Berwick. Could not the Berwick and Edinburgh passengers have boarded that train? It would surely have been quicker for them and cheaper for the industry than putting everyone into cabs. Better still, might that train have been asked to make additional calls at Morpeth and Alnmouth, where the curtailed CrossCountry service had been due to stop? That would have been far better for passengers with cars in station car parks.

***This is an area where GBR can, and must, improve. Better coordination would not only help passengers; it would save the industry money too.***

There are already signs of progress. Since December 2024, there has been an agreement between LNER, TransPennine



Express and Northern that if one operator's train is cancelled and that operator cannot provide an alternative within 60 minutes, passengers may use another operator's service. That avoids the need for ad hoc agreements on the day. But this sort of collaborative working needs to go much further: across more operators, on more routes, and not just for cancellations but for serious delays too. If a passenger can catch another operator's train and still arrive on time, that is better for everyone - not least because it reduces Delay Repay claims.

GBR should also produce much clearer guidance for passengers when an operator issues "advice not to travel", usually saying a ticket will remain valid for a few days afterwards. On a complex journey involving several operators, will that advice automatically be honoured by the others? If LNER tells me not to travel to London because of disruption, will GWR accept my ticket to the West Country on a different day as well? And if I postpone the outward journey, surely there should be flexibility on the return too. If I am visiting family for two nights and delay departure to help the railway manage disruption, I ought to be allowed to move the return leg as well.

### Ticket Purchasing

It is already possible to buy any rail journey from any operator's website, usually at the same price. In theory, that is simple. In practice, it does not always feel that way.

I prefer to buy from the operator I am travelling with. It gives me a sense, rightly or wrongly, that things may be simpler if I need to change my plans or deal with disruption. The result is that I have accounts with perhaps ten or twelve train operators. Yes, the fares may be the same, but the conditions around them vary. Some charge for

using a credit card. Some charge for collecting tickets from a machine. Some offer Avios or perks; others do not.

***So please, can we have just one system and only one account that passengers need?***

### Delay Repay

My recent journey from Morpeth to Huntingdon offered another good example. My LNER train arrived at Peterborough about 20 minutes late - not enough to trigger Delay Repay on its own, but enough to make me miss my Thameslink connection. Then the next Thameslink train was cancelled, so I reached Huntingdon more than an hour late.

Because I had bought the ticket from LNER, and because my instinct is always to go back to the party you bought from, I applied to LNER for compensation. I immediately received a rather sniffy note, probably computer-generated, saying it was not the LNER train that had caused the qualifying delay and I should apply to Thameslink instead. LNER offered to pass the claim on, but said it would take longer. Why? So I opened yet another Delay Repay account and applied to Thameslink directly. Unsurprisingly, I received the refund within days.

What makes this sillier still is that both the original LNER delay and the Thameslink cancellation were caused by the same issue: signalling problems at

Peterborough, if I recall correctly. So instead of a joined-up system, we have paper-shuffling between operators, arguments over blame, and the customer being bounced from one company to another.

***GBR can and must do better than that.***

I also recently received a stern email from TransPennine Express warning that because I had not used my Delay Repay account for more than two years, it might be closed. What nonsense. I was almost tempted to reply asking whether they might arrange a few more delayed trains so that I could keep it active. Why should I need a separate Delay Repay account at all? Why not use the same account I use to buy tickets? Again, the answer should be obvious: one GBR account for ticket purchases and Delay Repay claims, and one set of rules across the network.

### Fares Reform

The Department for Transport said in November 2025 that GBR would simplify fares and ticketing, setting more transparent prices within parameters laid down by ministers. Good. Fares certainly need reform.

Despite endless consultation and discussion, the Rail Delivery Group has never really managed to achieve that through voluntary cooperation between operators. So this looks like an obvious area where GBR might succeed. Yet the early signs are not wholly encouraging.



LNER, in public ownership since 2018, introduced its “Simpler Fares” reforms in February 2024. In my view they were neither simpler nor cheaper. The 70-minute flex ticket often meant it was cheaper to book a train an hour earlier than the one you actually wanted. And it was of little value at stations without at least an hourly LNER service. As for cheaper – well: LNER abolished off-peak returns meaning it became necessary to buy 2 off-peak singles.

Single leg pricing can be a good thing, provided the single fare is set to half the price of what the off-peak return was. But in some cases only the old off-peak single remained, often just a few pence cheaper than the former return fare, so virtually doubling the price for passengers travelling both ways off peak. So, if this is the kind of initiative we are going to have from GBR, we'll need to look forward to more complex and more expensive fares.

### Catering

One of the old criticisms of British Rail was its catering. Perhaps the weakest argument I have heard for retaining private operators is that “we don't want to go back to the old BR sandwich”.

That criticism is a little lazy. Yes, the old British Rail sandwich was dreadful. But catering more generally has improved enormously over the past 30 years. We now have far better coffee, much better sandwiches and a far wider range of food on offer across society as a whole.

***It is hardly fair to compare a 2026 sandwich with one from the final years of BR.***

That said, I do see signs of on-train catering deteriorating, particularly where there is a free first-class offer, as operators move into public ownership. I am told, off the record, that shadow GBR is already insisting some newly acquired operators cut costs, and catering is one of the few obvious places where those cuts can fall. If so, GBR must be careful. However unfairly, catering is one of those highly emotive issues on which the public can form a quick and lasting judgement.

### Innovation and Open Access

This is where I begin to have some concerns. If we have a proposal -



perhaps a change to stopping patterns or the stations certain services should serve - under GBR we may end up with only one body to approach.

When the East Coast Main Line was last refranchised, three companies bid for it. SENRUG tried to meet all three, but only First Group was willing. At that meeting we made a strong case for Morpeth, including the important Morpeth-Edinburgh market that operators often overlook in their focus on London. First did not win the franchise, but it did seem to listen: every First Group operation introduced on the route since then, including TPE and Lumo, has served Morpeth and recognised that market.

Likewise, when we campaigned for more long-distance calls at Morpeth, we had both CrossCountry and LNER to lobby. They use different trains with different performance characteristics, so one might well respond differently from the other. Even so, it mattered that there was more than one avenue to pursue. Both eventually increased their stops, and no doubt kept a close eye on what the other was doing. Competition of ideas has value.

Which brings us to open access. It is often said that people's views on open access depend on where they live: if your town is served by an open access operator, you love them; if it is not, you wonder what the fuss is about. I take a different view. The railway is healthier

when open access operators are there, looking at markets GBR does not want to serve, or cannot serve. If an operator believes it can make a business case work and is willing to take the financial risk, it should be allowed to do so. More rail services, overall, help grow the whole railway. It would be a great pity if open access were squeezed out by political dogma. But equally, those operators need certainty. It would be wrong for GBR to ignore a route, let an open access operator build it up, and then step in and take it over once it becomes commercially attractive. Those who invest and take the risk should be able to enjoy the reward over the long term.

### The Cost of Franchising

This is one area where I am convinced money can be saved. Having spent much of my working life managing PFI contracts with a major FTSE 100 company, I know how complex such arrangements can be. Rail franchising is similarly cumbersome, involving long-term forecasts, detailed financial modelling, lawyers, bankers and armies of advisers on both sides.

The bids run to hundreds of pages, and mistakes are easy to make. On the East Coast Main Line alone, three operators handed back the keys after overpromising. The West Coast franchise fiasco showed how costly disputes can become.

Franchising, in my view, is expensive, unwieldy and risky. Savings should be possible under GBR - provided they are reinvested in the railway.