

---

# The Train at Platform 1

---

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 42 - September 2022

Welcome to our September newsletter. The news continues to be dominated by the consultation over the proposed closure of ticket offices at stations, and the cuts in staffing of 20% proposed for the line between Exeter and Salisbury. At least the deadline for responses was extended until September 1st to give more people the chance to take part in the consultation. We await with interest the result of this vital consultation exercise. At the same time, we also hope for better news on the endless series of strikes and overtime bans that continue to blight our railway.



A complete train still in the old SWT livery as it approaches Pinhoe. Photograph by Dave Tozer

## Rail Fares to Rise Again in 2024

The Government has announced that the next round of rail fare increases will take place in March next year. The headline announcement was, on the surface, positive news, saying that fares will rise by “below the rate of inflation”, with the announcement coming on the day the ONS revealed the August inflation figure had fallen sharply to 6.8%.

However, the devil is in the detail, with rail fares being pegged to 1% above the higher RPI measure of inflation, and to the July figure, which was 9%. Therefore, the only guarantee presently being given by the Department for Transport is that regulated fares will rise by less than 10%.

The exact rate of increase will only be revealed later, but this may be quite a sensitive announcement, as the increases are due to come into force what may prove to be only a matter of weeks before a General Election.

Regulated prices cover 45% of fares, including season tickets on most commuter journeys, some off-peak return tickets on long-distance journeys and anytime tickets around major cities. Before the Covid pandemic, these were increased in January each year, based on the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure of inflation from the previous July. The normal formula is RPI plus 1%.

This year fares rose by 5.9%, which was well below July 2022's RPI figure of 12.3%. However, that increase was still the largest since 2012, according to regulator the Office of Rail and Road.

Anthony Smith, chief executive of passenger watchdog Transport Focus, presently in the spotlight as they are writing the official review of the government's ticket office proposals, said:

*"Nobody likes their fare going up, but after a year where many journeys have been blighted by disruption due to industrial action and patchy performance, passengers will be relieved to hear that fares will be capped below the Retail Prices Index and any increases will be delayed until March next year."*

However, Paul Tuohy, leader of the pressure group the Campaign for Better Transport, said that he believed that the government should freeze rail fares completely, as they have done with fuel duty, until the ticketing reform takes place.

It remains to be seen how passengers will purchase their tickets by the time these fare increases come into effect next March.

The deadline for responses to the ticket office closure and staffing plans announced at the start of July was extended until September 1st. Transport Focus is then due to write a review of the plans to submit to the Government and the Rail Delivery Group representing train operating companies.

The Scottish and Welsh governments have not yet announced their plans regarding rail fare rises next year.

## **Better News for Local Bus Travellers**

Bus passengers in and around Honiton and East Devon are set to benefit from new timetables that come into effect this month on September 3rd.

Some Stagecoach services are being extended, although others will be reduced. In Exeter, several bus services will be enhanced and extra journeys introduced in partnership with Devon County Council, and a number of high-frequency bus corridors will be introduced.

Additional and later last journeys will operate Monday to Saturday evenings on Service 9 and 9A which serve Honiton.

A new 2210 service will operate from Sidmouth to Honiton and at 2130 from Honiton to Sidmouth which will connect with rail services at Honiton Railway Station.

Additional and later last journeys will operate Monday to Saturday evenings on Services 44 and 44A between Exeter and Honiton/Axminster.

An additional service will operate from Exeter to Honiton at 2030, and at 2245 from Honiton to Exeter.

The frequency of buses on Service 4, which serves Exeter St. David's to Cranbrook via the City Centre and Honiton Road Park and Ride, will be increased across the week, with Monday to Friday daytimes enhancing from every 20, to every 12 minutes, providing an additional two journeys an hour.

On Saturday daytime buses are increased from every 20 minutes to every 15 minutes, and on Sunday and Public Holiday daytimes buses are doubled from one to two buses every hour.

The daily evening timetable is re-designed, following an increase in demand, to operate approximately every 30 minutes across the full route from Exeter St. David's to Cranbrook.

This reinstates direct journeys to and from Exeter St. David's during the evening.

There are minor changes to the frequency of buses during the early morning and a small number of late evening journeys are withdrawn.

Between Exeter St. David's and Honiton Road Park and Ride, Services 4 and 4A will provide a combined frequency of up to 7 buses an hour Monday to Friday, six buses an hour on a Saturday and a 20 minute frequency on a Sunday.

Following a review of the current Service 4A and the award of a tender by Devon County Council, there are changes to the route and timetable of Service 4A between Exeter St. David's and Exeter Airport via the City Centre and Honiton Road Park and Ride.

Service 4A will operate up to every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday daytime and every 60 minutes Sunday and Public Holiday daytime.

The route of Service 4A will be amended to provide more direct and quicker journeys to and from Exeter Airport, operating via the A30 and will no longer serve Clyst Honiton.

**Photo by Dave Tozer: Council Sponsored Service 43 which operates from Pinhoe Railway Station to Clyst Honiton.**



Following the award of a tender from Devon County Council, a new Service 58A will be introduced, operating between Exmouth and Exeter St. David's, providing new and direct peak time journey opportunities for commuters and students.

Buses will operate via Brixington, Woodbury, Exeter Airport, Exeter College Technology Centre and Whipton Shops.

## The Shape of Things to Come? A Special Report

With the threat of ticket office closures and staff cuts hanging over the future of stations, including here at Honiton, the events of the afternoon of August 17th gave us all a warning of what the future just might look like.

Picture the scene: it is a quarter past three in the afternoon, and passengers have arrived in good numbers to catch the Exeter-bound train. Soon they will be followed by those waiting for the 15.55 to Waterloo.

As previously advertised, the ticket office and waiting room are shut due to staff unavailability, meaning that there is no access to advice, or to toilets. The latter is quickly an issue for an older passenger who needs to use the toilet very urgently, but has to wait for the train.

There is also a sign on the Help Point saying that it is out of order, making it even harder for passengers to get information. Which they need, as the 15.15 train to Exeter was reported to be running late, and was not now due until 15.38. The information screen and automated announcements say that this is due to "An Operational Incident."

Regular readers will know what is coming. The red down signal at the end of the platform clearly showed that the train would be held at the station, to await the up service, which would be transferred to platform 2.

You and I know that, but how would the poor passengers find out? The Departures Board still showed the 1555 (which was running on time) as expected to leave from platform 1. Experience told me that this would not be changed until the train passed the signal just outside the station, giving passengers just a few seconds notice to hot foot it across the bridge.

I should say at this point that among the passengers arriving to catch the Waterloo train were a family from North America, parents with their two young children, not to mention a huge amount of heavy luggage. And even more seriously, there was a man with a range of physical and other needs in a mobility scooter, accompanied by a member of his family and a paid carer. Neither party would be able to get to platform 2 in a hurry or at the last minute.

Anyway, 15.38 arrived, and so did the Exeter-bound service. Also, I assumed it would bring the cavalry, in the shape of the guard, who would be able to answer passengers' queries, and advise them to get to platform 2 to await the Waterloo train, now that the Exeter service was blocking the platform.

No such luck. The clearly very inexperienced guard was immediately asked by a number of passengers what they should do. She looked at the Departure Board and told them that it showed the up train as departing from platform 1, which she expected it to do - despite the fact that it was shown to be due to arrive at the exact time she was now due to leave. She did not even seem to be aware that the line was single track!

At this point, I did the only thing I felt I could. When, still struggling to understand what was going on, she asked a passenger if they were local, I stepped forward and said that I was (and introduced myself). I explained what I believed the situation was, and asked her if we did not need, in her opinion, to start moving passengers across to platform 2.

Her response was that there were still a few minutes before the departure time, and that there was no hurry to do anything. And anyway, she was still convinced that somehow the Departure Board would be proved right, and the Waterloo train would leave from platform 1.

Now, our agreement with SWR includes the rule that we must never do anything that gives a member of the public the impression that we are an employee of the company. And it is a rule I understand and always respect. However, at this point I felt I did not have any choice but to intervene in some way, or we could have had a serious problem on our hands, when the disabled passenger missed their train, as they undoubtedly would if nothing was done.

I spoke to his relative, and told them that I was not an employee, and that I was not able to give them any advice, but I strongly suggested that they move to platform 2 urgently, for the reasons I told them, as the route required would take them some minutes.

Thankfully, they quickly began the long trek back to the road entrance to the station, down Church Hill, under the bridge, up the road to the car park and back up the ramps, to get to the platform, making it in time.

The American family managed to get over the bridge with their luggage, and most passengers quickly cottoned on to what was going on, and to my non-advice advice, and moved.

A minute before departure was due, the guard finally shifted her view, and spoke to the few remaining waverers and told them to get across the bridge. The reason was clear, as at that moment the Waterloo train came into view – she would have seen it coming in from her position speaking to the driver. At that exact moment, the Departure Board finally did its thing, and changed to show platform 2, although there was still no audible announcement.

Without me bending the rules a bit (a lot?), several people, including a young family and a seriously disabled person, would undoubtedly have been left behind.

If staff had been on duty at the station that afternoon, how would this have played out differently? For a start, as soon as the delay to the 15.15 was clear, Justin or Stacey in particular would have made an announcement both of the delay, and that fact that the train would be held at the station until 15.55.

Then they would have made regular further announcements that the 15.55 to Waterloo was leaving from platform 2. And, even more importantly, as soon as they were aware of the disabled passenger, both would have made a point of being on the platform to make sure the group knew what to do and where to go.

As it was, by the way, the disabled passenger was helped onto the Waterloo train by its guard, using their ramp, there being no member of staff on duty to deploy the station's ramp. In the end, everyone left, the lady got to the toilet on the train, the crisis passed, and the 16.16 train even left almost on time. The incident, such as it was, was over as quickly as it began.

But what if I wasn't there that afternoon, visiting the station, among other things to see the repairs that Network Rail had made to the fence several days previously? And what would incidents like this look like, once there is no ticket office at all, and no afternoon staffing on the platform? Is this what the future looks like? And what does it say about travelling by rail if you are disabled, or require special help?

Some food for thought perhaps.

## Local MP Discusses Ticket Office Closures

A number of local electors, including the Chairman, had a useful meeting at Honiton Family Church with the MP for Tiverton and Honiton, Richard Foord, on July 23rd, as part of his Summer Tour of the constituency.

At the start of the meeting, Richard asked the participants what issues they would most like to raise with him and to discuss during the meeting. The overwhelming choice, in a strong field of current issues, was the proposed closure of station ticket offices.

A lively discussion ensued, as you might expect. Richard raised the concern that has come to dominate discussion of these plans, which is the impact on some of our most vulnerable travellers, such as elderly passengers, people living with a range of disabilities, including blind and partially sighted people, and the digitally excluded (as well as those who simply prefer to speak to a human being when seeking advice on their travel).

Richard made it clear that he felt that figures issued by the Rail Delivery Group and others about the proportion of bookings now being made at ticket offices were “disingenuous”.

It is interesting to note, by the way, that GWR has now published station by station figures of the proportion of tickets still being booked in person, and it is often very much higher than the overall national figure being quoted.

In his comments, Richard referred to the fact that he had raised concerns about these proposals with the Transport Secretary on the floor of the House of Commons. For the record, the exchange on July 13th is below.

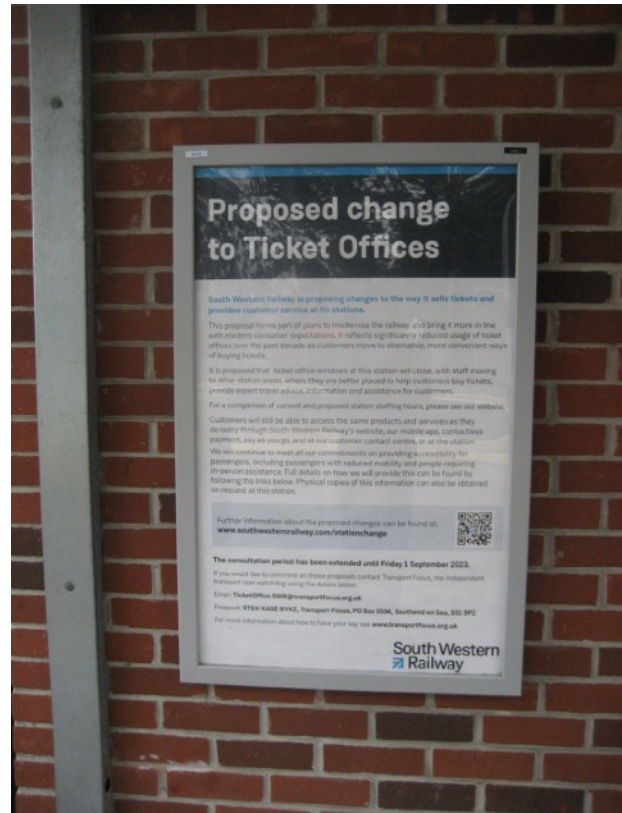
Readers may consider that his question could possibly have been clearer and more direct, as he gave the minister more wriggle room than was ideal in the circumstances. Anyway, here is what happened:

### **Richard Foord:**

What steps he is taking to improve rail services?

### **Mark Harper:**

Earlier this year, I set out my vision to modernise the railway industry as part of my Bradshaw address. This includes ambitions for a customer-focused, commercially led rail industry and the creation of Great British Railways as its new guiding mind.



We continue to invest record sums in improving infrastructure and, just last week, I was pleased to officially open the latest phase of the south-west rail resilience programme at Dawlish, part of a £165 million investment to date, which I know the hon. Gentleman is about to welcome.

**Richard Foord:**

The Secretary of State is right that I welcome the programme.

This week, the charity Devon in Sight sent an email to its supporters, including me, titled, "Proposed closures to Railway Ticket Offices." The email about the consultation was short: "Please find attached a letter from us detailing how you can make an objection."

Why does the Secretary of State suppose that a Devon charity that looks out for blind people should presume that its supporters would want to object?

**Mark Harper:**

I am not entirely certain exactly what the hon. Gentleman is asking. The rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), set out the purpose of the rail companies' proposals very well.

The rail companies are consulting on the proposals, the purpose of which is to recognise the changed reality that most passengers purchase their tickets either online or from a ticket machine, and most of them do not go near a ticket office. It is about getting the staff out of offices and into the station, so they can support all passengers, including those who are older or disabled and who need assistance, rather than having them stuck in a ticket office.

That is the point of the proposals, and there will be a detailed consultation. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will respond to the consultation, which the rail companies can take into account as they pursue their proposals.

## **Axminster to Lyme Regis Line to Re-open - Well, Sort Of...**

Nearly 60 years after it closed, 'trains will run' again on the former Axminster to Lyme Regis railway. This time, however, the magic of the six-mile branch line will come from a large model that is to be built and displayed as an attraction in Axminster.

The project is being planned in a partnership between Axminster Chamber of Commerce, the Community Waffle House, Axminster Community Shed and Axminster Heritage Centre. It has already won support from South Western Railway and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, both of whom have agreed to commit funding.

The building of what is planned as a substantial model is being undertaken by Lucas Barribal who has already taken on the construction of a model of the railway through Axminster that is on display at the Community Waffle House. Lucas had valuable support from the Axminster Community Shed and from Geoff Hicks, who modelled local buildings and other structures.

Both are closely involved with Lucas in the re-creation of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Line, which will be an altogether bigger task and occupy a much larger space.

Axminster Chamber of Commerce said it will be "quite a challenge but a very exciting one" because the branch line was an old style railway masterpiece with steep gradients, sharp curves plus the graceful Cannington Viaduct.

The viaduct will be one of the central features of a model that will also celebrate the railway stations at Axminster and Lyme Regis. Wooden buildings from the latter still survive at Alresford Station on the Watercress Line in Hampshire.

The partners in the project hope that the model will be complete in time to be a part of Axminster's Christmas attractions. Their plan is for it to go on display in the windows of the former River Cottage premises in Trinity Square, by kind permission of owners Palmers Brewery.

That arrangement is subject to the building not being let in the meantime. The model will be entirely transportable in sections and it is envisaged that it will become a long-term attraction for local people while also drawing visitors.



The Lyme Regis branch line connected the seaside town to the main line in Axminster and was opened in 1903.

It came into being at a time when Lyme Regis was in decline as a previously busy sea port. Tourists were seen as a solution to the challenge but it took nearly 40 years to come up with a scheme that coped with the hilly terrain and build the line.

### **Photo credit: SERUG**

When the branch line opened there were six return journeys on the branch every weekday, nine by 1908 and 11 by 1938 as holidaymakers flocked to the popular resort.

Passenger traffic declined after the Second World War and the line was eventually closed in 1965 as part of the Beeching cuts.

## **New Park and Ride Station Opens**

Hard on the heels of the long-awaited opening of Marsh Barton Station in Exeter, Transport Secretary Mark Harper officially opened the new Portway Park & Ride station railway station near Avonmouth, Bristol, at the end of July, before passenger services began on August 1st.

The opening of the station brings Britain's official railway network to 2,577 stations.

Passengers in Bristol will now benefit from easier access to jobs and businesses as the new, fully-accessible single-platform station on the Severn Beach railway line will take passengers into the city centre of Bristol in just 25 minutes.



Transport Secretary Mark Harper said:

*“Today's opening of Portway Park & Ride station is the latest example of this Government's plan to invest in infrastructure and grow the economy.*

*“It will provide a boost to Bristol and its surrounding area by improving local transport links while connecting passengers to business hubs and thousands of high-skilled job opportunities.”*

Managed by Great Western Railway, the new station will ease congestion on local roads and provide an additional transport option for the 9,000 people who work in the surrounding area.

Joe Graham, Business Assurance and Strategy Director at Great Western Railway, said:

*“We are delighted that services will be operating from the new Portway Park & Ride station. It will offer customers regular trains to and from Bristol Temple Meads twice an hour with a journey time of 25 minutes.*

*“Situated alongside the M5, this new station will provide a great alternative for those travelling into Bristol city centre or wanting to connect with the wider rail network.”*

It will also support local growth by improving access to the Avonmouth and Temple Quarter Enterprise Zones which are expected to create 31,000 new jobs by 2050.

Councillor Don Alexander, Cabinet Member for Transport and Councillor for Avonmouth & Lawrence Weston ward, said:

*“I am incredibly proud and delighted to open Bristol's first railway station in 96 years.*



*“Portway Park & Ride station will offer local people and commuters an efficient and sustainable travel option. Having boosted the number of free parking spaces at our park and ride site, it offers commuters more options to park up and catch a train or the bus.”*

## **SWR Returns to Naming Trains**

South Western Railway (SWR) recently named one of its trains after the Transport Benevolent Fund (TBF) to celebrate the centenary of this important charity.

The TBF supports public transport workers in times of need, hardship and distress. Members contribute £1.25 per week to be part of the charity, which enables them, their partners and dependent children to access a wide range of health, welfare and financial support. This includes a comprehensive range of complementary therapies, medical assistance, convalescence, legal advice, as well as bereavement grants.

The organisation was founded in 1923 by the predecessors of Transport for London, with roots in a fund established in 1914 to help the dependants of those who fought in the First World War. It has since expanded to cover all public transport workers in England, Scotland, and Wales.

SWR has more TBF members than any other train operator. Around 2,600 SWR colleagues are members of the TBF, almost half of all staff.

The operator marked the occasion with a special train naming ceremony at London Waterloo station, which recently celebrated its own 175th anniversary.

One of SWR's Class 450 trains, number 450100, named 'Transport Benevolent Fund CIO', was unveiled by the Managing Director of SWR, Claire Mann, the Chair of the TBF, Rob Jones, and the Chairman of Network Rail and Patron of the TBF, Lord Hendy.

Claire Mann, Managing Director of South Western Railway, commented:

*"We're proud to celebrate the fantastic work the TBF does providing advice and support to people during difficult periods in their lives. That SWR has more members than any other operator shows the generosity and community spirit of so many of our colleagues."*

*"One of our values as an organisation is that we are supportive of each other, and membership of the TBF is a wonderful example of that. We hope this TBF named train will be a reminder of the good that comes from putting our values into action."*

Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE, Chair of Network Rail and Patron of Transport Benevolent Fund CIO, commented:

*"As a Patron of the Transport Benevolent Fund, I am proud to celebrate their 100th anniversary. The TBF is the best example of how the transport community comes together to look after each other in times of need."*

*"Over the last century the fund has supported thousands of staff and their families through difficult times, including recently when the fund was at the forefront of the fight against Covid. The naming of a train in honour of this essential work is a fitting and appropriate tribute."*

## **A Big Thank You**

Our thanks to Tim Mears, our Station Manager and Network Rail for making sure that the latest damage to the fence on Platform 1 was fixed just as soon as possible, as well as ensuring that the damaged new panels in the Platform 2 were repaired.

It is so important that the station always looks its best, and that we do not get a reputation for being a place where vandalism and anti-social behaviour occurs.



## **Engineering Report for September and October**

After a quiet start to the Summer, there are a number of weekends over the next few months when engineering work affects our line. There are also plans for a longer line closure later in the Autumn.

### **Sunday 3rd, Saturday 9th, and Sunday 10th September**

The lines in the Wimbledon area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will be revised, with some services starting from Basingstoke.

### **Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th September**

The lines between Templecombe and Crewkerne will be closed due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will terminate at Templecombe.

Buses will run between Templecombe and Crewkerne.

A revised service will run between Crewkerne and Exeter St. David's.

### **Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th September**

The lines between Templecombe and Axminster will be closed due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will terminate at Templecombe.

Buses will run between Templecombe and Axminster.

A revised service will run between Axminster and Exeter St. David's.

### **Saturday September 30th and Sunday October 1st**

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Basingstoke.

A revised service will run between Basingstoke and Andover.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Buses will run between Basingstoke and Gillingham (non-stop).

A revised service will run between Gillingham and Exeter St. David's.

## **Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th, Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th October inclusive**

The lines between Axminster and Exeter St. David's will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's services will be revised and will terminate at Axminster.

Buses will run between Axminster and Exeter St. David's.

## **Sunday 29th October**

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed until mid-morning due to maintenance work.

Services affected include:

0654 Salisbury to Exeter St. David's will start from Gillingham.

0804 Basingstoke to Exeter St. David's will terminate at Andover.

0815 London Waterloo to Exeter St. David's will terminate at Andover.

0824 Exeter St. David's to London Waterloo will terminate at Gillingham.

Other services, including those operated by GWR, will also be affected. Check with the train operator for details.

Buses will run between Andover, Salisbury and Gillingham while the line is closed.

## **Blue Light and Community Day at Honiton Beehive**

The Beehive in Honiton is holding a special event on Thursday 21st September to highlight some of our incredible local community groups and organisations in and around Honiton.

The event takes place in the main auditorium between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Taking part will be 15 local community groups and service providers, who will be there to provide the public with information about their services. There will also be talks throughout the day from some of these organisations.

The event will also include Devon and Cornwall Police and Fire and Rescue services, who will be in the main car park with their emergency vehicles (subject to availability of course).

A spokesperson for The Beehive said:

*"We want to expose these community groups and raise public awareness that these services are accessible to anyone that is in need. As a community venue, we want to bring the people of Honiton and surrounding areas together to discover and support these life-changing services."*

The organisations taking part are:

Honiton Carers	Bro Check
Citizens Advice East Devon	Honiton LED
TRIP Befriending	Community Nursing Team.
Foodsave Honiton	Dementia Services.
United Response	Urgent Community Response.
East Devon Riding for the Disabled	Social Care Re-enablement
Parental Minds	First Responder.
Hospiscare	South Western Railway.
Home Instead Exeter and East Devon	

Entry is free. The café is open between 10 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. for visitors to enjoy a home-made lunch and cakes with a selection of hot and cold beverages throughout the day.

This is a great opportunity for local residents to come and discover their community groups and services. Stacey Retter from South Western Railway will be taking part, focusing on things like how SWR can help with things such as railcards and assistance onto trains.

Many of the groups taking part are also partners of The Friends of Honiton Station, promoting their services through our successful Adopt A Pot initiative, which has seen planters decorated with original art work installed on the platforms.

Supporters of the railway will also have seen a recent reminder of the vital work our blue light services do, and the dangers they run, when a Nottinghamshire police officer suffered critical injuries when he was hit by a train while attempting to rescue a distressed man on the tracks.

## **Community Rail Funding Update**

The Community Rail Network issued a statement last month about funding. It updates their announcement in July about cuts to community rail funding.

Community Rail Network (CRN) point out that they have been working hard over the past couple of months to engage in negotiations on the proposed cuts to community rail funding, following the Department for Transport's instruction for train operators in England to find savings.

They initially convened a meeting of all train operator members of the DfT's National Community Rail Steering Group, at which CRN advised that community rail is heavily dependent on train operator funding.

They made clear the value it delivers, and how CRPs and their ability to deliver value would be harmed by core funding cuts.

Community Rail Network said:

*"We strongly advised that, where savings had to be made, reductions in core funding should be avoided, due to it being critical to maintaining CRP staffing, with reductions only applied to biddable funding pots where essential."*

They are now pleased to say that train operators worked closely with them, and where relevant consulted CRP partners, and in almost all cases, ways were found to protect 100% of CRP core funding for 2023-24. They did, however, note that one operator, LNER, looks set to make a small reduction in core funding.

Community Rail Network went on to say:

*“We have now had a positive follow up discussion with the National Community Rail Steering Group about how we can work collectively to support community rail through what will continue to be a challenging period, including supporting community rail partnerships and station groups to fundraise from wider sources, and to evidence impact and value to help generate and protect funding.”*

*“We are very much turning our attentions to 2024-25, aiming to ensure we are clear as early as possible on the position for next year, and encouraging that CRPs are well engaged in train operators’ business planning.”*

## **And Finally... On A Lighter Note**

With all the serious news of fare increases, strikes and overtime bans, to say nothing of potential staffing cuts and the loss of ticket offices, we can all do with something a little more light-hearted.

In that vein, this year’s Edinburgh Festival has once again announced its top joke of the Festival Fringe, a competition run by TV channel Dave. And in what is fast becoming a tradition of this newsletter, we report one of the “best” jokes of this year’s crop.

The winning joke, chosen by 44% of those who voted, was this one-liner from Lorna Rose Treen:

*“I started dating a zookeeper, but it turned out he was a cheetah.”*

Other notable jokes – OK, the ones I actually thought were funny – included:

*“Last year I had a great joke about inflation. But it's hardly worth it now.”*

*“When women gossip we get called bitchy; but when men do it's called a podcast.”*

*“I thought I'd start off with a joke about The Titanic - just to break the ice.”*

*“I entered the 'How not to surrender' competition and I won hands down.”*

*“Nationwide must have looked pretty silly when they opened their first branch.”*

*“My grandma describes herself as being in her ‘twilight years’ which I love because they're great films.”*

Not exactly rib-tickers, I’m afraid. But then you should have seen the rest of the shortlist!

Looking back to past winners of this competition, maybe the school report for this year’s crop of comedians should be “must do better.”

Former winners include Tim Vine with his classic one-liner:

*"I decided to sell my Hoover. Well it was just gathering dust."*

Or there was Rob Auton's winner from 2013:

*"I heard a rumour Cadbury is bringing out an oriental chocolate bar. Could be a Chinese Wispa."*

Liverpool comedian Alan Rowe's one-liner about being sacked by a Jobcentre:

*"Working at the Job Centre has to be a tense job - knowing that if you get fired, you still have to come in the next day."*

Or Ken Cheng's comment on a new coin:

*"I'm not a fan of the new pound coin. But then again, I hate all change."*

And finally, Darren Walsh won in 2015 with this line from his appropriately named show Punderbolt:

*"I just deleted all the German names off my phone. It's Hans free."*

## **To End With a Touch of Luxury...**

A wonderfully evocative photograph taken by Dave Tozer, of the Midland Pullman passing Silverton on August 26th.

As the advert from the company running these tours says:

*"Relax into your comfortable seat, sipping chilled Champagne while you wait for your smartly liveried steward to take your order.*

*The menu itself is a journey through the best of British produce, filled with seasonal ingredients sourced from the regions on our routes.*



*From the immaculate white tablecloths to the impeccable service, every little detail of the Midland Pullman experience is designed for your comfort and relaxation."*