



# Convenient connections

**W**aiting in for a delivery got me off on the back foot. I was bound for a family wedding in Buckingham – which was being held on a Thursday, as it is the nature of these post-pandemic days that spare Saturdays at hospitality venues are as rare as hen's teeth. Awaiting the special delivery meant I left a good hour after I had intended, even if it also meant I got to do a few jobs in the garden while keeping a watch out for the post lady.

Could public transport help me out of my pickle? Indeed it could. Suitably suited and booted, I made the 11.39 off Tonbridge. Luckily this was a fast from Ashford, with just one stop at Sevenoaks before London Bridge. A brisk step down the escalators and back up to the Thameslink island enabled me just to make the 12.16 Cambridge service. Steady progress through the Snow Hill tunnels under the City of London meant I was deposited on the platform at St Pancras International at 12.29.

I had eschewed the glorious views over the Thames at Blackfriars in favour of reviewing the next steps on Realtime

Trains on the phone. A London Northwestern '350' leaving for Crewe at 12.46 seemed doable at a push. But would an Avanti departure at 12.43 be feasible, given the step across to Euston and the time requirement for ticket purchase? (With little signal in the Thameslink tunnels, I cursed myself for not thinking about buying the ticket on the phone while on the Southeastern train.)

The good thing about the exit from the Thameslink ticket barrier at St Pancras is that it is hard by the western exit from the station on to Midland Road. By striking directly westwards along Brill Place and Phoenix Road you can approach Euston without any need to take the detour via the Euston Road, avoiding pavement crowds to boot. LNR's ticket machines, thankfully, are intuitive and in no time I was heading for my train (forewarned and forearmed by RTT's platform advice) clutching a tangerine ticket entitling me to make a day return to Milton Keynes for the princely sum of £14.05.

I made the Pendolino a couple of minutes before the door warble, although I will admit to being a

tad puffed out and happy to rest a while in the vestibule before searching for a seat. No matter: there was the interesting exit from Euston to come, with the vestibule making it easy to switch from one side to the other to fully take in the action. On the west side you've got the LNR carriage sidings and then the HS2 works in full swing on the former DB Cargo site, before it's over to the east to espy what's what in London Overground's Willesden depot. Back to the west for the former Railfreight Distribution Chunnel terminal, now a depot for HS2's aggregates trains, before nipping rightwards for the ancient vans standing cheek by jowl with a spanking new yellow machine outside Royal Mail's Princess Royal Distribution Centre. Then it's always interesting to see what you can spot in Wembley yards: on this day we had Freightliner '66s' on container trains and a smart black DB Cargo '90' – with Pendolinos hiding in the rearground.

Seat secured, it was time to take in the view of the rolling countryside. Shooting out of the north end of Linslade tunnel with my back to the direction of travel

I noted the splendid crenellated entrance, which takes me back to my adolescence when I would cycle over here to catch sight of the magnificent rail blue AC electrics bursting through the brickwork.

There's more evidence of progress on the modern railway at Bletchley, where the rebuilding of the viaduct for East West Rail is nearly complete. Sadly, there was nothing to see in the carriage sidings, but it wasn't long before we were pulling into Milton Keynes Central, on time at 13.13.

I had found on the phone that there was an X5 bus leaving for Buckingham from stop Z4 just outside the station at 13.15, but a two-minute connection seemed an impossible ask. But no, lady luck had certainly decided to come along with me on the ride that day: I jumped on the 13.15 just before it was about to depart. Arrival at Buckingham High Street at 13.37: that's Tonbridge to Buckingham in under two hours. Who says public transport is too slow and unreliable? ■

**James Abbott**  
Consultant Editor

Leaning to the curve: Avanti West Coast Pendolino No 390155 forms the 07.20 Euston to Manchester Piccadilly at Old Linslade on 15 July 2021. Alan Wallwork





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Spectacular structure: ScotRail's No 170430 crosses the Forth Bridge with the 14.38 Edinburgh to Perth on 24 January 2022. Tom McAtee

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'Pride' liveried Pendolino No 390119 passes Horton, Cheddington with the 11.33 Glasgow Central to London Euston on 5 April 2021.  
Jamie Squibbs. Inset: Jamie Squibbs

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