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Early starts, old friends and huge potential

Normally, leaving home in West Cornwall before dawn signifies a holiday, but on 1 May it was for something rather special, and as it turned out, a rare chance for Richard to take a break from writing this page!

With a need to be in Bristol for 08.00, even the 'Night Riviera' might have been a little tight to get there in time from London, so at 03.30, I got in the car for the two-hour drive to Exeter St David's. A delay of 30 minutes on the A30 caused by a broken-down lorry meant I missed the Great Western Railway Exeter-Cardiff train I'd planned to catch and got on a later but faster CrossCountry service instead.

The Voyagers are, mercifully, undergoing a major refurbishment (see Richard's feature on pages 54-57), and a good job too because while the train was clean internally, the interior was many years overdue a freshening up. However, the fleet's performance still makes you sit up and take notice when the driver opens the taps. I've no idea what speed we were doing by the platform ends at St David's, but it was noticeably faster than on any IET I've travelled on out of the South West. The train wasn't massively busy – the return to office, as reflected by the sheer number of spaces in the car park – hasn't quite made it to Fridays yet, and the Bank Holiday weekend clearly showed that many commuters were extending the break.

It's not a spectacularly scenic journey up the 'Bristol and Exeter', but the countryside looked lush as the Voyager headed north. The ride was good, the seats still that *fraction* too upright to really relax in, and the staff were friendly, providing a good service.

But that wasn't the point of the horrendously early start. After a short ceremony in the new entrance on the eastern side of the station to mark final contract signing for reopening the railway to Portishead, it was time for a trip on the Portbury Docks branch, just past where the Portishead line diverges on the Avon estuary. At this point, you might have expected GWR to provide a 'Turbo' DMU for invited guests, but the train we travelled on couldn't have been more different.

Enter Locomotive Services Ltd's preserved main line certified 'Pacer', No 142003, hired in specifically for the day to avoid GWR taking a service train out of use. It was amongst the most surreal days of my 25 years in railway journalism seeing this beautifully kept train under Temple Meads' recently refurbished roof – who would have bet on seeing one of these units there in 2026?

It was actually a really suitable train for the preview trip, with large windows and low seats enabling a really good view of the line. And what a view it is travelling along the Avon Gorge under the Clifton suspension bridge towards the coast! We passed the station site at Pill, which is to be reopened, and stopped just short of Portbury Docks, the massive viaduct carrying the M5 over the estuary slightly beyond us.

That the Portishead line will, when it opens in 2028/29, be extremely popular with commuters from there and the surrounding area is surely a given. However, such is the beauty of this hitherto freight-only route that it can't fail to be popular with daytrippers and tourists, who will travel for the views, and then for the attractions of Portishead. It is going to be a very busy railway, you feel.

Back at Bristol, the 'Pacer' travelled to St Andrews Road and then down to Weston-super-Mare before dropping guests off at Temple Meads. As tempting as it was, the 100-mile-long drive back home from Exeter after that very early start meant I had to leave earlier than ideal – but the huge potential of this new line and the ambition of Bristol's plans is clear.

A week later, it was another early start – this time by rail - up to Plymouth for a preview of the first phase of the Mid-Cornwall Metro service on the Newquay branch, on one of GWR's ex-TfW Rail Class 175s. The Newquay line has for many years been the poor relation to the other branch lines in Devon and Cornwall, due to its length and inability to pass trains at a sensible point along it. With the new passing loop at Goss Moor, that equation changes, and the hourly service which was due to start just after this issue went to press will transform the useability of the line. Passenger numbers will surely soar as Newquay gets the service it has so long deserved. Changes to bus services in Cornwall, meanwhile, surely mean that when the full service to Falmouth Docks starts, the trains will be busy throughout.

As for the Class 175s, while their introduction has been more difficult than expected – there must be lessons learned about the folly of storing such useful units out of use for so long – they will be superb for passengers. They're comfortable, airy, ride well, and will provide suitable replacements for the 'Castle' HSTs on the main line, while also providing a boost for branches including Okehampton, Barnstaple and Newquay.

A busy couple of weeks in the South West, then, with much to look forward to. And a chance to unexpectedly renew my acquaintance with a type of train we thought we'd never see in this part of the world again. mr

Andy Bowes-Roden
Deputy Editor, *Modern Railways*

Branching off: the Portishead branch diverging to the left is set to carry passengers for the first time in more than 60 years when it reopens in 2028/29.

A 'Pacer' at Temple Meads! No 142003 awaits departure from the station with invited guests on a preview trip of the Portishead branch as far as Portbury Docks. All images by Andy Bowes-Roden

A shoddy business

It takes political skill of a high order to cut off your nose to spite your face while simultaneously shooting yourself in both feet. But that is what ministers and officials at the Department of Transport (DfT) have achieved with the summary termination of Chris Gibb's Non-Executive Directorship of Department of Transport Operator Ltd – effectively for Great British Railways in waiting.

Where to start on this appalling miscalculation?

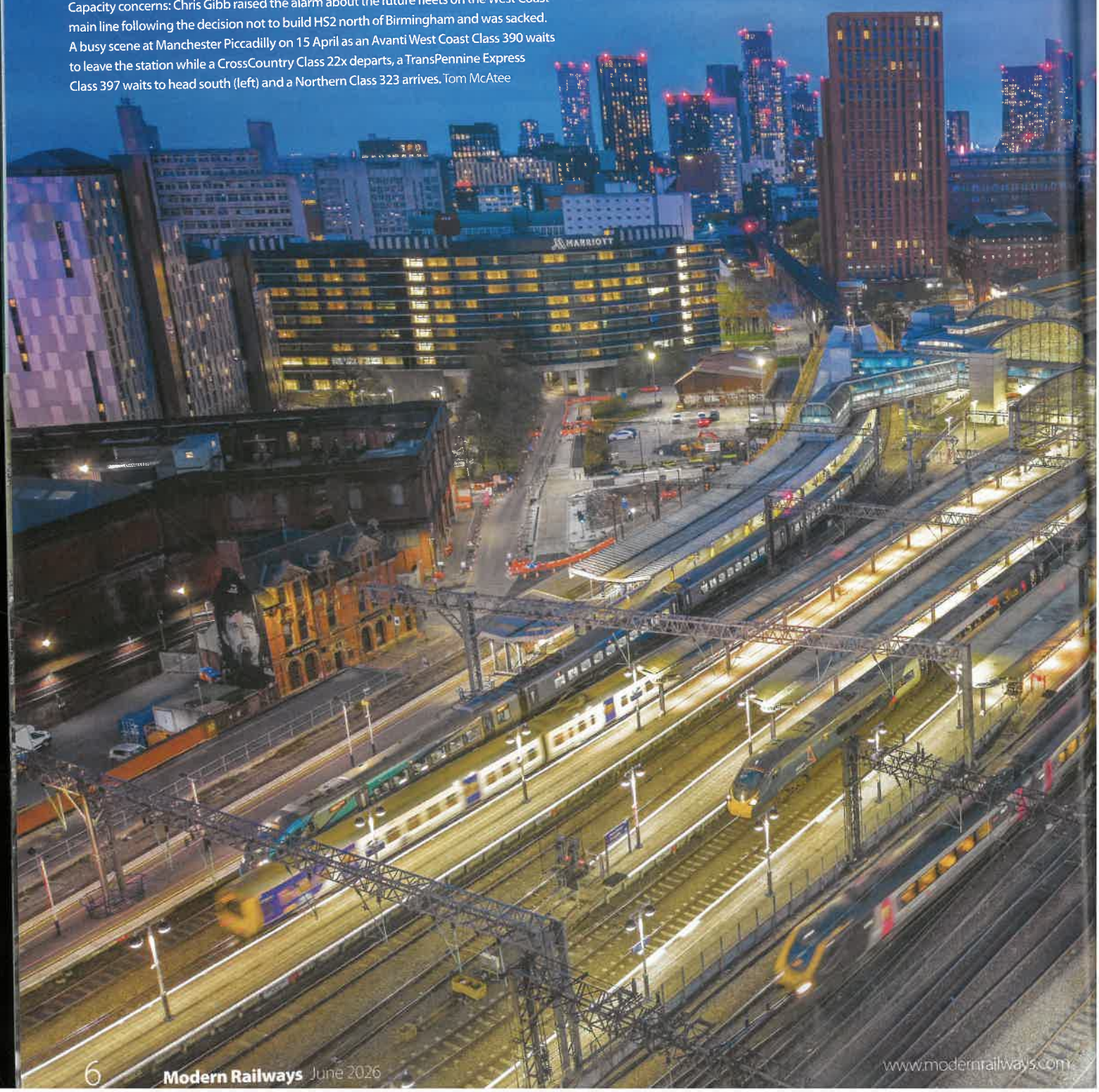
Initially we suspected it was a case of Henry II and Thomas à Becket, with a high-level someone asking: "Will no one rid me of this troublesome railwayman?" But the application of *cui bono* soon eliminated the obvious suspects.

The veteran British Rail manager had been a Non-Exec of DFTO for many years. He has brought unrivalled practical expertise to the emerging state railway in this role.

SPEED PAYS

As a one-time Chief Operating Officer of Virgin Trains' Intercity West Coast franchise, the West Coast is particularly close to Mr Gibb's heart and his head. Thirty years ago, Virgin's ambitious franchise bid combined tilting trains with a high frequency timetable. And while the West Coast Route Modernisation fiasco meant that 140mph running was an aspiration too far, the resulting service saw ridership double to 40 million journeys a year in the 10 years following the introduction of the high-frequency timetable in 2008.

At that time, Virgin was predicting continuing growth to 50 million



Capacity concerns: Chris Gibb raised the alarm about the future fleets on the West Coast main line following the decision not to build HS2 north of Birmingham and was sacked. A busy scene at Manchester Piccadilly on 15 April as an Avanti West Coast Class 390 waits to leave the station while a CrossCountry Class 22x departs, a TransPennine Express Class 397 waits to head south (left) and a Northern Class 323 arrives. Tom McAtee

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50 million

urneys a year by the time HS2 was
hen forecast to open in 2026. But
hat was before the pandemic and
he cancellation of Phase 2 of HS2,
eading the current 'great reset'.

Now itself deferred from
his 'summer' to the end of the
ear, the reset is expected to
ush back completion of Phase
– London-Birmingham – to
he late 2030s or even 2040.

ALL CHANGE

For Mr Gibb, this further delay
hanged the dynamic of the West
Coast inter-city passenger business;
2040 is around the time the current Class 390 Pendolino tiling train EMU fleet will be due for replacement. As a personal initiative, entirely separate from his DFTO directorship, he began developing a rolling stock strategy

> "Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest."
> **Nolan**

treating HS2 as part of the WCML.

Nothing to see here, just a professional railwayman exploring rolling stock options. But nowadays there are five dimensions to rolling stock procurement – design, quantity, cost, delivery and politics. And anything to do with HS2 is Political with a capital 'P'.

Mr Gibb became concerned that in contrast with his ongoing growth strategy, the DfT might be considering running West Coast inter-city services with just the 54-strong HS2 fleet and not replace the Pendolino. Self-evidently, this would reduce capacity, extend journey times and choke off growth. Anathema to a railway operator.

We understand that Mr Gibb wrote to DfT outlining his proposals, only to be ignored. He told *Modern Railways*: "All they had to do was sit me down and say, 'We have a better plan, but can't reveal it' and I would have shut up."

WARNED OFF

With increasing coverage of his views, it is understood that, following comments in a national newspaper, Mr Gibb had been warned in December 2025 about commenting on government policy without prior clearance. But cleared by whom, since neither HS2 nor West Coast inter-city services yet have anything to do with his then employer DFTO?

But what sealed his fate was his appearance at the All Party Parliamentary Group - Rail meeting on 13 April. While permission (again, from whom?) had been given for him to attend the meeting, speaking and distributing a brochure with his proposals was considered a provocation too far.

WHO, WHOM?

But who was Henry II in the Becket scenario? It seems it was the Transport Secretary's Special Advisors (SPADs) and the DfT communications team who saw wider debate on the topic as potentially embarrassing on multiple fronts, not least the two train building 'kittens'.

So, 'snip,' DFTO cut off its nose and lost one of its most, if not the most valuable, board members. Did DFTO Chair Andrew Haines resist? We don't know, but he should have.

Because 'bang' and there goes a foot. DfT is currently interviewing applicants for the new post of GBR Chair. With GBR touted as an arm's length body, what will candidates have made of this termination of an independent board member with considerable prejudice?

And, bang, there goes the other foot.

The resulting furore has seen Mr Gibb's proposals and concerns receive maximum media coverage, together with widespread support throughout the railway industry. Come the reset, rolling stock policy will be under well-informed scrutiny.

In a recent message to civil servants Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer called on them to offer 'total transparency' to ministers, adding: "I value the speaking truth to power that is the hallmark of our system. I want a culture where information flows freely, where risks are flagged early, and where we work together to solve problems before they become crises."

Yes, Prime Minister. mr

Coming soon: Lumo No 222601 races through Lichfield Trent Valley on 10 May with the 17.09 London Euston-Stirling training run. The open access operator was due to begin running direct trains on the West Coast main line between London and Stirling from 25 May. John Whitehouse

25 May start date for Lumo's WCML trains

LUMO WILL start running passenger trains on the West Coast main line between London Euston and Stirling from 25 May.

A full service will be introduced from 27 July once enough '222s' are available. Lumo is leasing 5x6-car former East Midlands Railway Class 222s from Beacon Rail, and these are being refurbished by Alstom at its Widnes facility, including the removal of first class facilities as the open access operator offers standard class only.

The trains will serve Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Crewe, Carlisle, Lockerbie, Motherwell, Whifflet, Greenfaulds and Larbert.

Eventually, four daily return services will operate between London and Stirling, with an additional fifth return service between Preston and London. The operator is already looking to expand this, with Blackpool North a possible destination.

Stuart Jones, Managing Director of First Rail Open Access, said: "This is a very exciting moment in our journey to launching a pioneering new service for the West Coast."

Adam Cunliffe, Chief Executive Officer of Beacon, said: "We are proud to be supporting Lumo on the introduction of its new West Coast rail service and look forward to seeing the trains enter passenger service."

Steve Harvey, Services Director UK and Ireland at Alstom, said: "Alstom is proud to help Lumo launch its new West Coast service through our refurbishment programme of their Class 222 fleet. Our focus remains on providing refreshed trains that are reliable, welcoming and ready to serve passengers from day one."

DfT confirms in-house dates for Chiltern and GWR

CHILTERN RAILWAYS will return to public ownership on 20 September, followed by Great Western Railway on 13 December. The Department for Transport confirmed the dates on 8 May.

DfT announced on 26 September 2025 that West Midlands Trains, Govia Thameslink Railway, CR and GWR would return to public ownership during 2026, but only the dates for the first two operators were confirmed; WM Trains joined the Department for Transport Operator (DfTO) portfolio on 1 February and will be followed by GTR on 31 May.

A DfT spokesperson told *Modern Railways*: "This is another significant moment for the Government's flagship public ownership programme and brings a simpler, more reliable network under Great British Railways a step closer.

"The Government is delivering on its commitment to bring services back into public ownership and put passengers, not shareholders, at the heart of our railways."

The GW InterCity franchise began operating on 4 February 1996, with Great Western Holdings, owned by former British Rail management (51%), FirstBus (24.5%) and 3i (24.5%). FirstGroup bought its partners' stakes in March 1998. On 1 April 2004, First Great Western Link began operating the Thames Trains franchise and from 1 April 2006, First Great Western, First Great Western Link and Wessex Trains were combined into the current GWR operation. Some services in the Thames Valley have since transferred to Transport for London for the Elizabeth Line.

Meanwhile, CR was privatised on 21 July 1996, bought by M40 Trains which was a management team backed by John Laing and 3i. In August 2002, the John Laing Group became the sole owner of CR and in January 2008 the company was sold to Deutsche Bahn with CR becoming a subsidiary of Arriva UK in 2011.

These transfers will leave East Midlands Railway, Avanti West Coast and CrossCountry as the final three TOCs to return to public ownership.

Since Labour won the 2024 General Election, South Western Railway, c2c, Greater Anglia and WM Trains have been taken back into public ownership.

HS2 reset by end of 2026

THE HS2 reset will now be delivered by the end of the year, HS2 Ltd Chief Executive Mark Wild said in his latest video update, posted on 8 May, adding that this would be the last time a reset would be undertaken before the new railway opens.

In her six-month report on HS2, delivered on 23 March, Secretary of State for Transport Heidi Alexander, had said that Mr Wild would deliver his reset by the summer (*Modern Railways*, May 2026).

Mr Wild, discussing progress on the project, said in his latest video: "I'm really pleased with productivity. We've achieved many notable milestones in the past year, and we've got off to a good start in this financial year. All the tunnelling is completed between Old Oak Common and Birmingham Curzon Street."

But he added: "We're in the midst of resetting the programme. We're making great progress. Helped, of course, by the certainty of a four-year settlement in last year's spending review, we're very, very clear about priorities in the next four years, and we're on track to delivering the baseline schedule at the end of this year.

"As we've always said, it's taking a couple of years to do this. Why is that? Well, we've got to get this right, because this reset will be the last time we do it to the end of the job."

Mr Wild did not give any indication for an opening date for the railway, and nor did he mention anything about the trains which will operate on the line between London and Birmingham.

Speaking about progress in his update video, Mr Wild said 2,000 piles have been installed at Curzon Street to support the terminus station. He added that one of the key priorities now was to create the trace needed to allow track to be laid on the route around Delta Junction, with more than 24 million cubic metres of earth moved, he added.

At Old Oak Common, he said the station was beginning to 'emerge' with the platforms installed and that he expects the station structure to start appearing "very shortly". At Euston, he said there was "great progress" in clearing the ground ready for the construction of HS2's terminus, although he did not specify how many platforms would be constructed.

Cambridge South to welcome passengers from 28 June

TRAINS WILL begin serving Cambridge South station from 28 June.

Located adjacent to the city's biomedical campus, it will be served by CrossCountry, Greater Anglia and Govia Thameslink Railway and will be the first new station to feature Great British Railways branding.

It is expected that 1.8 million passengers will use the station per year. 40,000 people per day visit Europe's largest medical research facility next to the station.

Up to nine trains per hour will serve the station, rising to 20tph during peak hours.

Rail Minister Lord Hendy said the station will: "Open up access to jobs, homes and world-class facilities for people across the region, boosting the growth of the Biomedical Campus as one of the most important engines of growth in the country."

He added: "As the first GBR branded station, the opening is an important milestone for our railways, and a sign of the real change public ownership will deliver."

Network Rail Chief Executive Jeremy Westlake added: "Thousands of people have worked tirelessly on this project to build a modern, accessible and sustainable station that reflects the excellence of the work being undertaken in Europe's largest biomedical facility."

There are four platforms at the station, which can accommodate 12-car EMUs. Track and signalling has been altered; loops will require extending when East West Rail eventually arrives in Cambridge during the 2030s.

The station cost around £250 million, most of which was from Government funding although £5 million has been contributed by AstraZeneca, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership.

Class 99s move closer to service

GB RAILFREIGHT'S Stadler Class 99 locomotives – owned by Beacon Rail Leasing – are moving closer to full entry to service after Network Rail granted the fleet an Interim Network Rail Statement of Compatibility (NRSC).

The NRSC allows the bi-mode fleet to operate across the rail network while GBRf and NR work together towards full certification. The first six '99s' have been accepted by GBRf, which says driver training can now "scale up" before the locomotives enter commercial service in the summer. A seventh locomotive, No 99007, is shortly to start its fault-free running process, while Nos 99008/009 are expected to be delivered after this issue of *Modern Railways* went to press.

The locomotives can operate on 25kV AC electric power or via a 1,800kW (2,400hp) Cummins QSK50 diesel engine. Starting tractive effort in both modes is 500kN, with maximum power in electric mode of 6,000kW.

GBRf Chief Executive John Smith said: "The granting of the Statement of Compatibility for our Class 99 locomotives is a significant moment for GB Railfreight and the wider sector. Achieving compatibility on Britain's complex railway infrastructure is no small task, and this has been a collaborative effort throughout.

"The Class 99 represents the future of rail freight, combining improved performance with clear sustainability benefits. With this approval secured, we are now focused on bringing the locomotives into service."

Class 99s are based at Leicester. Locos have hauled various trains as part of their testing process and have visited locations across the UK but they have yet to operate on the national network in revenue-earning traffic, and GBRf has yet to disclose where the locos will initially operate. One loco, No 99004, attended the Swanage Railway diesel gala, making the class' passenger debut, on 8-10 May. It is also expected that the locos will be used to operate the Britannic Explorer luxury train which GBRf operates.

Passenger debut: NRSC certification means GBRf can accelerate driver training on its Class 99s ahead of revenue service this summer. No 99004 attended the Swanage Railway diesel gala on 8-10 May, becoming the first of the class to haul a passenger train. On 8 May, the '99' passes Corfe Common with the 09.39 Corfe Castle-Swanage. Brad Joyce

Alstom 'repurposes' Widnes factory

High-profile deal: Avanti West Coast No 390050 stands inside Widnes Technology Centre on 10 October 2023. Richard Clinnick

Production ends in October

ALSTOM IS repurposing its Widnes facility with all site production activities ceasing by the end of October.

Ongoing work to refurbish 5x6-car Class 222s for Lumo will continue, but the refresh work on London Overground Class 378s will transfer to Ilford, while it is likely that the refurbishment of Class 222s will be carried out at Derby Litchurch Lane.

The decision means there will be a loss of around 70 permanent roles, alongside just over 40 contractors and ten in support functions. Local line managers and HR colleagues are engaging directly with Widnes-based teams with redeployment opportunities being offered. The offices at Widnes will remain operational and approximately 60 staff will continue to be based there, including around 20 engineers.

An Alstom spokesperson told *Modern Railways* on 22 April: "To ensure our UK operations remain competitive, sustainable and well positioned for the future, we have undertaken a detailed review of our activities. This includes the development of a more flexible, hybrid delivery model across our sites, helping us to balance new-build, refurbishment and services work while protecting nationally critical skills.

"We are therefore proposing to temporarily pause modernisation activity at our Widnes site. The facility would transition to operate as Alstom's national logistics hub, consolidating parts storage into a single UK facility and enabling us to support customers more effectively.

"We are fully committed to engaging openly with affected colleagues and will provide support throughout this process. Furthermore, Alstom remains dedicated to the UK rail industry, to investing in our people and sites, and to supporting the future needs of Great British Railways and our customers."

During the period to the end of October, projects will transfer from Widnes including modules, vacuum circuit breaker, switchgear and shoegear moving to Crewe Works, while the electronics cabin and its activities will move to Sutton-in-Ashfield.

The 13,000 square metre site opened on 29 June 2017 with a training centre opening in September that year. The site was designed for future expansion if the company won new-build contracts.

While no new trains have been built at Widnes, high-profile projects completed there include the repaint of Class 390 Pendolinos followed by their refurbishment, refurbishment and reforming of Class 458/5s back to Class 458/4s and the refurbishment of TfW Rail Class 175s.

Paddington's integrated Station Lead

LAUREN CLANCY has been appointed Integrated Station Lead, working across Great Western Railway and Network Rail Western, as the two organisations bring the leadership of London Paddington under a single team. The appointment is part of a series of moves designed to bring track and train together and Paddington is the first NR-managed station to integrate a leadership team with a passenger operator.

GWR is due to re-enter public ownership later this year, following Govia Thameslink Railway and Chiltern Railways.

In the past year, GWR and NR have brought control functions together in a single, joint team while route strategy teams and access strategy teams have been united.

Ms Clancy most recently led track and train integration programmes across Anglia Railway. She has also previously been station manager at Stratford, Ebbsfleet and St Pancras International stations.

GBR narrows down Derby HQ options

TWO SITES in Derby have made the final shortlist for a new headquarters for Great British Railways (GBR).

Becketwell, a city centre brownfield site set for redevelopment, and Midland House, an existing railway building opposite the city's station, have been deemed the most viable from a five-strong list.

Derby was named as the home of GBR's headquarters back in March 2023 following a competitive bid process with its strong rail heritage, significant existing industry presence and central national location highlighted. Since 2024, the city has been home to a GBR Transition Team (GBRTT) office in John Ellis House.

A final decision on the location of the headquarters is expected before the end of the year and will be made based on many factors including regeneration and economic value, value for money as well as environmental and social impact.

Rail Minister Lord Hendy said: "Derby will be the heart of GBR and we're one step closer to bringing highly skilled jobs to a city already brimming with rail industry history and talent."

Jeremy Westlake, Network Rail Chief Executive, said: "This is an important first step forward on our journey to GBR. Having lived and worked in Derby for 18 years, it is an excellent location for a national transport organisation like GBR."

Alex Hynes, DfTO Chief Executive, called the shortlist announcement a "positive step" as the journey towards GBR accelerates. "Derby shares a deep and rich connection with our rail industry, and as momentum builds towards GBR, we will continue to work together with colleagues in the city and across industry, to build a better railway for everyone in Britain."

Hendy calls for freight fleet upgrades

RAIL FREIGHT fleets need to be updated, Rail Minister Lord Hendy said on 13 April during a House of Lords debate, adding that he expected GB Railfreight's investment in 30 bi-mode Class 99 locos to be followed by other freight companies.

In the debate on rail freight, Lord Faulkner (Labour) had asked about bi-mode/tri-mode technology, to which the Rail Minister replied that bi-mode technology may provide the solution for problems such as the lack of wires to London Gateway."

If there were battery-electric locomotives then we would not need fixed electrification. "It is right that the rail freight fleet needs to be updated. That investment is very welcome, and I expect it to be followed by investment by the other freight operators which believe that there is a long-term future in freight on the railway," he said.

As well as 30 Class 99s for GBRf, Stadler has delivered 10 Class 93s for Rail Operations Group, with the tri-mode locos trialled by DB Cargo UK and Freightliner, with Great Western Railway expected to follow in the coming weeks.

Elsewhere, other than 27 Class 90s with Freightliner, six Class 92s with DB Cargo UK, 10 Class 88 bi-modes for Direct Rail Services and GB Railfreight's 25 Class 73 electro-diesels, all other freight locos are diesel-powered.

Portishead line construction contracts signed

THE LONG-PLANNED reinstatement of the Portishead branch from Bristol is set to reopen in winter 2028/29 after contracts worth £200 million were signed on 1 May for its construction.

A special train operated by Locomotive Services Limited's Pacer No 142003 carried invited guests on the operational route as far as the stop board at Royal Portbury Dock, before later running to St Andrews Road, Bristol, and Weston-super-Mare before returning to Bristol Temple Meads.

The project is being funded by the Department for Transport, West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and North Somerset Council.

Morgan Sindall will lead construction of the line and deliver highways improvements at Portishead; Colas Rail will design and install the signalling for the route, and AmcoGiffen is to deliver bridge works and associated highways works in Bristol.

Two new stations – at Portishead and at Pill on the currently freight only Parson Street-Royal Portbury Dock branch – will be built, and three miles of track reinstated west of Pill. Journey times from Portishead to Temple Meads are expected to be around 25 minutes – less than half the journey time by road. The branch was closed to passengers in 1964, and when reopened will reconnect more than 50,000 people to the rail network.

Network Rail Western Route Managing Director Marcus Jones described the contract signing as "a significant milestone," adding: "This project will reconnect more than 50,000 people to the rail network for the first time in decades, unlocking better access to jobs, education and services, while offering a faster and greener alternative to road travel.

"Working closely with the Department for Transport, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, North Somerset Council, Great Western Railway and our industry partners, we're committed to delivering a modern, reliable railway that supports long term growth for the region and meets the needs of local communities for generations to come."

Mark Hopwood, Great Western Railway Managing Director said: "This isn't just about trains and track – it is about reconnecting people to rail and providing a vital economic catalyst across the region. This project validates our belief that reliable rail services are essential for local and national growth.

"The line will allow thousands more direct access to the rail network and in the fullness of time will connect with our other new station, Bristol Brabazon, and the new Aviva Arena, creating further sustainable links for residents and visitors."

West of England Mayor Helen Godwin added: "Through this new £200 million train line, the West of England and North Somerset, alongside our industry partners, we can connect more people to work, nature, and leisure. This investment will also help unlock sites for new homes and strengthen the country's fastest-growing regional economy.

"Travel times between Bristol and Portishead will be halved by train services, helping the West get out of the slow lane and cutting congestion. Our record investment in more trains and better buses will get our region moving, while we continue developing mass transit plans for the longer-term."

And North Somerset Council Leader Mike Bell concluded: "After decades of waiting, trains are finally on their way back to the Portishead and Pill to Bristol rail line, and that is a huge achievement. We are delighted to welcome Morgan Sindall Infrastructure, Colas Rail and AmcoGiffen to the project as work on site ramps up and full construction gets underway, taking us another major step closer to opening the line.

"Today's observation train along the line towards Portishead gave me an exciting glimpse of what is to come. As ever, I would like to thank the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and Great Western Railway for their continued support and collaboration as we turn the Portishead line into a reality for residents."

Special train: No 142003 awaits departure from Bristol Temple Meads to take invited guests along the Royal Portbury Docks line and past the junction of the Portishead branch. Andy Bowes-Roden