

## LOCAL PASSENGER GROWTH TO APRIL 2024 by Peter Cousins

The annual Station Usage figures were published by the Rail Regulator on 21 November and cover the year from April 2023 to March 2024, a substantial part of which was impacted by cancellations as a result of strikes and, on several routes, staff shortages.



During the year seven new stations opened - Green Park (Reading), Marsh Barton (Devon), Portway Park and Ride (Bristol), Thanet Parkway (Kent), Headbolt Lane (Liverpool), Brent Cross West (London) and East Linton (East Lothian). Part-year figures for these stations have been included in this analysis. There are now a record 2,585 stations with a recorded footfall in the tables (1997 = 2,516), although two of these have not had a service since 2022.



By the end of the calendar year another five new stations had opened: Cameron Bridge and Leven in Scotland, Ashley Down (Bristol), Ashington and Seaton Delaval in Northumberland. Several more, including Newsham, will be ready to open in early 2025, with Northumberland Park, Blyth Bebside, Bedlington, Butetown, Winslow and White Rose probably following later in the year.

Although it is now over four years since the January 2020 lockdown, the latest figures are still disappointing, with few signs of a return to growth. Indeed, overall passenger numbers in the country are still only 95% of those published in 2019/20 (a year which was itself impacted by the first lockdown).

As previously, the picture is one of partial recovery, with England and Scotland at 84% just behind Wales at 86%. Only Greater London at 105% has so far matched its 2019/20 total, no doubt boosted by the new Elizabeth Line service.

At a regional level there is much variation with recovery in the West Midlands (76%) trailing behind the North West (80%), the South East (84%), Yorkshire and the Humber (86%), the East Midlands (90%), Eastern Region (90%) and the South West (97%); only the North East (105%) had passed its 2019/20 figure by April 2024.



Devon - 112% of 2019/20 levels

(Roger Davis)

At County/Unitary level there is better news, as the passenger numbers in many individual authorities have now matched their 2019/20 total. Redcar & Cleveland (114%), Devon (112%), Exeter (112%), Middlesbrough (112%), Kingston upon Hull (111%) and Blackpool (110%) head the list, followed by several other local authority areas. However, in the West Midlands only in Herefordshire (95%) and

Stoke-on-Trent (92%) have passenger numbers nearly recovered.

Even in the West Midlands, although numbers at New Street and Snow Hill are well below 2019/20 levels, some individual stations stand out with exceptional recovery, indeed renewed growth, at Longport (147%), Hampton-in-Arden (140%), Honeybourne (128%), Stone (126%), Canley (116%), Lapworth (109%) and Evesham (105%). Clearly there is no obvious pattern and it does not follow that passenger numbers on the radial routes with these stations have recovered. Only on the Chase Line (154%) and perhaps the Cotswold Line (100%) can we see 'green shoots'. The latter figure excludes Worcestershire Parkway where there were a reported 339,060 journeys in 2023/24 almost 30% of whom apparently travelled to Birmingham New Street, overloading the Cross Country service from Cardiff for most of the year.



Canley - 116% of 2019/20 levels

(Keith Flinders)



Evesham - 105% of 2019/20 levels

(Roger Davis)

Taking a wider look at some other English stations, many of those in the Bristol City catchment have more than recovered their 2019/20 passenger numbers as have Pontypool on the Marches Line (139%), Wrexham (126%) and Ilkeston (121%); but the star performer is Corby at 165%. Perhaps we are seeing a return of the fabled 'sparks effect' at that station.