

[Return to Area Groups News](#) [Index to other public pages](#) [MERG Home page](#)**There are 1460 days 14:39 since the next Virtual Area Group Meeting (18:30 BST on 5th May 2020)**

# MERG Virtual Area Group

## Email

To send us an email, [use the MERG Area Group contact form](#)  
For **MERG** members, you might also like to look at our [area group forum](#).

## Area Group Coordinator

Allan Geekie M5173 - email address: [vag@merg.org.uk](mailto:vag@merg.org.uk)

## How It Works

This group now uses Zoom to conduct a group meeting from member's homes or workplaces. It was formed in October 2018 to assess the usefulness of video conferencing technology.

The calls last one hour and to participate, members need a mobile phone, tablet or a PC / Mac with a camera and microphone. Recently we have started to enable members to join by telephone if they have limited broadband facilities.

In order to join the group you need to register at [this link](#). In the Area Groups section, select MERG Virtual Area Group from the drop down list and press the green button with the plus sign.

Calls are scheduled in advance and are held on each Tuesday of each month at 10:00, 12:30 or 18:30 GMT or BST. Topics are agreed in advance.

When it is time to start a call, a voice and video conference is opened up which has thumbnails of each video participant and any shared presentations or desktops. The call leader facilitates the call and the discussions and tries to get through the agenda in the agreed time. Zoom has two views available. The first is the speaker view which selects the video stream from the person speaking. The second is Gallery view which shows streams from all participants.

[This page](#) provides guidance for members on what needs be done to prepare for and join video calls.

Members are participating from:-

- Australia
- Canada
- Iceland
- Ireland
- UK
- USA.

Members can access the presentation material [here](#).

Calls are recorded and stored on MERG TV; access links are provided to members of the virtual area group.

If you would like to try out Zoom, then there is a test meeting service where you are the only participant and you can experiment with the various options available.

<http://zoom.us/test>

This link is available to anybody, not just members of the virtual area group.

## Next Meeting

**There are 1460 days 14:39 since the next Virtual Area Group Meeting (18:30 BST on 5th May 2020)**

The proposed agenda is as follows

### Tuesday 5th May 2020 18:30 BST

Topic	Leader	Notes
You, too, can Change the Wiki	Allan Geekie	A quick tour around the wonderful wiki and a demonstration of how to make changes, create new pages and generally have fun in the Playground

Once you have joined the group, you will receive a reminder email on the Sunday before the call and a second email 60 or so minutes before the call with a link to enable you to join.

## Future Meetings

Calls are held on most Tuesdays of each month at 10:00, 12:30 or 18:30 BST / GMT.

Topics exist for some future meetings - these may change.

Suggestions for additional topics would be welcome. In April 2020, we polled the VAG members with a list of potential topics and we are now trying to identify speakers and schedule these. There is a list of potential topics below.

Some discussion topics may move if needed.

Date / Time	Topic	Topic Lead
<b>May</b>		
12th 10:00 BST	CANCAB2 a variant on the existing hand held controller	Simon West
19th 12:30 BST	How Kits Work - Servo4	Martin Perry
26th 10:00 BST	Test Gear - A Buyer's Guide	Dave McCabe
<b>June</b>		
2nd 18:30 BST	DC Control	Allan Geekie
9th 10:00 BST	Success with Surface Mount Devices	Duncan Greenwood
16th 12:30 BST	How Kits Work	Martin Perry
23rd 10:00 BST	TBA	All
30th 18:30	TBA	

Date / Time	Topic	Topic Lead
<b>July</b>		
7th 18:30 BST	Pete's CBUS and JMRI update	Pete Brownlow
14th 10:00 BST	TBA	All
21st 12:30 BST	How Kits Work	Martin Perry
28th 10:00 BST	TBA	All
<b>August</b>		
4th 18:30 BST	The Arduino Platform	All
11th 10:00 BST	TBA	All
18th 12:30 BST	How Kits Work	Martin Perry
25th 10:00 BST	TBA	All
<b>September</b>		
1st 18:30 BST	The Raspberry Pi Platform	All
8th 10:00 BST	Signalling	Dave McCabe
15th 12:30 BST	How Kits Work	Martin Perry
22nd 10:00 BST	TBA	TBA
29th 18:30 BST	TBA	All

There is a standby list of topics that appear regularly:-

- **MERG** Update
- Our Layouts
- Our Projects
- Helping Beginners
- Kit Surgery
- 3D Printing.

In April 2020 we carried out a poll of VAG members and the following topics were identified as the most popular: -

- How kits work - a series of calls, each discussing the how one particular kit works - now scheduled
- Types and use of baseboard connectors - covered in Demystifying Components -Wires and Connectors
- Oscilloscopes and logic analysers for hobbyists - being planned as a two part course.
- Using the FCU - a multi part course is being considered including the use of the FCU to configure individual 2nd generation modules.
- Testing boards (use of various pieces of test equipment and the way to go about it) - A Test Gear Buyers Guide is already scheduled; other calls to be added.
- Neater Methods of under board wiring
- Best practice for wiring different bus types
- Layout control buses
- CBUS wiring strategy on a large club O gauge layout
- CANPAN wiring
- Servo and Servo Mounts
- Building CANVOUT
- Prusa 3D Printer
- 3D scanners
- Photogrammetry - generating 3D models from multiple photographs

- CBUS Beginners Kit.

## Previous Meetings in 2020

Topic	Leader	Notes
Connecting and Configuring CANMIO and Servos	Alan Turner	Going through the steps needed to configure a CANMIO Device, using the FCU, to control a servo.

### Tuesday 21st April 2020 18:30 BST

Topic	Leader	Notes
Semaphore Signals	Allan	

### Tuesday 14th April 2020 10:00 BST

Topic	Leader	Notes
Universal Software	Dave McCabe	Dave will talk us through the configuration of a CANMIO / CANVOUT module using the Universay Firmware

### Tuesday 7th April 2020 10:00 BST

Topic	Leader	Notes
Making Great Connections	Howard Watkins	Howard and his crimper(s) will be on an adventure with an assortment of ferrules

### Tuesday 31st March 2020 12:30 BST

Topic	Leader	Notes
An Introduction to Arduinos for Model Railway Layouts	Duncan Greenwood	How to get started with an Arduino module and do useful things on a layout.
Topic	Leader	Notes
Journal Discussion	All	A discussion around the Journal, what w like, what changes might we want to see

### Tuesday 17th March 2020 18:30 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
Colour Light Signals	All	A discussion around the topic of controlling colour light signals

### Tuesday 10th March 2020 10:00 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
3D Resin Printing	Chris Walsh and Roger Woodward	Chris and Roger will talk about the highs and lows of 3D resin printing

### Tuesday 25th February

Topic	Leader	Notes
What is on our Workbenches?	All	What are we workin on

### Tuesday 18th February 2020

Topic	Leader	Notes
Changing Points	All	A general discussion on the topic of changing points - I guess we will start with a finger!

## Tuesday 11th February 2020 10:00 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
CANV* Modules	Ian Hart	Ian will talk about the new CANV range of modules, now in production and about to appear in the Kitlocker

## Tuesday 28th January 2020 10:00 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
Radio Throttles Discussion	All	A general discussion around wireless communication with hand-held throttles.

Tuesday 21st January 2020 10:00 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
MERG in 2020	Martin Perry	MERG Chairman, Martin Perry discusses what MERG will be doing in the coming year.

Tuesday 14th January 2020 18:30 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
Train Detection Discussion	All	A general discussion around train detection using light, lasers, magnets, current consumption and any other ideas that members can devise

## Previous Meetings in 2019

Tuesday 17th December 2019 18:30 GMT

Topic	Leader	Notes
Layout Wiring	All	A general discussion on the basics of wiring a layout

Tuesday 10th December 2019 - 10:00 GMT

Item	Leader	Notes
Journal Feedback	Allan	We will take a few minutes to gather some feedback regarding the December Journal
Tales from the Kitlocker	Judi Rastall	A good opportunity to learn more about this essential part of MERG

26th November 2019 18:30 GMT

Item	Leader	Notes
Video Recording of VAG calls	All	My original of a policy is not working due to space restrictions at Zoom; we need to agree a policy; I can provide an update on the recent problems.

19th November 2019 18:30 GMT

Item	Leader	Notes
DCC PMP Kits Discussion	All	This is the first of the evening discussion calls. We will start with PMP DCC kits but see where it takes us.

12th November 2019 10:00 GMT

Item	Leader	Notes
Merg Feedback	Allan	Feedback from the Thirsk event and AGM
Getting Started with PlatformIO	Dave McCabe	What is PlatformIO?

**October 22nd**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Designing PCBs	Alan Turner	30	
MERG Online	Martin Sebborn	30	

**October 8th**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Journal - The Road to JMRI series	Allan	40	
Challenge the Group	All	20	This is an opportunity to ask the group for help with problems on your layout or with electronics in general

**24th September**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
More Wires or More Modules	Discussion	40	Duncan lit the blue touchpaper on the Forum

**10th September**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Journal Feedback	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
MERG Update	Allan	5	Update from the last committee meeting
CBUS for Beginners	Discussion	20	How to progress the idea of helping CBUS adoption for new users
TTH CANCAB	Discussion	30	General discussion

**27th August**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
Station Destination Boards	Discussion	45	An opportunity to discuss hardware and messaging systems
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

**13th August**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
DC Control	Discussion	45	An opportunity to discuss the forgotten world of DC control
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

**9th July**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
Signalling Objects for CBUS	Dave Turner	55	The aims of this White Paper are as follows
			1 To make configuration and documentation of an interlocked system easier
			2 To add the following higher level functionality to the existing CBUS messaging system
			- System initialisation
			- Interlocking of modelled signalling items
			- Route reservation, locking and release
			- Reporting of operational errors

**25th June**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
General Discussion	All	45	CANEMPTY, 3D Printing Java FCU, Rocrail, stiction controllers, wifi controllers, CBUS module reset and Duncan's latest servo setter.
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

**11th June**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Journal Feedback	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
DCC Decoder for Under a Fiver	Duncan Greenwood	45	Duncan will talk about the work he has been doing on hardware and firmware for a DCC loco decoder
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

**28th May**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
On my Workbench	Discussion	25	What are we all working on.
CBUS - long messages 2	Discussion	20	Potential solutions
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

**14th May**

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
Blue Pill Talks to CUS	Dave McCabe	45	Dave takes up the challenge to show how a simple program on a Blue Pill module can communicate with CBUS
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

## 23 April

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Etiquette	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
PMP Project Ideas	Discussion	25	What would we like to see as future PMP projects?
CBUS - long messages 1	Discussion	20	Problem Definition
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

## 9th April

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Future Topics	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
Workbenches	Discussion	25	What are members working on at the moment?
Layouts	Discussion	20	Share information on the layouts we are contributing to
Burning Topics	Discussion	10	Does anybody need some help?

## 26th March

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
From the Workbench	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
Getting Started with Blue Pill Microcontrollers	Dave McC	25	Quick intro to Blue Pill( inc schmatic )
			Arduino IDE
			Blue pill config
			Compiling code
			Flashing using ST-Link
			Debugging
Any Questions	Discussion	10	Let us all try and help one another with any 'burning platforms'
Future Topics	Discussion	5	What topics would we like to discuss in future calls

## 12th March

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Last Journal	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
CBUS	TBA	40	TBA to include Layouts with large numbers of modules
Any Questions	Discussion	10	Let us all try and help one another with any 'burning platforms'
Future Topics	Discussion	5	What topics would we like to discuss in future calls

## 26th February



Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
<b>MERG</b> Update	Allan	5	Feedback from last committee meeting
3D Printing	Howard	40	(1) Filament
			* Makes
			* Types
			* Storage
			(2) Creating a model
			* Design Software
			* Correction software
			* Slicing software
			(3) Printing in more than one colours
			* Change filament at certain depth
			* Separate objects glued together
			* Multi material
			(4) 3D Printers
			* Makes
			* Bed Levelling
			* Nozzles
			(5) What can go wrong (if time permits)?
Any Questions	Discussion	10	Let us all try and help one another with any 'burning platforms'
Future Topics	Discussion	5	What topics would we like to discuss in future calls

## 12th February

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
Interesting Forum Threads	Discussion	5	Initial discussion while members join the call
A MERG Newsletter	Discussion	25	Discussion about a new way of communicating with members
Helping Beginners	Allan	15	Discussion about what beginners need to know about resistance
Any Questions	Discussion	10	Let us all try and help one another with any 'burning platforms'
Future Topics	Discussion	5	What topics would we like to discuss in future calls

## 22nd January

Item	Leader	Minutes	Notes
<b>MERG</b> Update	Allan Geekie	5	Feedback from last committee meeting
Layouts	Discussion	25	Updates from the group on the electronics on the layouts they are working on
Projects	Discussion	25	Projects from the group's workbenches
Future Topics	Discussion	5	What topics would we like to discuss in future calls

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