

[Return to Area Groups News](#) [Index to other public pages](#) [MERG Home page](#)**There are 1454 days 15:58 since the next Virtual Area Group Meeting (10:00 BST on 12th 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; the current list of recordings are available, to members, [here](#).

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 1454 days 15:58 since the next Virtual Area Group Meeting (10:00 BST on 12th May 2020)**

The proposed agenda is as follows

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

| Topic  | Leader     | Notes  |
|--|------------|--|
| CANCAB2 a variant on the existing hand held controller | Simon West | Simon will talk about the changes he has made to the CANCAB kit to better suit the way he wants to control trains. |

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>     |   |                  |
| 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  | What is on our Workbenches?                                 | All              |
| 9th 10:00 BST  | Success with Surface Mount Devices                          | Duncan Greenwood |
| 16th 12:30 BST | How Kits Work   | Martin Perry     |
| 23rd 10:00 BST | Zoom Playground   | Allan Geekie     |
| 30th 18:30 BST | Moving a Servo on CANMIO (Universal Firmware) with a CANPAN | Dave McCabe      |

| Date / Time      | Topic   | Topic Lead                  |
|------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>July</b>      |   |                             |
| 7th 18:30 BST    | Pete's CBUS and JMRI update                         | Pete Brownlow               |
| 14th 10:00 BST   | DC Control  | Allan Geekie                |
| 21st 12:30 BST   | How Kits Work                                       | Martin Perry                |
| 28th 10:00 BST   | CBUS Wiring Strategy on a Large Club O Gauge Layout | Dave McCabe                 |
| <b>August</b>    |   |                             |
| 4th 18:30 BST    | Arduino - I did it my way.                          | Ron Pluck                   |
| 11th 10:00 BST   | Kitlocker Update                                    | Judi Rastall / Paul Tomkins |
| 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   | What is on our Workbenches?                         | 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 - scheduled
- 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

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

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

### Tuesday 21st April 2020 12:30 BST

| 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 we 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         |

| Item               | Leader     | Minutes | Notes   |
|--------------------|------------|---------|---|
| 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 |

| Item           | Leader     | Minutes | Notes                        |
|----------------|------------|---------|------------------------------|
| 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 schematic )                        |
|   |            |         | Arduino IDE  |
|   |            |         | Blue pill config   |
|   |            |         | Compiling code   |
|   |            |         | Flashing using ST-Link   |
| Any Questions                                   | Discussion | 10      | Debugging  |
|   |            |         | Let us all try and help one another with any 'burning platforms' |



| Item          | Leader     | Minutes | Notes  |
|---------------|------------|---------|--|
| 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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