

raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

ISSUE 170 JUNE 2016

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Photo: Network Rail

CAMBRIDGE NORTH IS REACHING FOR THE SKY

As you can see above. It also features in this issue as part of a special Focus on the Cambridge Area, where so much is growing and changing on our railway. More details inside and at: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/news/2016/apr/new-station-Cambridge-North/>

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NEWS ITEMS



Steve Wilkinson will be well known to many of our long term members. Sadly he died on April 6th after a very long and bravely fought illness. Many members of Railfuture attended his funeral in Cambridge on April 27th. Also there was his Addenbrooke's Hospital Consultant who had become a good friend over long years of treatment.

For many years from the 1970s Steve served as East Anglia Branch Secretary and then its Chairman. He went on to join on the National Committee and eventually became Chairman of this too. He also was a founding member and Secretary to the Freight Committee (now Railfuture Freight Group). Its next meeting will be its 170th. He was a very effective administrator and forged many long lasting and extremely useful contacts for our society. All of this at a time when the network was under real threat from interests who saw little value in its continued development.

I think we can safely say that it is through the work of Steve and his colleagues of the time that today we are campaigning not to save the network but to expand it. There is much evidence of that in this issue of Rail East.

Steve's greatest effort of all went into the campaign to re-establish passenger services on the St Ives to Cambridge railway, in that he and those campaigning with him were successful. The culmination of all this effort was a visit by the then Minister of Transport, Roger Freeman to Histon in 1993 and an announcement that it will reopen. Events sadly overtook this when a few weeks later Prime Minister, John Major announced the privatisation of the railway. All the work was lost and we ended up with the guided bus. Steve did not just work hard for our national railway network: he had a wide range of interests including being a long serving and meticulous chairman of Histon Parish Council; a great love of local history and included semi professional football which led to ardent lifelong support of Histon FC. He was also an accomplished organist: a claim to fame was to have played the great Compton organ that rose majestically out of the basement of the Regal Cinema in Cambridge! He was also a passionate animal rights campaigner, as well as being very proud of his army days with the Wiltshire Regiment based in Devizes. His attachment to Devizes was a contradiction of his fierce loyalty to Histon with its tenuous tolerance (tongue in cheek) of adjoined Impington! Yes, so many stories. He is sorely missed. RIP. *PW*.

Good News from our Transport Minister

A little earlier this year the Transport Minister, The Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP, spoke to a conference in London about the Government's commitment to expanding the railway. What follows is an extract from this speech, with its reference to Wisbech: *"...working, too, with powerful city regions that can take the responsibility of shaping their transport systems far more effectively than Whitehall ever could. That's the way, for instance, that we have seen a reversal of some of the Beeching cuts. Finding ways to bring trains back to towns that should never have lost them and whose growth requires them. Like the Chase Line project did for Rugeley, Cannock and Hednesford. Or for places such as Tavistock and Wisbech, which have well-advanced plans."*



The full speech is to be found at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/george-bradshaw-address-2016 PW

And talking of Wisbech; plans are well advanced

There has been a flurry of political activity connected with the Wisbech line restoration project. Primarily, a 'Garden Town' style proposal is being worked up that will double the size of the town to around 60,000 people. Local Government Secretary, Minister Greg Clarke, went on a Wisbech walkabout on March 30th, pledging that support for the Garden Town status and the prospect of re-opening the rail line to March did not depend on Cambridgeshire signing up to the Chancellor's devolution deal. When asked whether Wisbech deserved to be regarded as a special case for the Government and was it fair for local councils and the MP to press for that outcome, he replied:

"Every place is unique and part of my approach is to get to know places and to recognise the issues. You need to understand them to do something about them." And he argued that people should see the rail link "as an investment not as a special favour to Wisbech. It is an opportunity to invest in the prosperity of our country".

Mr Clark said he very much hoped the current feasibility study underwritten by the local growth funding "will be positive". **On the prospect for the rail re-opening, he said the link to March would "make more jobs available, a greater choice of jobs, higher paid jobs, and would help people who may want to work in Cambridge to live in Wisbech.** Newcomers would bring "vitality and spending power" to the area and create investment opportunities." PW

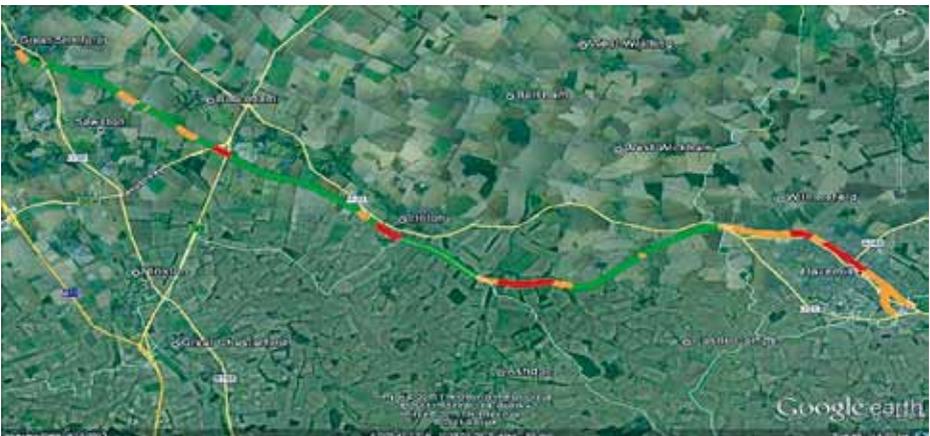
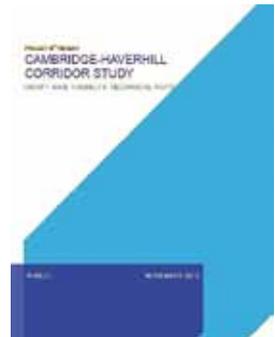


And a reminder of what was and will be again; note train destination. (Cambridge 1960).

Rail Haverhill

The Greater Cambridge City Deal commissioned and recently published a Cambridge to Haverhill Corridor viability report which estimated a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 0.99 for the scheme.

This is based on a single track railway with passing place allowing a half hourly service to operate from Haverhill to Linton, Granta Park, Sawston then onto the existing West Anglia Main Line to serve Shelford, the future station at Addenbrooke's and then Cambridge and soon to be opened Cambridge North.



Map from the report colour coded to show the difficulty of reinstating each section of the line

The figure of 0.99 is only half the figure of 2.0 seen as necessary for rail infrastructure to be built, but Railfuture East Anglia have studied the report and can see there are numerous reasons to believe that further study work will be able to significantly increase the BCR to the required level. The findings are described in detail here: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Haverhill> and conclude: The Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) in the study is around half than needed to hit the figure of 2.0 needed for the scheme to be considered viable. However, the study only presents a very early analysis of the BCR and there are numerous reasons why it will substantially increase with further study.

- The capital costs have been assumed to be around twice the cost per mile compared to other recent re-openings
- The capital cost contains a very high figure of 60% for risk and contingency
- The study assumes an expensive route to the centre of Haverhill; other lower cost options should be studied
- Passenger growth has been assumed to be low with the figure for 15 years given as 15%, whereas rail travel to Cambridge has seen growth of 25% in the last 5 years alone
- Haverhill's population is expected to increase by over 30% by 2025 which again makes the study's modest 15% increase look very pessimistic
- The wider economic benefits have not yet been assessed. This typically adds an additional 15% of benefits
- A figure of 28% for the modal share for rail into Cambridge could be pessimistic as Ely has a figure of 40%
- Variations of the route could draw in additional passengers, for example a direct connection to the major employment centre at Hinxton Hall along with reduced journey times to Stansted and London (although at the cost of journey times to Cambridge)
- There are a number of other rail schemes which are due to be delivered in the next 10 years, for example the East West Rail link from Cambridge to Oxford, which will magnify the benefits of the Haverhill scheme. A proposed new station at Addenbrooke's will provide significant additional journey time benefits to rail passengers from a reopened Haverhill line

When the multitude of factors above are taken into account by further studies, the BCR will increase substantially and into the region above 2.0 which will allow this valuable scheme to go ahead and benefit Haverhill for generations into the future. *PH*



Supporting sustainable and enduring solutions for Cambridge transport

Cambridge Light Rail an alternative for Cambridge transport?

Railfuture East Anglia have been promoting rail to meet public transport needs in Cambridge region for many years, most recently to the Greater Cambridge City Deal, which has been allocated substantial funds to address transport problems in the region. Railfuture East Anglia suggested a light rail line running from west Cambridge, tunnelling for access to the city centre and the railway station, before heading for the Newmarket Road area in the east. Recently we initiated collaboration with 'Cambridge Connect', led by local resident Colin Harris, who has elaborated a proposal for a light rail network with much in common with our own suggestions. Designed to provide a backbone of public transport within Cambridge City, Cambridge Connect has outlined the needs (including estimates of demand), benefits, technologies and approximate costs on their website (www.cambridge-connect.uk).

Light Rail network

Light Rail with an underground component in the historic city core could provide the backbone of a public transport network that would help address the serious congestion problems facing Cambridge. Approaches and technologies must be fit for purpose to meet Cambridge needs in the 21st Century. Medium- to long-term investment is needed, beyond resources available through the Greater Cambridge City Deal. To achieve an outcome right for Cambridge, more ambitious investment is required.

Five strategic Options

A conceptual plan comprising five Options for a Cambridge Light Rail system has been put forward by Cambridge Connect as a model for discussion. It is recognised more detailed technical work is needed. If all lines were completed, the network would comprise around 35 km of light rail track, of which approximately 8 km would be underground.

Public transport people want to use

Light Rail is considered a preferred technology because it is fast, reliable, safe, sustainable, comfortable, and potentially very frequent. On dedicated lines, the network is not subject to congestion. These attributes make Light Rail a quality public transport system that people are likely to want to use. Light Rail has operated for decades and is implemented in hundreds of cities worldwide. As such, it is proven and well-tested by successful use over millions of miles. Moreover, Light Rail is more energy efficient, better for air quality, has superior carrying capacity, and occupies less space than buses.

Protect Cambridge heritage

Current plans for busways present a significant risk to Cambridge heritage. It is likely that more than 200 buses per hour could need to circulate in the city centre to meet demand by 2031 given commuter data and growth projections. This has major implications for inner city congestion, and for important landscapes such as The Backs, Parker's Piece, Midsummer Common, and Bridge Street. The busways planned for radial routes into Cambridge will themselves substantially alter the city character. Long-term transport strategies should take account of the historic and architectural landscape of Cambridge, the heritage value of which

is of outstanding global importance. These factors do not appear to have been adequately considered in bus-based solutions proposed for Cambridge. For example, protection of heritage and landscape values are not mentioned on the Greater Cambridge City Deal website, which seems an extraordinary oversight given the scale of the infrastructure developments planned. Investment in an underground Light Rail transport solution within the historic city core would address these vital concerns, as well as avoid surface congestion which plagues bus and coach punctuality.

Connect residential, employment and commercial centres

All lines would connect to the Cambridge Central Rail Station, the key link to London. Lines within the historic city centre would run underground. 'Option A' connects the University of Cambridge West Campus and the new development in the NW of Cambridge (to be called Eddington) to Market Square and the rail station. 'Option B' extends to Newmarket Road, Chesterton, the new Cambridge North rail station and the Science Park in the NE of the city. 'Option C' assumes the existing guided busway alignment in the south of the city to serve Addenbrookes Hospital and the rapidly expanding biomedical campus. 'Option D' extends to Capital Park and Fulbourn, a centre for high-tech employment, via Cherry Hinton. 'Option E' links both 'Option A' and 'Option B' to create a fully connected 'circle line', providing users with more and faster destination choices. At the city periphery, lines connect to strategically placed Park & Rides, many of which already exist, which in turn would connect to outlying centres by express bus services. Further options to extend south towards the Granta Park biosciences centre and Haverhill are currently being explored.

Journey times

The journey time on the Light Rail network from the Cambridge Central rail station to Market Square would be around 5 mins. Journeys from the network periphery to the centre would be around 15-20 minutes.

Multi-modal network

Cambridge Light Rail would provide a backbone of rapid public transport in the city, with buses, coaches, taxis, private vehicles, cycling and walking playing complementary roles as part of a multi-modal integrated network. Inter-city coaches would deliver passengers to the Light Rail network at the periphery, reducing coach traffic in the inner city.

'Greenprint for a Sustainable City'

Station distribution is arranged so that around 95% of the built-up area of Cambridge would lie within a 20-minute walk, or less than an eight-minute cycle ride, of a stop. This could transform the way people move about the city, with more walking, cycling and use of public transport. This is a greenprint for a more sustainable city.

Investment

Preliminary estimates suggest investment in the range of £1-2bn for all Options, based on comparisons with schemes in France and the UK. A more modest scheme adopting one or several lines could be completed for £400-700m. A detailed appraisal of the costs has yet to be completed.

The risks

Light Rail and tunnelling have been excluded from consideration by the City Deal because they are regarded as undeliverable within the time-scales or funding available. This creates a risk that schemes implemented will fail to provide infrastructure fit for purpose on the longer time horizon. This risks substantial waste of resources, irrevocable damage to environmental and heritage values, and much community anger.

The opportunity

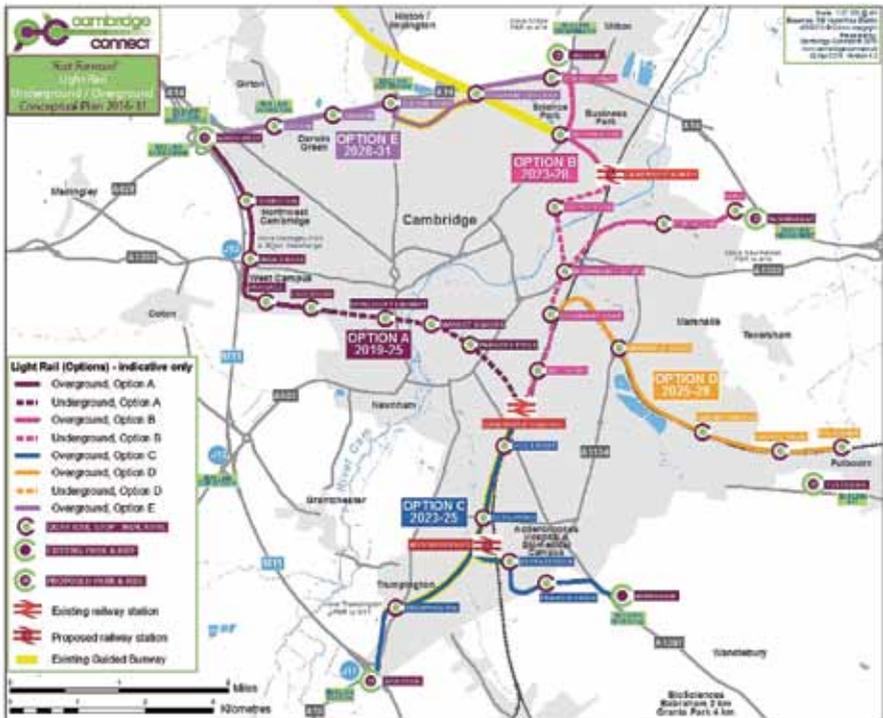
Cambridge Connect recognises that the Cambridge Light Rail indicative Options – if they were taken up – would require investment and commitment beyond the scope of the City Deal. However Cambridge Connect believes serious consideration should be given to Light Rail and underground for their potential to address the long-term needs in Cambridge.

Soon, decisions will be taken that will permanently and irrevocably alter the Cambridge landscape and character. The vision currently being rolled out by the City Deal is based on buses running on lanes to be built along existing narrow streets in Cambridge. This raises questions about how a congested historic city core will function given anticipated increases in pressure, and also about the implications of this approach for the important heritage values of the city. Cambridge Connect is calling on Cambridge residents to ask whether this a legacy we will feel proud to bequeath to our children.

Cambridge Connect suggests there is an alternative model that deserves serious consideration, with light rail and underground playing an important role along with other transport modes for a positive outlook for the future of our city.

Ultimately, this is about the legacy we leave to our children...

More information: www.cambridge-connect.uk CH



Cambridge North and a day to watch out for?

Cambridge 'North' seems to be the (logical) name chosen for the new station actually being built in the north of the city. After a slow start, the substantial works are now very evident, as you can see from our front page picture. Lift towers, overhead electric wire headspans, three 12 car platforms, and concourse steelwork have risen out of the ground and track laying completed.

Transport Minister Patrick McLoughlin MP visited the site as well as that of the recently announced A14 upgrade on Friday May 13th.

The Minister emphasised that the station, at least, will be open for business in one year's time. However, as many trains due to call here are already bursting at the seams, we hope Monday June 27th will be the day when the East Anglia rail franchise winner will be revealing promises of new rolling stock furnishing increased seating and services. That's the new deal for East Anglia's railways we truly wish for! *PW*

Abellio Greater Anglia's Train & Station refurbishment

But before this franchise ceases, AGA is undertaking a series of significant upgrades to station facilities across East Anglia, and very good they are too, ranging as they do from the complete rebuild of the island platform waiting rooms at Ely, to the excellent and elegant refurbishment of the waiting room on the east-bound platform at Bury St Edmunds. Much has either just happened or is in the process at stations like Kennett, Newmarket, Needham Market, March, Marks Tey and several others where significant safety or passenger-friendly access work has been undertaken.



Photo: Network Rail



This composite photograph shows just a few of these: Kennett in the upper third, Newmarket in the middle, and indeed, the opening of the very smartly revamped Newmarket station on 5 February by Matthew Hancock MP for East Suffolk and currently Minister for the Cabinet Office. It's a shame though, that modest-priced disability access requires such severe looking structures, creating a sort of Stalag Kennett impression. We also see March station footbridge undergoing elaborate refurbishment in flatteringly dramatic lighting.

Rolling stock refurbishment is continuing too, witness some much needed improvement being carried out to some of the electric multiple unit fleet, such as the Class 321s on the Great Eastern Main Line.

Jamie Burles, AGA's MD, said at a recent stakeholder meeting that the TOC is receiving more revenue than expected and his Board decided to plough all the surplus back into the fleet upgrades. Well done AGA. PW



East West Rail Link Central Section

Phil Smart tell us that years of campaigning by Railfuture are almost over. The East-West Rail Link, once written off by many as 'pie-in-the-sky', has now become part of the nation's economic orthodoxy. It enjoys the backing of all the region's local authorities and MPs, the Department for Transport, the region's business organisations, Network Rail and most importantly, the Treasury.

To these we can now add the National Infrastructure Commission, which in the last month has been instructed by the Chancellor to work with the EWR Consortium to support this project. This is an important development as their involvement could help free the funding log-jam building up in the next control period.

More good news came in March with the expected announcement from Network Rail that we are now down to a single route 'corridor' via Sandy. The capital cost of a route via Hitchin turned out to be almost as high as a more direct route with lower operating costs.

The 'Sandy Corridor' includes several route options from which one will be selected by September this year in order to meet the deadline for the next Network Rail Initial Industry Plan. At the Bedford end, the line could run out of Midland, St.Johns or a new parkway station on the Midland Main Line to the south. The line could then pass to the south or north of Sandy itself (with an interchange to the ECML) on its way to Cambridge, where all options show entering the City via a new station at Addenbrooke's. All show positive cost-benefit ratios.

Planning a new railway in the 21st century involves making similar choices to those faced by the pioneers in the 19th. The straighter you make your line, the shorter the route and the more attractive the journey time but this can present greater engineering challenges. Serving intermediate settlements can bring extra revenue but this has to be weighed against the costs of operating a slightly longer route. All these factors are included in the evaluation process.

There are, though, some significant differences that apply today. Newer technology means that, unlike the former 'Varsity' line, the new railway can be built with 125mph capability and this alters the business case. The rapid growth of both the economy and population of East Anglia have made it one of the UK's more significant regions and the new railway can benefit the cities of Norwich and Ipswich, each with science and telecommunications industries of their own, as well as Cambridge itself.

Rail campaigning has been likened to pushing a very large boulder up and over a hill; it requires a lot of effort and progress is very slow. One day you reach the top and your boulder starts to take on a momentum of its own until it becomes unstoppable. That is where we seem to be with East-West Rail. *PS*

East West Rail Link Western Section

Branch Committee member, John Henderson, attended an update talk on this section of EWRL at Bedford recently. He reports that Caryl Jones and Charles Hurst from the EWR Consortium and EWR2 Alliance respectively spoke. Caryl Jones said that EWR Western Section is now a DfT ‘priority 2’ scheme, but they are waiting for NR’s new Delivery Plan which is due to be published in December 2016 [therefore in the next few months, some scope for Rf to influence it]. The new Plan will clarify the full scope and schedule for the Western Section. HS2 will ‘have a massive impact’ as it requires re-routing of EWR and takes priority.

Charles Hurst was more precise. He said that engineering and environmental work were continuing towards a Transport Works Order application in late 2017. Allowing 2 years for approval means construction can start in late 2019 giving a completion date around 2021. Those dates were achievable provided the scope could be decided and frozen. The design of the line and the new passenger and freight services will be as previously planned, except that passive provision for electrification will be confined to the Oxford – Bletchley section.

The upgrade of the Princes Risborough – Aylesbury section is delayed indefinitely. Progress is being made on re-routing the road crossings between Bedford and Bletchley, but the approvals needed for each are difficult and taking a long time. For example, a diversity assessment is needed for each one. A new design for a re-route of the crossing at Lidlington will be out for consultation in June. *JH/PW*

Tendring Area Developments

John Smock and Tony Baxter report that ONTRACK AGM on Saturday 21st May 2016 produced lively debate on the topic **“WILL THE NEW FRANCHISE BE A GOOD DEAL FOR US?”** Cllr Mark Platt, Vice Chairman of Tendring District Council was Keynote Speaker and Richard Henry Boyd OBE, Alresford Essex also spoke. Valid points were made about the need to improve services and infrastructure to cope with massive new housing developments being targeted on an area so close to London.

A new member, a TfL manager, having lived in Brighton and elsewhere said that this attractive part of England was held back by the poor rail service i.e. frequency, speed, standard of rolling stock etc. **“ONTRACK”** is also going to change its Constitution in order to cover all public transport. After the debate there was also a short **“General Surgery Session”**.

Current hot issues are:

1. Proposed demolition of the Station Booking Offices/Houses at Alresford (Essex), Weeley and Kirby Cross; apparently DfT is giving money to Abellio Greater Anglia Railways to demolish these disused structures that have been allowed to rot for over 20 years or more and replace them in some cases with glass and steel waiting room structures. However, it is suspected this agenda is being driven by HM Treasury trying to reduce cash spending in the short term, because ONTRACK has used the same financial modelling analysis as prescribed in the Official “Green Book” that should have been applied for such decisions. This showed that better value for money lay in restoring these 100 - 150 year-old architectural gems that date from the construction of the Tendring Hundred Railway, which celebrates 150 years of reaching Walton-on-the-Naze during May 2017. The matter is now being dealt with by Tendring District Council Cabinet Members and Officers, Parish Councils and other Local Stakeholders. There is a general point of policy about the lack of maintenance of such public assets and replacing these with short life assets, for short term cash savings rather than long term community benefit.
2. Network Rail has announced plans to close a number of footpath crossings at various points across the GE main line and Harwich, Walton and Clacton lines: the Tendring District Council is assessing impacts in areas of outstanding natural beauty, wildlife conservation, housing and tourist interest. This announcement also involves level crossings in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, though not Norfolk, surprisingly. NR state that none of the proposals affect A or B classified roads. We will be watching closely and attending some of the local meetings planned by NR over the coming weeks. Go to: <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/anglialevelcrossings/>

The Meldreth Mechanism

At Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Stations we find that our Community Rail Partnership is exactly the mechanism needed to help progress vital strategic thinking. We are delighted to welcome AstraZeneca, as a local business, into the partnership and it has been great to work together with them, as well as Railfuture, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambs District Council and Govia Thameslink Railway on comprehensive station audits. With footfall rising rapidly (see next story) and the Thameslink roll-out on the horizon we must see improvements to cycle parking facilities and pedestrian access, and where possible, car parking capacity and all the features of good transport interchanges. How to bring about the necessary infrastructure improvements is the challenge ahead.

The management contract arrangement between GTR and the DfT appears to have constricted opportunities for small scale infrastructure needs, rather than opened them up. Two years into the franchise, there have been no improvements to cycle parking at any of our three stations.

We've had keen interest from local business in restoring Shepreth Station's disused main building, but arranging for a site visit through Network Rail's estates contractors is proving extraordinarily difficult. It would be a terrible shame to see this opportunity lost.



The trial of a Car Bike Port at Shepreth Station has proven highly successful – notably because after a two-year loan of this unique bike rack from Cambridgeshire County Council, we have had to part with it and are consequently short of cycle parking spaces.

Teenage volunteers have come forward in droves this year and will make a huge difference in keeping station gardens watered throughout the summer. Five are Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award students from Melbourn Village College and one is a 12-year-old from Harston Scouts.

Our Community Rail Partnership recently secured a grant from Cambridgeshire County Council for ‘Community Edible Gardening’ inspired partly by a GTR stakeholder meeting and learning from good practice elsewhere. This is taking place at Melbourn Primary School, the largest feeder village to Meldreth Station, and our station gardening team is now providing direct support to the school. *Susan van de Ven*

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Stations Audit

On Friday 25th March four branch members undertook a comprehensive audit of the first three stations out of Cambridge towards Royston.

The aim of the audit was to enable the Meldreth Shepreth Foxton Community Rail Partnership to have a clearer understanding of

- how the stations cope with existing traffic levels
- how the stations may cope with considerably more traffic in the future
- how more users can be attracted to the three stations to improve the sustainability of travel in the district

The footfall statistics for the year ending 2014 show a rapidly growing throughput which is expected to surge when the Thameslink service is introduced in 2018 together with likely road travel restrictions into Cambridge. The three closely spaced stations are showing distinct signs of not being ‘up to the job’ especially at Meldreth where there are severe accessibility problems.

Meldreth	267,218	+29.3% since 2010	+9.7% in 2015
Shepreth	105,802	+33.8% since 2010	+11.4% in 2015
Foxton	94,080	+30.5% since 2010	+7.9% in 2015
Total	467,100		

The full report can be accessed here:

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/docs/Railfuture-East-Anglia-2016-03-25-Station-Accessibility-Audit-Meldreth-Shepreth-Foxton.pdf> PW

Retirement of Peter Meades: Abellio Greater Anglia Media Manager

Peter Meades who has served the railway in East Anglia for nearly 4 decades, retired in April this year. Railfuture East Anglia conveyed their best wishes to Peter for his help and guidance over the years and wished him well for the future.

We expect he will keep in touch with developments in the region and hope to see him from time to time. *PS*



'Easy Stations' challenge

The recent Sir Peter Hendy Review attempts to resolve the log-jam of improvement schemes on the Network. One of the potential impacts of this is a reduction in the 'Access for All' programme of improvements to station facilities, particularly those aimed at passengers with reduced mobility. Unless your local station already has works underway, it is unlikely that you will see anything very much undertaken by Network Rail in the current control period (to 2019).

At our Branch AGM, Railfuture East Anglia resolved to issue a challenge to the Train Operating Companies to undertake improvements themselves. The 'Easy Station Awards' will issue certificates and plaques to those projects that show real progress in improving access to the rail network for those with prams, wheelchairs, cycles etc. or those with sensory impairment. Funded by a generous legacy from the late Clara Zilahi, we hope to launch this at the time of the new East Anglia franchise announcement. *PS*

Felixstowe Branch

We are aware of fresh proposals by Network Rail to ease congestion on the Felixstowe branch and accommodate the growing number of freight trains. Officially expected to handle 24 trains per day within 'reliable working margins', NR is actually safely routing 31 trains per day along the branch, though too often to the detriment of passenger service reliability!

Matters all round would be improved by this new proposal which would see some sections double tracked to permit up to 45 freight trains per day. Until works are carried out elsewhere on the network, it is not possible to handle more than 42 per day west of Ipswich. The plans will be subject to consultation next year with work likely to start during 2018. *PS*

Branch Meeting 14.00 hrs 25 June Ipswich
Venue is St Mary at Stoke Church Hall, IP2 8BX
Speaker: Steve Hooker Network Rail, Area Director Great Eastern Main Line

East Midlands Re-franchising

In late April Peter Wakefield and Chris Burton met a potential bid team representative regarding the next East Midlands franchise, even though the current holders, Stagecoach, are officially in place until March 2018. Naturally our prime concern was the Norwich to Liverpool service with particular focus on the Norwich-Ely-Peterborough section.



We made clear that though the hourly service had improved immensely under Stagecoach management in terms of reliability, smartness and engagement with stakeholders, the overall average speed of around 45mph for a 255 mile long service was wholly unacceptable in the 21st century. We noted that one train per week, Sunday's 15.54 ex Norwich, avoids Ely station by using the Ely West Curve. It waits an extra 9 minutes at Peterborough to use up the time saved!

We pointed out that in many ways it could be called the University Link serving as it does Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham and Norwich, not to mention Cambridge, a mere 15 miles from the stop at Ely. If the service were to divert via Loughborough, a sixth university of note could be added. Therefore Sunday services during term are very important to students.

Essentially we conveyed our six priorities as:

- Shortened journey times, especially *Norwich-Peterborough, Ely-Nottingham*.
- Revise the timetable to enable services to run at half hourly interval Norwich to Ely before the development of the services mentioned below
- All day Sunday service reflecting Saturday
- Core off peak service to run to/from Yarmouth seven days a week, ie: 4 or 5 services a day
- Retain through service Norwich to Liverpool as now
- Or, if the alleged "plan" by DfT and local authorities to run Norwich service to/from Nottingham only materialises, we will still want real service development, ie; better trains and faster transits between all pairs of important towns along the route
- If DfT insist on so called 'remapping north of Nottingham', consider running Norwich service on to Derby-Stoke on to Stoke on Trent-Crewe-Manchester Airport....entirely within EMT network area
- Only if 2tph /Wisbech/King's Lynn/Norwich-Cambridge service pattern develops (6tph plus 1tph Ipswich-Peterborough) we would not oppose a reroute of EMT via Ely West Curve thus avoiding using paths up between Ely station- Ely North Junction. March would then become a service interchange station again with facilities to match. *PW*

After much deliberation the Office for Rail and Road (ORR) announced on May 12th that First Group would be allowed to run a five-times-a-day, Open Access (OA) service for eleven years from 2021, linking Edinburgh with King's Cross, Stevenage, Newcastle and Morpeth (easier parking?).

This brings another OA business to the route, complementing Grand Central and First Group's other OA operation, the popular Hull Trains. Alliance Rail were denied their application to run tilting Pendolinos to Edinburgh in under four hours (and to Yorkshire), confirming the prime critical factor on this route; track capacity. It might also be claimed that First's intention to run a five-coach formation is not in itself ideal use of notably limited pathing opportunities.

The buzz for travellers is the promise of a £25 average ticket price plus, for us in West Anglia, a portal at Stevenage connecting frequently to Royston and Cambridge. But all this might come at a higher medium term price, as quite how much this new operation will be contributing to future investment via Track Access Charges is unknown. Meanwhile its immediate competitor, Stagecoach/Virgin East Coast, has an onerous franchise contract which commits to paying the Treasury (us, the tax payer) £3.3 billion over its eight year tenure.



Richard Branson as ever grabs every publicity opportunity going, as here in Alistair Anderson's excellent record of the first visit to King's Cross of Hitachi's new Intercity Class 800/1 bi-mode train on 18 March 2016.

Add to this an expensive leasing contract covering operating and maintaining a big fleet of Hitachi's new Class 800/801 express trains, and one grasps why Government and Virgin/East Coast are getting somewhat agitated by this development. That nefarious thing, Rumour, has it that East Coast business is in any case levelling out rather than growing. If true, discouraging news for all east coast main line operators.

For decades, successive governments have subscribed to a policy of rail users funding an ever increasing percentage of investment in trains and infrastructure (71% in 2014-15 ORR figures). Therefore all operators should contribute proportionally, otherwise a faltering cash-flow might induce a reciprocal reduction in spending on the railway.

That said, First Group does have to grow a new market to survive; the market currently using budget airlines. It is a particularly challenging remit too, as First is unable to gain revenue from the lucrative stations between Stevenage and Newcastle and Morpeth and Edinburgh.

The irony is that, if successful, though it may reduce demand for air travel over this route, very much an environmental aspiration of successive governments, it will simultaneously curtail government transport income if it filches too much existing East Coast revenue. Oh dear.

But the Competition and Markets Authority are said to be taking an interest in this proposal, suggesting some financial fancy footwork still to come. For details of First Group's proposals go to: <http://www.firstgroupplc.com/news-and-media/latest-news/2016/12-05-16.aspx> CB

Cambridge Cruiser to get Class 387 trains

A tranche of these units, seen here under construction for Gatwick Ex. during March at Bombardier's Derby factory, has been earmarked for deployment on the fast King's Cross-Cambridge-King's Lynn service, thus deposing the originally nominated '377s currently working on Thameslink services. Apart from being brand new and air-conditioned, the '387s are capable of 110mph rather than the 100mph maximum of the '377s.

This additional turn of speed will see them through the Welwyn double-track bottleneck quicker thereby easing congestion. This news pleases our Branch greatly because it has been lobbying for exactly this outcome for at least five years. Some of the present trains (Class 365) will remain in service on the route though. CB



Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association (MARPA)

Continuing our series on local Rail User Groups we turn our attention to MARPA whose remit member John Drake now describes.

MARPA was formed (with the assistance of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society) in July 1990 at a meeting in Bury St Edmunds, initially as Mid Suffolk Travellers Association. A concern at the time was recent cuts in trains stopping at the smaller stations and the effect on local business. The aim was to cover the Ipswich–Bury St Edmunds–Cambridge route and to Ely via Soham.

Since then there have been gradual improvements in services so that we now have an hourly service between Ipswich and Cambridge. Passenger numbers have increased to the extent that there is now serious overcrowding on certain trains despite most trains being recently increased to 3 carriages.

We are now campaigning for more trains to stop at Kennett and Dullingham (which are not served by all trains). Another aspiration is for the service to be increased to half hourly on weekdays and to hourly on Sundays (presently two hourly). We also want the Ipswich – Peterborough service increased from two hourly to hourly.

We have put these aspirations to the bidders for the franchise commencing in October and anxiously await the details of the new contract. Hence Mid Suffolk Travellers Association becoming Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association.

We also maintain contact with local authorities, other interested parties and railway managers about problems and desired improvements including the setting up of a community rail partnership, but a problem has been the involvement of two county councils. The condition of some stations (e.g. Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds) has been a concern but constant campaigning is now producing some improvements.

A few years ago we were approached by Roger Wolfe of Ramblers about publishing a series of station to station walks as had been done for the East Suffolk line. After discussions it was agreed that the walks should be included on our website with leaflets for each walk able to be downloaded and printed. The walks have been revised and new ones added so there is now a total of 14 covering sections of the Ipswich to Cambridge and Ely route.

In order to reflect as broadly as possible the needs of MARPA-route rail travellers, we naturally seek as many members as possible. To join just contact John Drake at: <http://www.marpa.org.uk/>

Olga (and Albert) Honoured at Halesworth (and Oulton Broad respectively).

Mike Farahar reports that ESTA commemorated the pioneering work of two of the Association's founding members with the provision of seats at East Suffolk line stations.

Installed in February at Oulton Broad South and Halesworth, the memorial benches are for Albert Godfrey, who was ESTA's Chairman for many years and latterly President, and for Olga Awty, Vice-President. Rf EA Branch provided £200 towards the cost of these benches from Clara Zilahi's legacy fund, the branch's contribution being acknowledged on plaques on both benches. (Pictured is Olga Awty's memorial seat at Halesworth.



IPSWICH STATION FORECOURT: A COVER UNCOVERED!

The cover of our last edition featured the scheme to improve Ipswich Station forecourt. They must have known, as no sooner had we gone to press than work was halted by legal difficulties. Although we understand that these are now resolved and small design changes made, work had still not re-started at the end of April with time running out for completion as the current franchise ends in October. *PW*

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And there we have to close this RE magnum opus: nothing more until September for which contributions, please, by Sunday 4 September. Stories WITH photographs are always favoured, if you can. Otherwise, thank you very much for everything you have contributed, it is always greatly appreciated. Thanks too to John Clark who volunteers his great skills in page design.

June Meeting

Saturday 25 June at 14.00hrs.

**St. Mary at Stoke Church Hall, Stoke Street
Ipswich IP2 8BX**

**Guest Speaker: Steve Hooker Network Rail
Area Director Great Eastern Main Line**

**Our Autumn Meeting will take place on 25 September
in the Friends Meeting House, Norwich NR2 1EW
Speaker TBA**

Railfuture

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Design and Artwork - Ryecroft Data 01763 208843