

STANSTED AIRPORT - BRAINTREE RAILWAY

(A Paper for Discussion)

INTRODUCTION

Whilst this project has appeared in the last two editions of the Society's publication "**A-Z of Rail Reopenings**" it has never been the subject of really vigorous campaigning for the simple reason that the Society has concentrated its efforts on the greater prize of the Strategic "**East - West Rail Link**". (Ipswich - Cambridge - Bedford - Bletchley - Oxford - Swindon - Bristol). Nevertheless in the original leaflet produced to launch this project an extension of the Stansted Airport Branch east to Braintree and Chelmsford/Colchester was seen as a longer term project.

The purpose of this Paper, therefore, is to look at the historical background and suggest that the time has come when this proposal needs to be taken more seriously. The reason for this is simple.

Road Development.

THE ROAD PROPOSALS

Plans to further expand the capacity of the currently largely single carriageway A120 east of Stansted Airport are once again being seriously considered. The A120 now has severe congestion problems, exacerbated by the enormous growth in traffic at Stansted Airport, considerable growth in towns such as Bishop's Stortford and increased commuting and general travel demand. Another contributing factor has been changes by the DETR in signposting and road numbering (e.g. abolition of the A604 as a through route from Cambridge to Colchester and Harwich) encouraging more traffic to use the A120 as a matter of policy. To this end the following proposals appeared in the Government's recent Roads Review - Consultation Document (at page 56).

A120 STANSTED - BRAINTREE

Standard D2

Scheme cost £87.5 million.

Length 24.0.km

Next Stage OM Developer Funding

"Improvement of the A120 from Thremhall Avenue (Stansted Airport) just east of Airport Junction 2 to the western end of the A120 Braintree Bypass near Pannors is part of a Trans European Road Network route. The scheme's objectives are to provide part of a new trunk road between the M11 (Junction 8) at Stansted Airport and the A12 at Marks Tey; to provide additional traffic capacity and to provide adequate access for towns and villages in the route corridor; to improve safety and provide environmental relief along the existing A120 by removing through traffic".

It is, however, a well-known fact that, at certain times, serious congestion occurs at Junction 8, (between the M11 and Stansted Airport) to the extent that traffic has been known to back up on the motorway itself back beyond the Harlow turn-off (Junction 7). To cope with this situation it is also proposed to spend a further £24.7 million between Junction 8 and Stansted Airport Junction 2 (a distance of some 2.4km) by providing dedicated slip roads between the M11 (south), A120 (east) and Stansted Airport at a cost of £24.7 million.

The Grand Total (for the two projects) is £112.2.million

THE RAIL ALTERNATIVE

(which can be achieved for at the most £40 million)

An alternative to this destructive road construction would be to re-open an east - west rail link from Stansted Airport to Braintree, using much of the disused railway alignment of the abandoned Bishop's Stortford to Braintree Railway. This would link up with existing railways at both ends and revolutionise the currently poor public transport in the area with both new local and regional direct links.

History of the Bishops Stortford to Braintree Railway

Railways from London reached Bishop's Stortford in 1842 and Witham in 1843. A branch line from Witham subsequently reached Braintree in 1848. An east - west branch linking Bishop's Stortford and Braintree was opened in 1869, partly for political reasons to prevent competitors, but also to provide a more

direct route for goods traffic and open up new passenger traffic. Four intermediate stations were initially provided at **Rayne, Felsted, Dunmow and Takeley**. A further 4 stations and halts were subsequently constructed on the route by 1922. There were 2 level crossings on the route, at Rayne and Eastern Lodge. The line was always largely rural in nature; with agricultural traffic always the most important traffic. This situation and the lack of significant commuter traffic amongst the largely agrarian community limited passenger traffic.

Regular passenger traffic ended as early as 1952, as bus and car competition, together with a lack of innovation in services led to a reduction in traffic. Freight traffic survived, however, until 1969 and subsequently all the track was lifted by 1974. Since then nature has reclaimed much of the route, which has also been developed as the Flitch Way, a linear walking and cycling route by Essex County Council. While some sections and structures have been removed, much of the route from Takeley to Braintree survives intact.

Current state of the Right of Way

From a junction linking with the existing railway branch to Stansted Airport, the new railway would follow a new alignment across the Airport approach road and the A 120 to then probably join the disused railway in the vicinity of Takeley.

The B183 road overbridge west of Takeley station is intact, as is **Takeley Station** building itself although slightly dilapidated and apparently in use by BTCV, an environmental group. A single platform is still evident but new housing covers the goods yard.

The next road overbridge (Canfield Road) is intact. The access Road to Crumps Farm Landfill site (includes household recycling facilities) crosses the railway on the level. **A freight opportunity for the railway perhaps?** The railway bridge over the river Roding is intact, but closed, presumably for safety reasons (low walls and high drop). The bridge over the access lane to Canfield End is also intact. The next road overbridge (Highcross Lane) was filled in during 1976, as an arch had cracked and also to allow larger lorries to cross. The bridge is still in situ underneath.

Easton Lodge Halt. An 1890's crossing keeper's cottage and level crossing hut are still in situ and now used as a private house. The platform area is now their garden, but there are no structures impeding the right of way. The nearby Geest banana ripening centre, opened in 1962, provides another freight opportunity for the re-opened railway. Adjacent High Cross Lane is crossed on level - it was one of the two original level crossings on the railway - as is Buttleys Lane.

Great Dunmow. The disused railway trackbed has been incorporated into the Dunmow bypass and the station and viaduct crossing of the River Chelmer have long been demolished. There appears to be sufficient space alongside the bypass and underneath two overbridges (1 pedestrian and 1 road) to fit the railway along or close to the original alignment.

This area seems to be one of the biggest obstacles for the new railway to negotiate.

The trackbed can be picked up on the other side of the demolished viaduct, where it is intact until **Felsted** station, where a considerable length of it is now in use as accommodation for Travellers, including some brick-built structures. The station itself remains and is in private ownership. The station road railway bridge was removed in 1978 to allow lorries to access the adjacent Sugar Beet factory. Ironically, the factory closed in 1981, but is still apparently partly in commercial use with dumper trucks parked outside.

Thereafter, 3 rail bridges over roads are intact before a new A120 crosses the railway route on the level. There is no evidence of **Bannister Green Halt**. After a further intact rail bridge, **Rayne Station** is reached. The station was renovated in 1994 as a Visitor Centre and Ranger base for the Flitch Way. The single platform has also been restored. Once again, new housing is being built on what was previously railway land, with an access road crossing the railway on the level. The road overbridge on leaving Rayne is intact.

There are four further road crossings before reaching **Braintree Station**. The three rail bridges have been replaced with pedestrian bridges, while the road overbridge has only a pedestrian gauge tunnel through it at present, although the original rail gauge structure is still there.

Braintree station area is being refurbished, with only a single platform remaining. Through running would still be possible with the current layout. Sufficient space remains to reinstate a second platform on the original site.

Outline Proposals

1. The RDS believes that this railway should be reinstated to:-

- (a) Provide a direct rail route between Stansted Airport and Eastern Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk;
- (b) Provide new opportunities for rail travel between the Upper Roding Valley, Stort Valley and Cambridge to Eastern Essex through Stansted;
- (c) Avoid the need to expand the A120 trunk road;
- (d) Provide incentives for airlines to offer more flights from Stansted, thereby relieving demand at Heathrow and Gatwick Airports.

2. The line would use the last half mile of the Stansted Airport branch. The work required consists of:-

- (a) Construction of about 1.5 miles (2.4km) of new single track between the Stansted Airport branch and a point just west of Takeley on the former Bishop's Stortford - Braintree line.
Works needed include bridges under the Airport approach road and over the A120.
- (b) Reinstating a single track on the former railway trackbed between just west of Takeley and Braintree (c. 13 miles, 20.9 km), with stations at Takeley, Dunmow and Rayne. A halt at Felsted may also be viable later on if housing development were to follow in the next few years.
- (c) The main civil engineering works would be reinstatement of a structure east of Dunmow crossing the River Chelmer and the A130, and a bridge to carry the line over the A120 west of Rayne.
- (d) The railway would lie on the south side of the A120 in Dunmow - should that part of the proposed A120 forming a new southern Dunmow bypass be constructed, the whole width of the present A120 at Dunmow might be available for the railway.

3. The line could be operated initially by extending the existing service from Witham and London to Braintree on to Stansted Airport. New stations should be provided at an early stage at Rayne, Great Dunmow and Takeley to encourage commuting by airport based staff. In the longer term a service from Stansted Airport could run to Braintree and either reverse at Witham or traverse a new north-east curve towards Kelvedon and Marks Tey, Colchester, Manningtree, Ipswich and Norwich.

4. Journey times from Stansted Airport would be about 9-10 minutes to Dunmow, 16 minutes to Braintree. Stansted - Colchester would take about 45 minutes with about an hour to Ipswich.

5. Additional new services could give direct rail access to Stansted Airport from principal stations between London and Cambridge as part of WAGN's service expansion. This could be achieved by extending Bishop's Stortford stopping trains to Stansted and on to Cambridge after reversal.

Many direct rail journey opportunities to Stansted (or with one change) become possible from East London and much of Hertfordshire, many parts of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk.

Estimated Capital Costs

	£m
New Rail Link - Stansted Airport Jct - west of Takeley - 2.4 km	5.0
Relaying of track, west of Takeley - Braintree - 20.9km	16.00
Electrification, Signalling and Telecommunications	8.00
Crossing of A130 and River Chelmer and A130 near Dunmow	2.00
Crossing of A120 west of Rayne	1.00
New or rebuilt stations at Takeley, Great Dunmow and Rayne	4.00
Contingency for bridge works	4.00

Estimated Total

£40.00m

↑ To Cambridge

Audley End

Newport

Elsenham

Stansted
Airport

Stansted
Mountfitchet

Bishops
Stortford

Sawbridgeworth

Harlow Mill

Harlow
Town

↓ To Tottenham Hale
and Liverpool Street

A120 A10 - M11 - Bishops Stortford - Braintree - Colchester Road

Takeley

Great
Dunmow

Felstead

Rayne

Braintree

Cressing

White Noteley

Kelvedon

Witham

To
Colchester, Clacton,
Ipswich and Norwich

Improved Rail Access to Stansted Airport

A new rail link, connecting Stansted Airport with East Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk could be achieved simply by restoring part of the former railway running west from Braintree to Great Dunmow and Takeley, and then takes a short new route into the existing Airport station.

Frequent modern electric trains could provide a real alternative to the increasing volume of road traffic using the A120 and A130. With an integrated transport policy, rail can provide a viable solution to ever increasing car use, lowering congestion and pollution levels.

Much of the route from Takeley to Braintree remains intact, as the Flich Way. Some realignment may be necessary particularly near Great Dunmow where the A120 road now occupies the former trackbed.

RDS recognises the importance of the Flich Way route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. However the need for a regular and reliable train service for airport workers and passengers must be balanced against those of leisure users.

To Romford, Stratford
and Liverpool Street

FEASIBILITY

So what has been done to date to put such a proposal to the test?

As long ago as November 1994 Essex Highways Consultancy was appointed by the County Council to investigate and report on the feasibility of a railway line linking Braintree with Stansted Airport. This study stemmed from requests made by the Witham and Braintree Rail Users Association and from work carried out on their behalf in 1991. The study concluded that the proposed rail link would be realistic from a commercial point of view and whilst the freight potential of the scheme needed to be considered in greater detail at a later stage, any potential opportunities in this respect would in essence add to the viability associated with passenger rail services established by the study at that stage.

N.B. A subsequent re-appraisal of the scheme, carried out by Ove, Arup and Partners for the County Council found it to be no less viable.

Furthermore during the Public Inquiry into the proposed new A120 (as outlined above), held from 16-25 April 1995, FoE and CPRE Essex pointed out that no consideration for a future rail link had been made in the plans for the road. Members of the Essex Alliance for Sustainable Transport (EAST) and other objectors also pointed out that the badly needed link for airport users and workers would also provide inter county links from Essex to Cambridge and the north. Also that the second largest source of Stansted Airport travellers is from Essex, whose only access by rail has to be via Liverpool Street.

The most recent Essex County Council feasibility study costed out the reinstated rail link at around £35 million for a single-track electrified line with passing loops and various stations. It concluded that "the proposed rail link would be realistic from a commercial point of view". It would breathe new life into the Witham - Braintree Railway. With a new north-to-east curve at Witham, direct access to Stansted will be possible from NE Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk and well as from the Chelmsford direction. **Freight opportunities would be an added bonus.**

So why has nothing been done to implement these proposals?

That is a question which RDS and other concerned representatives of transport users have been asking for some time. The answer seems to be that local MPs, MEPs and many Councillors are still obsessed with outmoded concepts of road-building as a solution to all transport ills and appear to be out of step with current Government thinking and, more particularly with obligations under the Road Traffic Reduction Act to reduce car usage and air pollution.

As EAST put in a Paper to a Conference in October 1997 "Building new roads on a 'predict and provide' basis is no longer acceptable, yet here in Essex we are left with outdated major road schemes, planned in a different era, which fly in the face of current policies. If built, these roads will create congestion on the rest of the major roads in Essex. Funding for the maintenance of our roads is already a problem."

RDS therefore considers that the time to start campaigning for this sensible proposal is NOW!!!!

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Any Comments on this Paper and, more particularly, how we should move this project forward, should be sent to me at 108, Berwick Road, London, E16 3DS

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