raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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First train arrives at 06:35. Photo by Jerry Alderson

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION OPENED ON 28 JUNE 2026...



AND ATTRACTS 110,000 USERS IN ITS FIRST 28 DAYS

BUT WAIT UNTIL YOU READ ABOUT THE SECOND MONTH!

Crowded peak-time platform. Photo by Peter Wakefield

Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

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- East Coast Mainline is full
- Cost analysis of the Ely upgrade
- Stowmarket station accessibility
- Cambridge train-bus integration
- Tempsford as a super hub?
- Change management challenges
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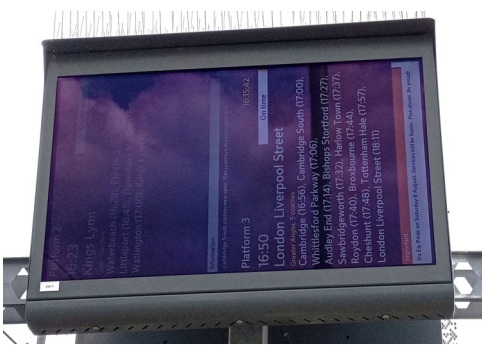
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The second part of Jerry Alderson's Interrail article will be in issue 212 (November 2026) and will include his visit to InnoTrans in Berlin in September 2026, which he will be attending with Railfuture's Policy Director, Ian Brown. A reminder that we are also on the lookout for new contributors to RAIL EAST.

Photo on the left shows a rather unhelpful customer information screen seen on the island platform at Cambridge North station on 26 July 2026, photo by Jerry Alderson. On the right, Ian Couzens with the two guest speakers at the Ipswich meeting in June 2026 (from Ben Walsh). Our Cambridge meeting on 28 November will have a speaker from East West Rail — it's not to be missed!





FROM THE CHAIR

BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH



Hearing about troubles in recent years with Deutsche Bahn (see also Jerry Alderson's article in June 2026 RAIL EAST) I took a bit of care on a recent trip to Germany to build some slack into our travel schedules. While there were no particular issues on the first part of the trip, ominously the indicator boards at different stations showed late running for a significant proportion of trains.

When travelling to our second destination in the Harz mountains, disruption caught up with us as our own train broke down a little short of the journey's end. Then, with our homeward departure two days later, things got much worse. Our train came to a halt only 10 minutes out due to line problems ahead and on crawling into the next station we were all told to leave the train. Passengers were then left waiting outside the station without any information for a bus which we hoped would arrive at some point! Instead, we opted to take a taxi to the next junction station where trains were running, but it was all too late to make our connection at Hannover for our booked onward train to Amsterdam. It was also too late to make the compulsory reservations needed for any later trains as they too were all fully booked. In the end we arrived in Amsterdam some 4½ hours late, having had to take a total of eight regional and local trains to cross Germany and the Netherlands!



Many people probably still think that trains in Germany run on time, consistent with the old image of German efficiency, and that their trains must inevitably be better than our own. But the sorry fact is that underinvestment in the German rail system over the last three decades has stored up a host of problems that are now manifest in Deutsche Bahn's poor performance. To be fair, a good deal of investment was put in to modernise the East German system after unification in the 1990s, but not nearly enough has been made within Germany as a whole.

Of course, the lesson here is that investment has to keep flowing to maintain performance and that no railway, however good, can rest on its laurels for long. Despite all the problems of the privatised railway there has been investment in Britain and we in East Anglia have certainly benefited, particularly with the complete renewal of rolling stock by our main train operator. The performance figures for Greater Anglia reflect this, of course. However, performance will only be maintained if investment continues to flow and indeed as demand still continues to grow, even more will be needed to accommodate this growth. Where things do go wrong it goes without saying that passengers need to be kept informed quickly and accurately, and that contingency measures should exist to make their onward journey as painless as possible.

Railfuture Events—Site visit to Crown Point Depot and Cambridge meeting

In the June issue of RAIL EAST, I said that Greater Anglia had kindly allowed a small group of Railfuture members an exclusive visit of its Crown Point depot in Norwich on 26 September and I asked for any interested members to contact me by 31 August. We still have a couple of spare places, so please apply to me. The visit will be a great opportunity to see the work that goes on behind the scenes in keeping the Greater Anglia fleet working so effectively day in day out. We look forward to reporting in detail about our visit in RAIL EAST issue 212.

We will not be holding a branch meeting in Norwich on that day. The next East Anglia branch meeting will be at 14.00 on **Saturday 28 November in Cambridge** (at a new venue — see page 24) when the speaker will be Stuart Ratcliffe, head of external communications at the East West Rail Company.

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION OPENS

BY JERRY ALDERSON

COVER STORY

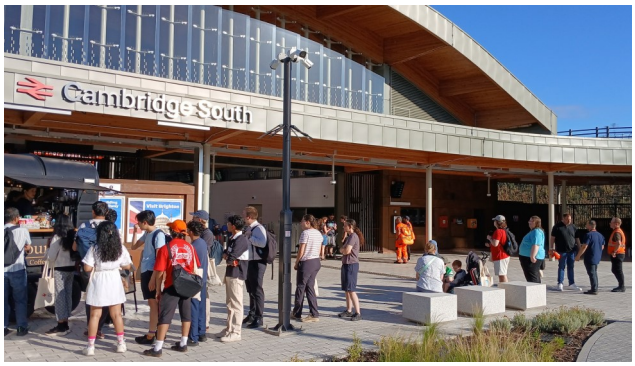
In Britain around half a dozen new stations are built each year. In 2026 so far there have been nine, and Cambridge South is the largest in every way: station size, project size, project cost and expected patronage. And the latter is key. It's why Railfuture and others campaign for them, local government promotes them and the government funds them. The cover of this issue of RAIL EAST shows that Cambridge South has delivered high numbers from day one. But as the late Jimmy Cricket would have said "…and there's more".

The 110,000 users figure in the first 28 days was joyfully blasted out in press releases and on social media. Railfuture and its affiliated user group, MARPA, have been told the latest figure and we're allowed to reveal it here.



There have been **300,000** users of the station in the first two months. We weren't told exactly how many days that covers, but if the second month was 180,000, that would mean 2,160,000 per year (**2,090,000 in the first year**). Railfuture expects that September will be even busier as the holiday season will have ended and all the Long Road 6th form students will be back. In the coming years as the Biomedical Campus continues to grow, the six million per year estimate by Edward Leigh (formerly of Smarter Cambridge Transport and now a senior transport officer at North Herts Council), who was an 'objector' at the station's public inquiry (against an inadequately sized station) could well be proven correct. The front-page photo and the one above show, perhaps surprisingly, how many passengers are young.

The official estimate was a mere 1,800,000, but we all knew that was absurdly low. The Treasury sets the formula, which has been shown to be pessimistic time and time again. Cynics would say it's because it wants schemes to fail the business case. Regardless, we need more accurate estimates in future.



Unsurprisingly, several Railfuture members got up early to be on the very first train, which left Cambridge station at 06.20 and arrived at 06.25 (see front cover). The station soon became busy — the photo on the right is outside the eastern entrance at 07:17, less than an hour after the first train.

Railfuture has been campaigning for this station since the 1980s, then as part of a cross-city rail service including the St Ives line, but as it would have only served Addenbrooke's Hospital (no buildings existed next to the railway line) no-one could have envisaged much more than a basic two-platform station for four- or eight-car trains and providing a couple of shelters. No CCTV, help points or even TVMs would have been expected in those days, and it could well have been unstaffed. What we have got isn't quite a science fiction dream but reflects the growth in Cambridge to become a significant contributor to the UK's economy. Google says: "By 2040, approximately 60,000 people are expected to travel daily to work or visit the adjacent Cambridge Biomedical Campus, alongside over 33,000 local residents living within a 2km walking and cycling distance of Cambridge South station". As magnificent as the station may seem at first glance, it does beg the question: is the station we have been given actually good enough to serve all those people?

So, what did we get, and not get, for £250 million?

Given the strong public reaction to the botched proposal in 2023 to redefine the delivery of rail retail and information at many stations, it was no surprise that the government has decided not to provide a traditional ticket office at any new station (Beaulieu Park didn't have one — see RAIL EAST issue 208). The issue is not the absence of the 'chair, desk and window' but the inability to help people with non-standard transactions — if it cannot be done at the ticket vending machine (TVM) then it cannot be done at all, with the customer sent packing to a 'proper' station. Chiltern Railways had no problem providing 'hosts' with the full retailing abilities, but Greater Anglia has chosen not to do so at its new stations. There is an impressive array of four TVMs at the eastern (main) entrance (photo, right) and another two on the western side. Contrast this to Great Northern, where life-expired TVMs are not always being replaced — it says that the growth in contactless and online tickets has reduced use of TVMs.

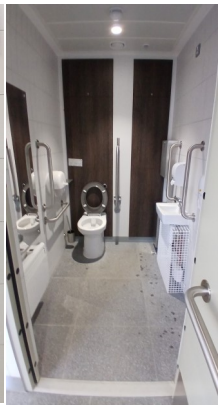


The most noticeable feature of Cambridge South is its lovely streamlined building (a superb wooden roof and some artistic elements such as poetry on the staircase balustrades, see photo) with entrances on both the western (for Trumpington) and eastern (for the Biomedical Campus and hospitals) sides. It is good that Peterborough will soon be getting its western entrance, with East West Rail delivering second entrances for Bletchley, Bedford and Cambridge 'Central' stations. It is surprising, however, that there are no doors on either side. In winter the wind is going to be howling through the station, and there is no way to keep people warm (or cool in summer for that matter). Although there is a shelter (not a waiting room) on the island platform, if a traveller really wants to avoid the cold there are just two options: hide in a toilet or the lift. Station staff, who will be exposed to the elements for their entire shift, have privately expressed concerns to Railfuture — a pity the designers didn't consider this.



On the subject of toilets, there are male, female, accessible and changing places toilets. The bad news is that they found space for just a single cubicle for men and another for women. This compares badly with Cambridge North which had a business case estimate of only 800,000 passengers per annum (now attracting 1.6 million). With frequent train services it is not expected that people will hang around, but the toilets are clearly inadequate and problematic when the cubicle is out of order, as it was on the station's third day!





An impressive number of cyclists have been riding to this supposedly 'destination-only' station, proving that it will be the closest and most convenient origin station for many people. There are racks for 500 cycles on each side, making 1,000 in total, the same as Cambridge North, which seems to have set the acceptable minimum in Cambridge. Whether Cambridge East will get the same is uncertain.

The curved shape of the stairs precludes any bicycle runnels, although they could have been installed on the stairs down to the island platforms.



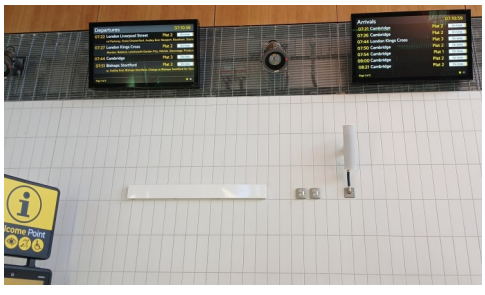
The walking route between the cycle racks and the station entrances (both sides) is completely under cover. A pity the same cannot be said for passengers boarding and alighting their trains. The Department for Transport (or is it the Treasury?) insists on a minimum-viable product (MVP) whereby the customers are the least important party on the railway. The canopies stretch along only a third of the 12-carriage platforms, despite most of the services having eight or 12 carriages. The brand-new platforms at Darlington have canopies to the very end, as did platform 0 at Doncaster, which was built in 2015. Why is there no consistency? It wouldn't be so bad if there were shelters scattered along the platform (as there are at Cambridge North) but there is nothing, not even a seat, beyond the end of the canopy, despite passengers heading for London wanting to be at the southern-most end for a fast exit at either King's Cross or Liverpool Street stations. It will be bleak in a cold winter. Does the rail management not have metrics to show how dwell times increase in really bad weather as people bunch up through lack of cover?

Perhaps there is no space for shelters or seats because of the absurd number of poles supporting the lights, audio announcements and CCTV. A separate pole enables each to be maintained individually, but surely that is rare and they can share a pole — a saving on construction cost and the carbon cost of manufacturing the steel for those poles. However, space is made for several wheelchair ramps to be stored, less of a walk for staff to lug them.



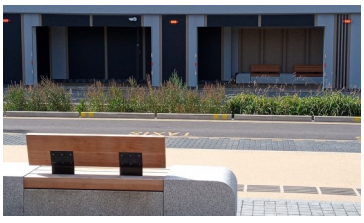
The usual transparent plastic bag litter bins are present on the platforms but none in the building, hopefully to be rectified. Full marks for tactile wayfinding navigation around the station and outside it. There is currently a mobile coffee kiosk in front of the eastern entrance, which is passed by many people. There is only one retail outlet and that is on the western side, before the gate-line. It seems entirely the wrong location to get good trade. There's plenty of space for a portable kiosk inside.

For £250 million, couldn't they have afforded some impressive information screens, perhaps a smaller version of the kind you see in London terminals? Instead there are two standard sized screens high-up in the area where 50 of more people might easily congregate in cold weather. On the footbridge itself, you would struggle to find any screen — there is one, hidden away near the lifts to platform 4.



In the "you couldn't make it up" category, there is a covered seating area next to where GA staff park their cars, where no other vehicles are allowed to stop, but there's no cover on the other side where people sit waiting to be picked up. A clear lack of thought.





Despite the nit-picking it is wonderful that we finally have this much needed station.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT — SHOULD IT BE SO DIFFICULT?

BY JERRY ALDERSON

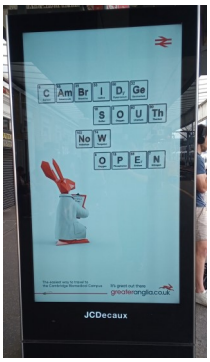
The opening of Cambridge South station is a significant change for the rail industry, and previous issues of RAIL EAST have looked at the infrastructure enhancements to mitigate the journey time increases of calling at a new station. But adding a new station reverberates throughout the railway and many organisations outside it. With 30 years of fragmentation, there is no guiding mind or single person to make sure every box is ticked. Indeed, there is probably no-one compiling such a checklist.

The government, having spent £250 million on the project, announced the 28 June opening date seven weeks before, on 11 May, in a fanfare of press releases. That's great for everyone on the 'inside' or those who follow rail news, but no-one thought to tell the passengers — they're the ones (the only ones) who would benefit from it.

The sooner the public became aware of the opening date then the sooner they could make plans to use it and to tell other people about it. That's why many commercial businesses would have erected large posters, not least a banner outside the new station. The railway did promote it, of course, but only properly in the two weeks before opening, and to Greater Anglia's credit, some impressive and inventive promotion (above).





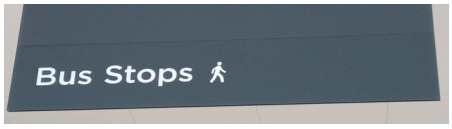


The challenge is to encourage external parties to promote the station, and time was spent over several months to do so. Wandering around the Biomedical Campus you'll see a lot of signage that show the station and others that don't, plus maps that mention it but without the BR arrows that everyone is familiar with. It is disappointing that the closest building, the Royal Papworth Hospital, has signs for "Bus Stops" (right) but nothing about the railway. Easy to rectify.









Does the lack of a direction sign for trains matter? Well, look at the view (right) as you come out of Papworth — can you see a station? Of course, we live in the age of Google Maps and it will surely guide us there. But how many people will never use the station because they don't know that it exists? There will be many visitors who are not local.



It is the railway's job (a project manager whose role goes way beyond construction and initial opening) to ensure that the station is publicised, and to provide material to relevant organisations. If you go into Addenbrooke's hospital you will not find any information or directions to the station, not even in the concourse.

A fun photo in RAIL EAST issue 209 prematurely showed the station as open. But the railway did get its act together; at Cambridge North trains stopped but doors remained locked until the driver did an emergency evacuation! Lesson learned.

DEWIREMENT NORTH OF CAMBRIDGE — CHAOS REIGNED
BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

It's inevitable that things will go wrong on the railway. It could be designed better to remove single points of failure, for example, but we are largely stuck with the railway we have. However, how incidents are dealt with really matters, and passengers need to be looked after.

It was disappointing how long it took to provide any information or useful assistance to passengers on Friday 3 July 2026 when Cambridge suffered serious disruption after train 1T08, the 07:24 King's Cross to King's Lynn service, de-wired north of Cambridge station at 08:24. This closed Cambridge station for several hours and blocked the route north of Cambridge until late evening. The pantograph on the leading unit was severely damaged, with wires wrapped around it, while the pantograph on the rear unit automatically dropped.

The next issue of RAIL EAST (212 in November 2026) will look at this incident in more detail, based on the rail industry's incident log, which Railfuture has obtained (log header, right). One thing which looks particularly poor is that it was three hours before Great Northern requested taxis for the passengers stuck at Waterbeach. Meanwhile, below is a short summary of how it affected the line north of Cambridge

1T08 dewirement 30 OHL Dewirement	**Location:** Coldham Lane Junction **Line:** Up and Down	**Incident** 3294378 03/07/2026 08:20 **Fault Number:** 1180578 **Possession Ref:** **BTP Ref:** **3rd Party Ref:**
Area: A - ROM Outer	**Action:** MOM/OHL/BTP/TOCS/SSM	

Incident Start	Advised	Initial Resp	NWR	Booked In Order
0820	0824	0827	2322	03/07/2026 2322

The incident caused the electrical supply to trip and affected the section from the power feed at Milton through to the neutral sections south of Shepreth Branch Junction. As a result, Cambridge North, Cambridge and Cambridge South were without traction power.

The passengers on the incident train were detrained by 11:05. Other trains affected north of Cambridge included 2W04, the 06:56 Ipswich to Cambridge service, which was sent back and cancelled at Dullingham.

1T13, the 07:45 King's Lynn to King's Cross service, was fortunately in the platform at Waterbeach. Although it still had power, it was unable to continue because there was no power at Cambridge North. It also could not reverse because the crossover is locally controlled by a ground frame. By 11:31, only twelve passengers remained on the train, and taxis were ordered to take them to their destinations, over three hours after the initial incident. The ground frame was operated at 13:15, allowing the train to leave as 5T13 to King's Lynn.

At 14:20 CrossCountry announced a plan for all its services until 19:52 to terminate at Ely. This was updated at 16:34 to a plan to terminate services at Cambridge North wherever possible, with return workings starting with 1N63, the 17:03 Cambridge North to Birmingham New Street service. The overhead wires were repaired and the possession was lifted at 20:23. The first four carriages of the incident train were moved at 22:10, with the other four moved sometime later.

The passenger experience: Jerry Alderson arrived at Cambridge North at 09:05 (for an 09:30 train) to find that everything had stopped with no news and travellers told to "just wait". Greater Anglia (GA) did nothing to arrange bus transport. At 10:00, whilst seeking an update, another traveller asked if they could go to Huntingdon instead. GA staff at the gate-line said "yes", so he immediately thought of asking a friend for a lift to St Neots station. Had he thought of that at 09:05 he would never have claimed any Delay Repay — he got 100% back for his first class journey to Birmingham (via Euston) for the Railfuture AGM the next day. Had GA been really proactive and had someone (often five staff are working there) standing outside telling people what was happening, he would have immediately gone to St Neots. Travellers need good information and suggested solutions.

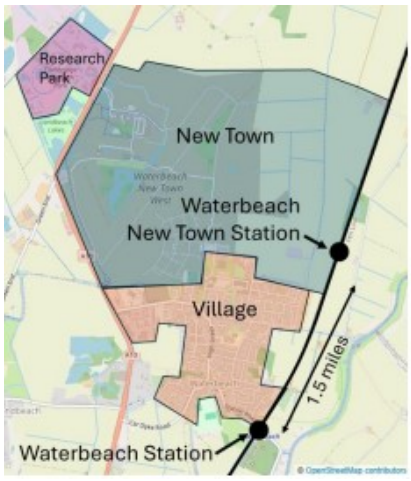
WATERBEACH — THE TWO-STATION SOLUTION

BY JERRY ALDERSON



The Railfuture proposal for two stations within Waterbeach, to serve their different markets, including a turn back at the new station, has been covered in RAIL EAST before, so this article will not go over old ground. However, it raises concerns about the 'closed minds' of both the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) and Network Rail (NR) and the 'not invented here' syndrome.

Network Rail owns the railway. Neither a developer nor the GCP can force it to close one of its stations. Make no mistake, NR willingly intends to close the existing station, which has 370k passengers, although this will be reduced if allowed to stay open once all new houses are occupied but still more than many other stations. Opponents to the closure cite Foxton (100k) and Shepreth (110k) which are coincidentally also 1.5 miles apart. To some people, it smacks of a "Do as you are told and be thankful" attitude.



On 1 July 2026 a public meeting was convened in Waterbeach chaired by the Waterbeach South Cambridgeshire district councillor, Anna Bradnam, with speakers talking about the new housing development, utility issues and the railway. Charles Baker was the unfortunate NR representative, who had to toe the party line.

The cost of operating two stations versus one was not even mentioned — the overhead ought to be fairly insignificant and possibly less than the revenue that will be lost to the railway if the village station were to be closed. There was no mention either of the additional road traffic and congestion caused by, for example, Horningsea residents driving to Cambridge North station along the A14.

NR gave the single argument that it was impractical to stop a train at both stations because the timetable was already exceedingly tight. However, this assumes that *every* train would call at both stations — there is no need for that. NR ignores the vital future capacity upgrade at Ely, which would give greater timetable flexibility, or the benefits that ETCS will bring in being able to fine-tune timetables. So too would better train acceleration or higher line speeds. NR wants to lock-in closure of the existing village station based on today's railway, not the future one. Readers will remember that the delivery of Cambridge South station was not allowed to plan for East West Rail — actually a scheme extremely likely to go ahead in the next few years — because the process to approve it is not complete; it will result in ripping out recently-installed signalling and other work to expand the railway to four tracks.

Planning consent for the new (eastern side) development in Waterbeach will not allow a single resident to occupy a house until the new station has opened. Both the GCP and NR have taken this to mean that every train must serve the new station as soon as it is ready to open, rather than any gradual transition of services. They can argue the benefits of a single station, but not the unnecessary inconvenience to many existing passengers in the early days of a barely populated new development when few will benefit (just those on the existing development on the western side).

There has been no attempt to win hearts and minds by making the new station so much better than the existing one. In fact, it will be built down to a price, and in some ways will be inferior to the existing station. It will have a waiting room (unlike at present) but no shelter of any kind on the London-bound platform, just a canopy with no side protection. Imagine many people dashing from the shelter on the western side to the eastern side as the train arrives. Imagine too if you are disabled and need much more time: essentially disabled passengers will be required to ensure a less pleasant (potentially freezing) environment than others. Acceptable?

The author lives in a village immediately south of Waterbeach.

ELY THE GATEWAY TO THE EAST – EACE TO OCEG? HAS CPCA MAYOR BRISTOW PICKED THE DEADLOCK?

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

EACE is of course the acronym for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement project. It is a project that Network Rail (NR) has brought to the point of being almost ready for start of work with a strong business case and benefit-cost ratio (BCR). Thus far the Treasury has refused funding, as however necessary the works are, they are deemed unaffordable.

The strong BCR is based on freeing up the junction to enable more freight trains to run. But in proving the case not enough cognisance was taken of the possibility of running extra passenger trains from Peterborough, King's Lynn and Norwich to the Cambridge area and across the Ox-Cam Arc. This is something Railfuture East Anglia has pointed out repeatedly as being just as important as the possibility of more freight trains.



Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Mayor Paul Bristow (right, sitting outside Cambridge South station on 29 June 2026) has taken up the challenge of getting the Department for Transport/Treasury to take note that EACE is more than freight, and that getting fast frequent passenger services from all over the east to the Cambridge area and beyond is of national importance.

Mayor Bristow has coined the term "Ox-Cam Eastern Gateway" to rebrand EACE, linking it into the government's heavily funded Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor, and by doing so making sure the Treasury recognises its national strategic importance.

The government has announced an £800 million funding package for the Ox-Cam corridor: so, with the establishment of a powerful new Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, Mr Bristow is aiming to tap directly into these more local pots of money and, together with the rebadging of EACE to the **"Ox-Cam Eastern Gateway" (OCEG),** rescue the project from the national **Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline** (RNEP) and get work underway.

The CPCA has also received £100 million to use over five years as a local investment fund. It is suggested that part of this could be spent bringing the business case quickly up to date by including a better case for more passenger trains – such as the two trains an hour all day from King's Lynn, Norwich and Peterborough to Cambridge – highlighting their role in connecting major East Anglian life science and technology hubs and their workers to high-value jobs along the wider Ox-Cam growth corridor.

It is assumed that unlocking the capacity constraints imposed by mistakes of the past must include doubling the Ely - Soham line to enable the long promised hourly Ipswich - Peterborough service, as well as a possible hourly Ely - Soham - Newmarket to Cambridge service.

However, Mr Bristow always emphasises that Ely is above all a major bottleneck for freight trains travelling inland from the Port of Felixstowe. Unblocking it for additional freight trains is vital for the UK's entire trade infrastructure.

So instead of EACE, is it cheers to OCEG?

Several commentators and local politicians have wondered why no reference is made to the fact that the two major bridges over the River Great Ouse at Ely, the Cutter Bridge and the Common Muckhill Bridge, both need renewing and are included in the overall cost of EACE.

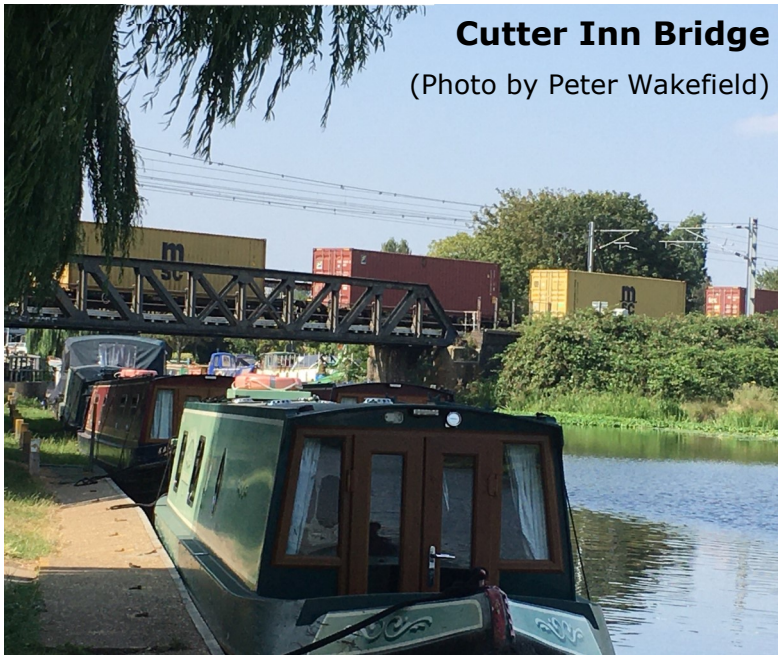


Common Muckhill Bridge

(Photo by Peter Wakefield)

But should they be? They have been problematic for 50 years — British Rail even once threatened to close the whole route north of Ely because of their condition! Surely these should be included in NR's renewal budget, not that of EACE? These large bridges, built on the part of the railway that cuts across the neck of the large meander in the river just north of Ely station, have a severe 20mph speed restriction for freight trains and 35mph for passenger trains imposed on them. This restriction takes out a lot of capacity from this very busy section of railway.

If this renewal was in the NR renewals budget, local additional funding may be available to complete the work to the standard needed to provide enhanced capacity for freight and passenger traffic in the future – given that NR, bizarrely, can only renew like with like when using its own allocated funds. Just getting the 20mph speed restriction removed will help for the time being – and reduce the overall EACE/ OCEG budget.



Cutter Inn Bridge

(Photo by Peter Wakefield)

Haughley Junction, where the Norwich and Ely lines near Stowmarket bifurcate, is a single lead junction – which means it has a short section of single line restricting the number of trains that can use it from/to the line to Ely. For a long time, this junction has been linked to EACE as another bottleneck hindering the development of traffic through the Port of Felixstowe. If it is renewed "like for like" as the rules currently insist, it will be left in the same condition, but hopefully in the new dispensation of Great British Railways, NR will be allowed to seek third party funding for the necessary extra work to finally eradicate this bottleneck. Decoupling Haughley from EACE will itself enable the latter to become that bit more affordable. For more on this, see the article by Ian Couzens on page 12.

ELY AREA ENHANCEMENTS – A FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

BY IAN COUZENS

The Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE), as mentioned in Peter Wakefield's article (pages 10-11), is a package of proposed improvements covering a wide area, not just Ely North junction itself. The £460 million price tag turned out too high for the government to bear, at least for now. The following financial analysis is from Network Rail's EACE executive summary business base, produced in 2022. **Table 1** below breaks down the projected cost:

Table 1: Breakdown of reported cost	£ million
Direct construction cost	161.6
Indirect construction cost	85.1
Design Team & other project costs	126.1
Total Base Cost	**372.8**
Risk provision	82.2
Less opportunities	-82.4
Inflation	93.6
Reported cost	**466.2**

The direct costs of construction, including material costs, labour and subcontractors, amounts to £161.6 million. You might be surprised by the fact that this figure accounts for only 35% of the overall total cost. There are then indirect costs, including site management and other costs not directly attributable to the work in hand. They might also include loss of revenue during the construction period. These costs come to a hefty £85.1 million. But you will note that the next line, design costs of £126.1 million, is a truly eyewatering amount. These equate to 80% of the direct costs of actually doing the work! These three items together come to a base cost amount of £372.8 million.

Table 2: Base Cost by project	£ million
Ely South (including bridges)	169.6
Ely North (including junctions)	84.2
Queen Adelaide Road	22.2
Level Crossing Upgrades	79.0
Other	17.8
Total base cost	**372.8**

In **table 2** (left) you can find a broad analysis of the work to be carried out by type and location.

Back to table 1, the base estimate is uplifted by a risk factor of £82.2 million. This is an additional 25% on top of a base cost figure already containing very high indirect costs and design fees. Next, there is a deduction of £82.4 million, referred to as 'Opportunities'. This is to take account of those elements of the project which would have to be done at some point in the future anyway, such as renewing Cutter Bridge.

Finally, a hefty inflation factor of £93.6 million has been built in to take account of the project extending over seven years. While inflation has to be allowed for, it reflects the fact that most of the project costs are going to take place towards the end of the project period after a lengthy design interval. This means that the project reflects more the value of money in some years' time rather than in today's money, which is the sum against which the decision to invest or not will be made.

What conclusions can be drawn? The package of improvements, replacing level crossings, relaying single lead junctions as double or even replacing bridges, is all within the railway's range of normal activities — unlike building a completely new railway, for example. So, if EACE is the sum of various interventions, it does raise the question as to why design fees are so high and why such substantial risk provision is needed. The aggregation of multiple elements delivered over several years creates a significant inflation element and the high price tag has discouraged the government from taking the project forward. In Britain, cost saving by continuity and repetition is lost because of stop-start processes in the railway, such as with electrification, with design teams are set up and then stood down.

Does EACE lend itself to being done in smaller bites? It is certainly preferable to look at what can be done sooner rather than waiting for government to sanction a big-bang approach. Perhaps under the new governance structure of GBR, the railway will have leeway to prioritise capital investment internally up to certain levels, and that when renewals are needed appropriate upgrades are considered at the same time. Upgrading the single lead junction at Haughley — needed for the freight corridor — was estimated to cost £25 million and is just the kind of project the new railway should be able to carry out without major recourse to the DfT.

ACCESS AT STOWMARKET RAILWAY STATION – PROGRESS AND SETBACKS

BY JEN OVERETT

Local residents welcomed an announcement in June 2022 that Greater Anglia (GA) would be spending its £5.5m 'Access for All' funding for Stowmarket Station on a modular, stainless-steel AVA footbridge with integral lifts. This "revolutionary" new design would come with minimal maintenance, longevity, and a substantially reduced installation time. And at a station where annual footfall is now close to a million, this has to be good news.



Groundworks started late 2024 and in late November 2025 the new footbridge was installed, finally opening in early January 2026 with extensive media coverage, and as reported in RAIL EAST issue 209 (February 2026). Regrettably, the lifts were still awaiting "final testing", and this remains the case nine months on, currently with no date for completion. So passengers with mobility issues had nothing to celebrate back in January and still have an indefinite wait for step-free access between the platforms.

Left: The footbridge and lift under construction.



Alongside this, back in early 2023, some changes were made to the station forecourt. These included installation of barriers to ensure all vehicles using the car park would be ANPR monitored and appropriately charged. Some extra blue badge spaces were also added, but these were not accompanied by dropped kerbs, nor by a step-free route to access the Norwich-bound platform. *Right: View from the footbridge and lift towards the car park lanes, barriers and town centre, but with no designated pedestrian route.*

Local campaigners and the Mid Suffolk Disability Forum wrote to GA to express their concerns that these recent works had made the forecourt less, not more, accessible. Three years, two site visits and numerous emails later, we have secured two dropped kerbs to facilitate blue badge holders when accessing the ramp. We have also suggested a potential pedestrian route through the forecourt, with an undertaking from GA that its viability will be assessed within the current financial year. To this day there is no pedestrian pathway either to the ramp to the platform, or – more shockingly - to the lift once this is finally opened. We have recently been advised that there will be no funding to secure such a pathway until 2027/28.

GA's decision to secure an innovative new footbridge and lift design is to be applauded — it looks great and the issues with the lifts, though hugely regrettable, are largely outside its control. Yet it is beyond comprehension that step-free connectivity to the lift from the blue badge spaces and from the town centre direction has not been designed, funded or even considered.

GA's Accessibility Manager Rebecca Richardson has agreed to consult with a Mid Suffolk Disability Forum representative at the design stage of all future railway works affecting the district. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that bigger changes are needed within our railway service if we are to see a commitment to accessibility embedded into the organisation's culture. The perspectives of local passengers with lived experience of disability urgently need to be heard at every stage of GBR (Anglia)'s process of planning and change, and to be reflected in the commitment and actions of its leadership. Local railway and access campaign groups will then be able to focus their energy and expertise on constructive partnership working, rather than on fighting for basic accessibility provision. I look forward to that day.

Jen Overett is an Access for All campaigner and Mid Suffolk District Councillor

BETTER BUS-TRAIN INTERCHANGES NEED GOOD LOCAL INFORMATION – A CASE STUDY FROM CAMBRIDGE

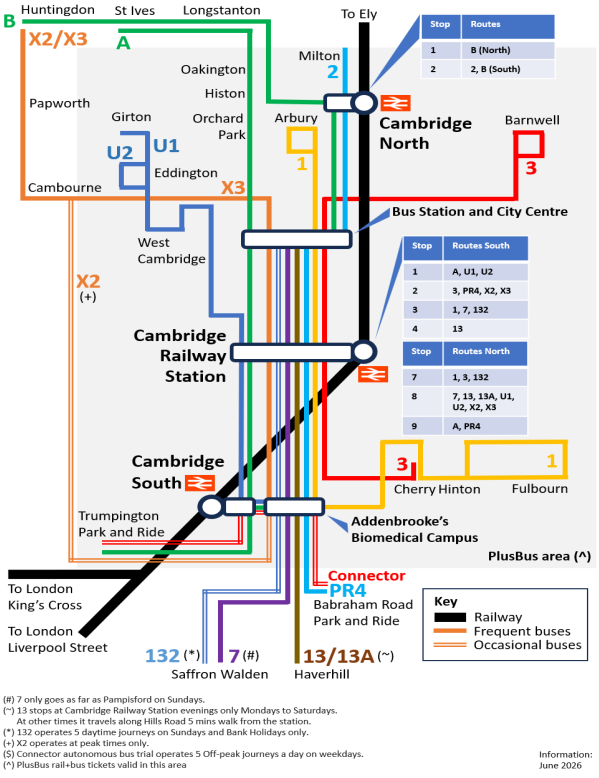
BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

RAIL EAST readers may have seen that the July 2026 (no 188) issue of Railwatch magazine – https://www.railwatch.org.uk/backtrack.php?mag=rwm&issue=188 – included an article "Rail and bus adds up to multimode magic" about the Railfuture East Anglia Cambridge bus map which has been adopted by Greater Anglia and displayed at Cambridge and Cambridge North stations.

This article explained that Britain does not generally excel at integrating rail and bus travel. Cambridge is a good example of the challenge. The city's main station handles more than 10 million passengers a year, with Cambridge North adding another 1.5 million, while Cambridge South has now opened to serve the Biomedical Campus and growing communities in the south of the city. With the railway stations some distance from many destinations, good onward travel information is particularly important.

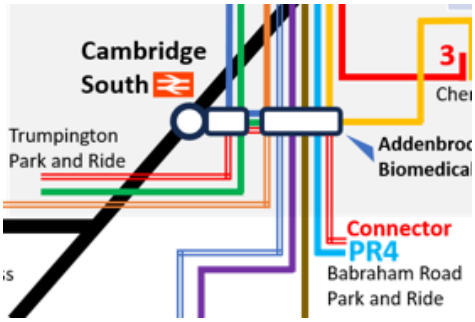
Cambridge already has a substantial network of bus services, including routes linking the railway station with the city centre, the Biomedical Campus and destinations beyond the city. The problem is less the availability of buses than the way information about them is presented. At Cambridge station, information is fragmented between posters, electronic displays, individual bus stops and journey planners, making it difficult for passengers to get an overall picture of their options.

A network map can provide that missing overview. By showing routes geographically, it makes the extent of the bus network immediately apparent and helps passengers understand where they can travel without having to decipher unfamiliar destination names. This was the thinking behind Railfuture East Anglia's prototype Cambridge bus map, inspired in part by Transport for London's highly effective "Spider Maps". Greater Anglia has now adopted the concept for display at Cambridge and Cambridge North stations, providing an opportunity to make onward journeys by public transport easier and more attractive.



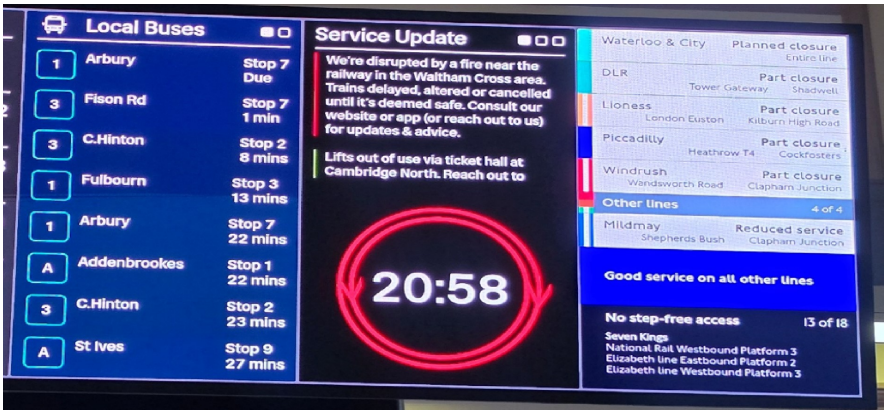
Cambridge South updates

Since the article in Railwatch was published, Cambridge South station has opened, which has resulted in the map needing to be updated (Railfuture provided GA with a new version several weeks before it opened). The main issue was that the Biomedical Campus is a large site, with Cambridge South station to the west and Addenbrooke's bus station to the east. Once the rail station opened, it became important to distinguish between bus routes serving the west of the site, which interchange at the stop close to the railway station; those which serve the bus station; and those serving both areas.



The updated map, above right, has a more detailed view of the Cambridge South area, separating services. Any comments on how the services are represented in this area would be welcome. The small image shows the detail around Cambridge South.

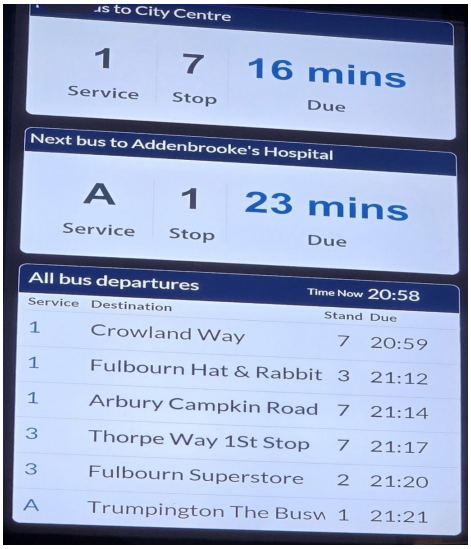
There have been some recent enhancements at Cambridge station, with a well-presented bus information departure board above the exit gate-line (right), providing a much clearer set of destination names compared with the information post outside the station.





Something similar has also been introduced at Ipswich station, and it includes a map with the location of the bus stops, as shown on the left.

The photo on the right is the bus information screen outside Cambridge station, with destinations including the Hat & Rabbit pub in Fulbourn. However, the destinations shown might not be helpful to many people. Modern train information screens show a list of main calling points on the route, often with planned arrival times (the screens at bus stops in Edinburgh show which parts of the city the bus goes through, for example) — perhaps those at Cambridge should do so as well.



Related to this, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has a project with £218k of funding for enhanced information at Cambridge Station Square. Railfuture East Anglia hopes this can extend to an onward travel map derived from the current one, bringing it up to the standard of maps such as the "Spider Maps" displayed at bus interchanges in London. It also hopes that the various organisations involved with the station interchange can deliver something which meets best practice for passengers.

From the most recent CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee Agenda Pack "Cambridge Station Passenger Information Project (C/15/2271/FUL.) £218,127.76 of S106 funding is available to deliver enhanced passenger information at Cambridge Station Square, with a spend deadline of 03/10/2027. Officers are working with Cambridgeshire County Council to allocate this funding effectively, including provision for Real Time Passenger Information, bus stop improvements or franchising-related activity. Approval is sought to enable expenditure of this funding within the specified timeframe."

BRITAIN'S NEXT ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE – THE TEMPSFORD EFFECT?

BY MARK YOUNG



East West Rail is often described as a railway designed to reconnect Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge. While that is undoubtedly true, its greatest legacy may prove to be something far more significant: creating entirely new centres of economic activity rather than simply improving journeys between existing ones. Nowhere is that opportunity clearer than at Tempsford.

Article continued on pages 16-17.

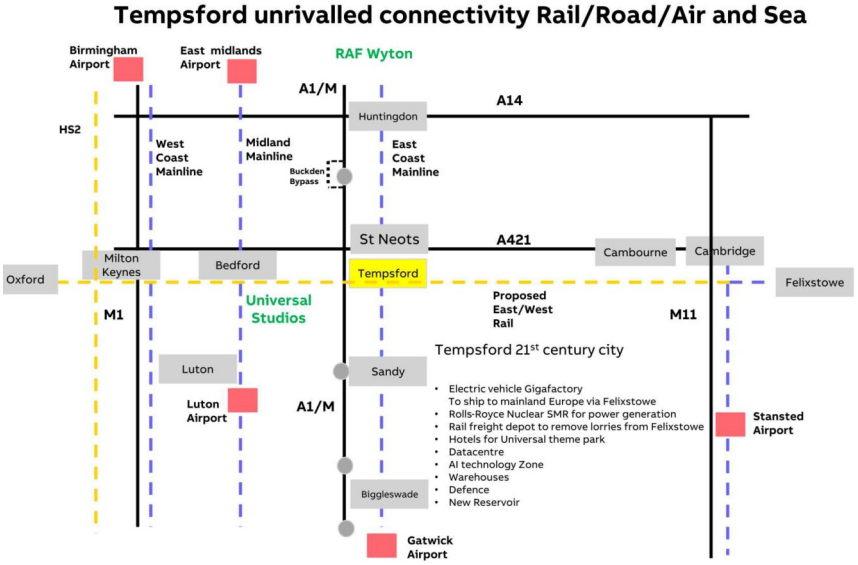
Much of the debate about the proposed new town at Tempsford has understandably focused on housing delivery. Yet to regard Tempsford as simply another housing development is to underestimate both its strategic location and the transformational potential of East West Rail. Situated alongside the East Coast Main Line and adjacent to the Black Cat interchange, where the A1 and A421 converge near St Neots, Tempsford occupies one of the most strategically connected locations in England. Few places combine north-south and east-west transport links on this scale.

The arrival of East West Rail changes the equation completely.

Rather than becoming an isolated new settlement, Tempsford has the potential to become the focal point of an integrated growth corridor stretching from St Neots towards Bedford in the west and Cambourne in the east, while connecting directly with Cambridge, Oxford and the wider national rail network. Delivering this vision should include an East West Rail station serving the eastern side of St Neots, ensuring that the town is fully integrated into the corridor and allowing both communities to grow as complementary centres of employment, innovation and housing.

This is precisely the type of location where transport infrastructure shapes economic geography rather than simply responding to it.

St Neots already provides the foundations. As the largest established town adjacent to the proposed development, with around 50,000 residents and a growing commercial base, it represents an existing economic anchor. If Tempsford reaches its anticipated population of around 120,000, the combined urban area could approach 200,000 people over time, creating one of the largest population centres within the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor.



That scale changes investment decisions. Businesses considering locations for advanced manufacturing, life sciences, logistics, engineering and technology increasingly assess labour markets, connectivity and long-term resilience rather than administrative boundaries. East West Rail has the potential to expand labour markets in every direction, allowing employers to recruit from a much wider geography while giving people greater access to highly skilled, well-paid jobs.

This is where rail becomes an economic enabler rather than simply a transport mode. The railway would position Tempsford at the crossroads of the Midlands' advanced manufacturing economy and Cambridge's globally recognised science and technology cluster, while the East Coast Main Line provides fast connections to London, Yorkshire, the northeast and Scotland. Few emerging locations could offer access to such a diverse range of markets, talent and investment opportunities.

Freight should not be overlooked either. The combination of East West Rail, the East Coast Main Line and the strategic road network present a rare opportunity to develop modern rail-served logistics and distribution facilities. With appropriate investment, more freight could transfer from road to rail, strengthening national supply chains, reducing congestion on strategic roads and providing direct connections to the Port of Felixstowe, Britain's busiest container port and one of the country's principal gateways to global markets. This reflects a broader point about the role of railway investment.

Major rail schemes have traditionally been judged through journey-time savings alone. Increasingly, however, their greatest value lies in unlocking housing, attracting private investment, improving productivity and enabling sustainable economic growth. East West Rail could become one of the clearest modern examples of that principle.

The wider corridor is already evolving. RAF Wyton continues to strengthen its role in defence, intelligence and digital capabilities. Cambridge remains one of Europe's foremost centres for science, engineering and innovation. The proposed Universal Studios near Bedford has the potential to become one of the UK's largest visitor attractions. Together with the manufacturing strengths of the West Midlands, these assets provide the foundations of an exceptionally diverse regional economy.

Connected by high-quality rail infrastructure, they become more than individual developments; they become part of a single economic ecosystem. That, in turn, requires planning with a much longer horizon. Rail infrastructure should not simply accommodate opening-day demand. Land should be safeguarded for future operational flexibility, additional passenger capacity and freight expansion, alongside investment in energy, digital connectivity, utilities and employment land.

Looking beyond the railway itself, the corridor has the potential to become an ideal location for a nationally significant EV gigafactory. Positioned between the West Midlands' globally recognised automotive manufacturing industry and the scientific excellence of Cambridge and East Anglia, Tempsford could become the point where battery research, advanced materials, AI, engineering and vehicle production converge. Components, batteries and finished vehicles could move efficiently by rail and road, with direct access to the Port of Felixstowe for export to international markets while supporting Britain's transition to electric vehicle manufacturing. Such an industrial cluster would also require secure, reliable and low-carbon energy. As Britain develops the next generation of nuclear power, Small Modular Reactors, including those being developed by Rolls-Royce SMR, could provide the dependable baseload electricity needed to support energy-intensive battery production, advanced manufacturing, AI computing and future industrial growth.

Planned alongside transport, housing and skills, this would create one of the UK's most strategically important industrial and innovation corridors. Decisions taken during the design phase will shape economic opportunities for generations. Britain has too often failed to capture the full value of major infrastructure investment because transport planning, land use and economic development have been pursued independently.

Tempsford presents a rare opportunity to do things differently.

The objective should not simply be to build another new town, but to create a nationally significant employment, manufacturing and innovation hub where homes, jobs, education, research, rail connectivity and strategic infrastructure are planned together from the outset. If that ambition is realised, East West Rail will be remembered not merely as the railway that linked Oxford and Cambridge, but as the catalyst that created Britain's newest economic powerhouse: a globally competitive region where advanced manufacturing, clean energy, artificial intelligence, life sciences and logistics converge around world-class transport infrastructure. It would unite the automotive strength of the West Midlands with the scientific excellence of East Anglia, connected to international markets through Felixstowe and Luton, Birmingham, East Midlands and Stansted Airports powered by the next generation of British nuclear technology.

That is the true prize. The railway is not merely connecting places; it is creating an entirely new one.

Mark Young is a Liberal Democrat District Councillor on Huntingdonshire District Council. Alongside his role in local government, he has worked in the energy transition sector for 30 years. The views expressed are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of Huntingdonshire District Council.

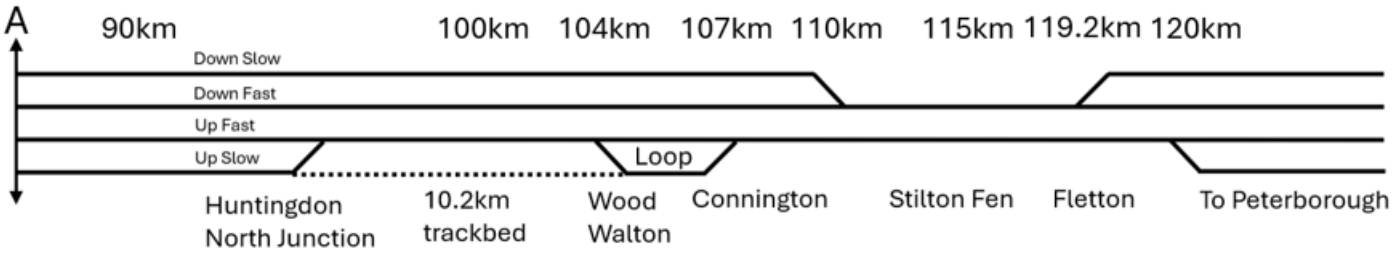
THE EAST COAST MAIN LINE IS FULL – BUT A LOT MORE IS REQUIRED OF IT

BY PETER WAKEFIELD (All photos by the author)

During recent work with members up and down the country in support of Railfuture's East West Rail (EWR) consultation proposals (June 2026), several mentions were made about the necessity of an interchange between long-distance intercity trains from/to the north of England/Scotland and EWR at Tempsford. Our response was to point out the difficulties of doing so, given the East Coast Main Line (ECML) is at capacity, especially south of Peterborough. That in turn has led to this article, further examining the situation coming at us in the near future. Phil Smart discussed the issue of ECML and freight in our last issue (RAIL EAST 210), and his contribution complements what is outlined here.

Currently, the ECML south of Peterborough carries eight or nine intercity trains to/from Yorkshire, the northeast, Edinburgh and beyond each hour, in each direction — a train about every six minutes on the fast lines. Additionally, every hour two semi-fast services call at all six stations from Peterborough to Stevenage then fast to Finsbury Park on the slow lines — as does an average of one freight train each hour. Overall, on the slow lines that means a train every 20 minutes.

More than enough capacity, you might say. But now look at this diagram of the route between Peterborough and Huntingdon.

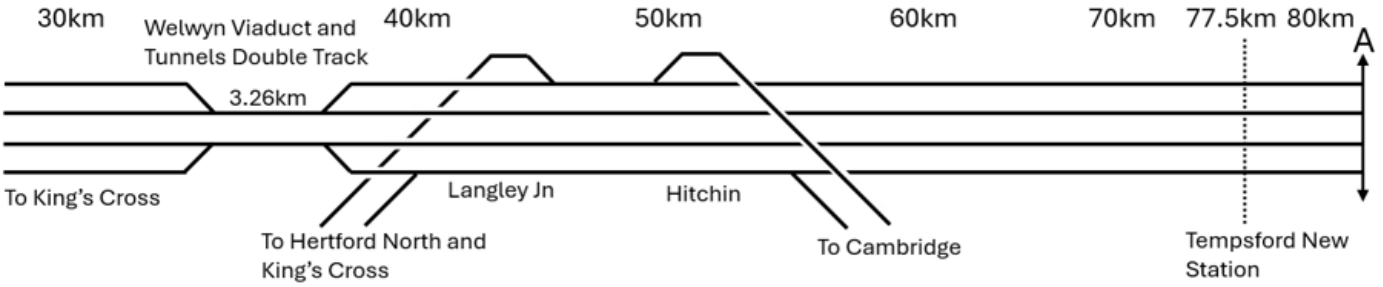


Diagrammatic map of section of ECML between Huntingdon and the southern outskirts of Peterborough. Distances from King's Cross.

There is more fast line than slow line as the four tracks merge, so that semi-fast and freight trains have to share with the expresses – a train every five minutes. No wonder Network Rail has declared this part of the network "full". When the route was electrified over 50 years ago the 10km marked "trackbed" was lifted. There was a recent proposal from operators to reinstate this section as a "no regrets" project… no business case expense, just do it, as it is. In spite of the congestion, nothing has happened.

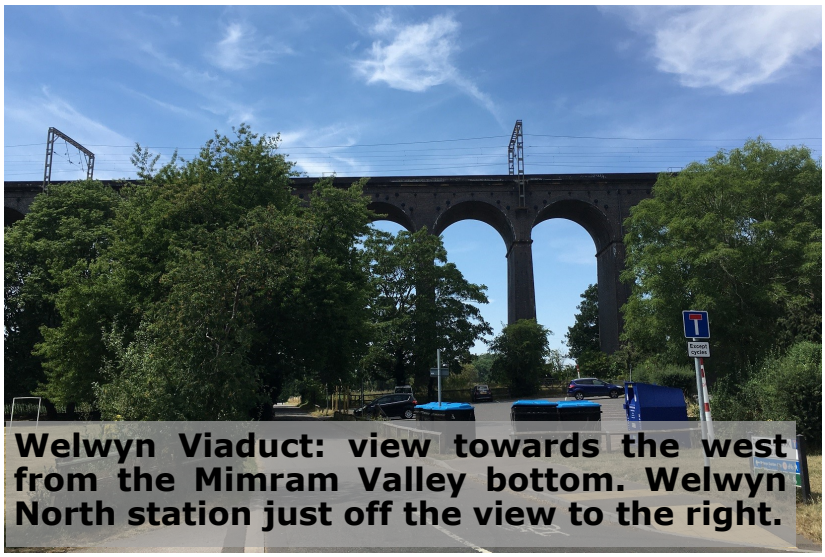
Now let's turn to Hitchin. Two more tracks join there from East Anglia via Cambridge. These add another six trains each way each hour to those 12 already on the ECML, so 18 in all.

Now look at the diagram below.



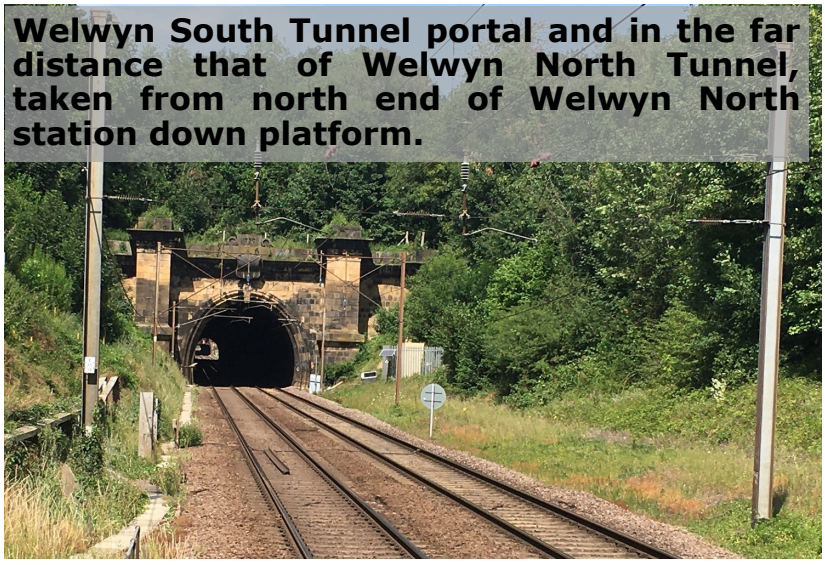
Diagrammatic Map of the section of the ECML between Welwyn Garden City and St Neots. The 3.26km single-track bottleneck comprises seven obstacles. Distances from King's Cross

Freight trains peel off the route at Langley Junction to access Finsbury Park via the Hertford Loop. The other 17 (passenger) trains each hour continue direct to Finsbury Park via the tracks on top of the Welwyn (sometimes referred to as Digswell) Viaduct. As you can see from the diagram above, all squeeze through that 3km of just two tracks! That is a train every 3.5 minutes...and two of them stop midway in those 3km at a station serving Welwyn North (annual footfall 386,640). Between them these two stopping services take out about an additional five minutes every hour. But of course, we are not calling for the closure of this very busy station, which has over the years enabled a dense residential settlement to grow around it.



Welwyn Viaduct: view towards the west from the Mimram Valley bottom. Welwyn North station just off the view to the right.

This section has long been a bottleneck with a big bill required to fix it, as it would entail the doubling of the viaduct (photo, right), two tunnels, two overbridges and an underbridge along with cuttings and a new station. In the early twentieth century the Hertford Loop was completed to bypass the problem at least for freight trains. In the early twenty-first century, it had been hoped that HS2 East would avoid any further expenditure, as most intercity services heading south from Leeds, Newcastle and Edinburgh would have transferred off the ECML at York. The reality now is that we are left with a heavily loaded section of railway that simply cannot take much more traffic.



Welwyn South Tunnel portal and in the far distance that of Welwyn North Tunnel, taken from north end of Welwyn North station down platform.

So, what more is required of it?

At **Tempsford** the new station will serve as a junction between Thameslink semi fast services on the ECML and frequent services on EWR to Cambridge and Bedford, Milton Keynes and Oxford. In twenty or so years' time it is expected that Tempsford will host a new city of some 120,000 residents, as Mark Young's article on pages 15-17 reminds us. Many will work locally or in Cambridge and Bedford, but no doubt many will travel to London too — on services that are already full for much of the working day.

Meanwhile **Cambourne**, just a few minutes east towards Cambridge on EWR, will also expand to a large settlement of about 100,000 residents, potentially a city in its own right rather than being just a dormitory for Cambridge as now. Travel arrangements will be similar to those mentioned for Tempsford.

In passing above we mentioned the Hertford Loop. Currently its stations are serviced by a basic two trains per hour, but Govia Thameslink has recently announced that the service level will soon be increased to 4tph. Crews Hill station is earmarked for a new town nearby. Capacity on the loop is now being eaten up by planned developments.

Clearly the ECML is in no state to handle any more trains, let alone stop intercity trains at Tempsford as some have called for. Welwyn Viaduct is the key to the timetable and even adding two minutes or so for a station stop will be very difficult to manage. Current Thameslink services are nearly full all day long for much of the route and will not cope with additional traffic generated through Tempsford. **Our conclusion is that planning these developments at Tempsford and Cambourne, as well as Alconbury further north, must go hand in hand with railway capacity works, which should be part funded by the developers.**

The Woodwalton to Huntingdon slow line can be reinstated quickly for some relief now, as it will add some 10km of additional up track. Surely the point has been reached where even relatively short additional stretches of track such as this will help relieve existing and future timetable pressures — especially during the inevitable episodes of unplanned perturbation created by factors from extreme weather to signalling problems.

The track over the peat of Stilton Fen will be difficult to deal with. The peat continues to dry out, a process accelerated by rising temperatures, and thus the land surrounding the railway keeps sinking. But this vital 8km section must have an engineering solution – albeit an expensive one. The nearby Great Fen project may yet help stabilise the situation by creating more local wetland.

But the future of local developments in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire surely cannot be separated from the need to fix the Welwyn Viaduct and Tunnels. If HS2 East is not going to be resurrected, this critical section of the ECML must be funded by the developers and the Department for Transport. The hugely significant ongoing expansion of the wider Cambridge economy alone should make this an obvious priority.

Jerry Alderson gives his views from a technical perspective.

Reinstating the 'up slow' from Woodwalton to Huntingdon is a 'no brainer', and Network Rail was about to apply for planning permission prior to funding being cut. At the moment intercity (LNER, Lumo, GC and HT) and Great Northern/Thameslink trains, which have different top speeds, share a single track all the way from Peterborough to Huntingdon, which can cause further delays to an already delayed intercity travelling towards London, or the slow train is delayed leaving Peterborough to let the 'priority' train go first.

The planned Tempsford station will have just two platforms on the outside like Huntingdon and Hitchin. But crossovers from 'fast' to 'slow' and back again on either side of the station would be required to enable some intercity trains to stop there.

The seven obstacles around Welwyn North pose the greatest problem. Should it be solved in increments or all at once? The capacity increase that Railfuture calls for, and the rail industry wants, needs all seven, but timetable flexibility can be created by simply shortening the distance of the bottleneck, not least thanks to the European Train Control System (ETCS) being rolled out on the route from King's Cross to just south of Grantham by 2033. Getting a slow train out of the way of an intercity train 45 seconds earlier (or that slower train 45 seconds closer to the two track section) creates flexibility a long way along the route, and could be easily achieved (without huge cost) by four-tracking the northern end (one underbridge and two overbridges). The problem with any such intervention is that you must have decided how to solve the other four constraints before you do the first, otherwise expensive re-work may be required.



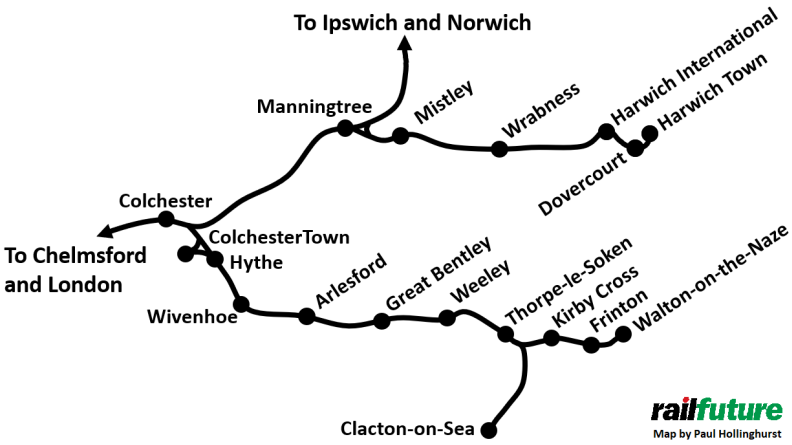
Digswell celebrates its railway viaduct

Perhaps the best approach is to keep the central alignment and build on either side. The two tunnels could be filled in and re-bored as two double track unidirectional tunnels, like Farnworth Tunnel near Bolton. Whilst Railtrack had proposed a separate second viaduct, would it make sense to have a cantilevered four -track top on the existing viaduct with supports on either side?

TENDRING PENINSULA TRAIN SERVICES (PART ONE)

BY DEREK MONNERY

Most people would not know where Tendring is unless they have a local connection. However, if you mention Harwich or Clacton, the location becomes clearer. The peninsula was named after the centrally located village of Tendring because the area was originally known as the Tendring Hundred. The peninsula has an area of approximately 130 square miles with 36 miles of coastline and a population of about 150,000 people.



In terms of the rail network, the south of the area is served by a double track rail route off the Great Eastern Mainline (GEML) from Colchester to Clacton. This has a short spur to Colchester Town station, reached by a double track "Y"-junction leading to a terminus which only has a single platform. The main line serves Tendring villages, Wivenhoe, Alresford, Great Bentley, Weeley and Thorpe-le-Soken. From Thorpe, the double-track route goes to Clacton, while a single-track route serves Kirby Cross, Frinton and Walton, including a passing loop at Kirby Cross. The Walton line was the main line until the second world war, when the Clacton line was double tracked as part of the war effort. Since the war, Clacton has developed as an important seaside resort and residential area. Walton and Frinton too are seaside resorts.

The north side of Tendring is served by a double track route that runs along the Stour Estuary from Manningtree station (on the GEML) to Mistley, Wrabness, Harwich International, Dovercourt (a seaside town) and Harwich Town. Harwich International station (formerly Parkeston Quay) connects directly to North Sea ferries. The branch is single track from Harwich International to the Town station. Currently all rail provision serving Tendring is courtesy of Greater Anglia.

During steam days, all Tendring main lines were served by express trains from London, with local services provided by tank engines and passenger coaches. Special fast boat trains were run to Harwich PQ to connect with ferries to the Hook of Holland and Scandinavia. Diesel railcars started replacing local steam services in the mid-1950s. The south Tendring lines were electrified in the late 1950s. The main line was electrified to London in 1962, with units serving both Clacton and Walton by splitting eight- or 12-car trains at Thorpe.

In the mid-1980s electrification was extended to Manningtree, Ipswich and Harwich as part of the GEML electrification scheme. At this time Walton line services were downgraded, losing most through services to London, making rail travel unattractive as connections to through trains were often missed. Today, Walton is served by a stopping service to Colchester (connecting to fast services at Thorpe) with only one very slow through train to and from London. The Harwich branch has fared better, with a few peak trains between Harwich International and London in addition to a branch shuttle train.

As successive generations of trains have come into service, so Tendring services have lost their express status, with all now provided by class 720 outer suburban EMUs and only Manningtree station served by main line class 745 stock. Even the boat trains use outer suburban stock, apart from those originating from the Ipswich direction, which use class 755 bi-mode units.

Over the last 40 years, the population of the Tendring peninsula has greatly expanded, with large housing estates built, especially around Manningtree, Dovercourt, Walton/Frinton and Clacton. Older people from the London area have moved out to the Tendring peninsula, as the pace of life is slower and quality of life higher. Some of these London migrants are long distance commuters using trains regularly for work, others are self-employed, work from home or retired, and would only use trains occasionally, if at all.

Manningtree station, with around a million users a year, is the busiest station in the area, having an excellent train service with two main line trains each hour to London and to Norwich, alongside one stopping train an hour to London and to Ipswich. An enhanced service operates in peak hours.

Clacton is the second busiest Tendring station, with around 750,000 users a year. The annual Clacton Air Show in August brings in large crowds, many arriving by train, with an enhanced train service provided. The Walton branch as a whole has about 400,000 users a year. The Tendring villages add a further 650,000 users, with Wivenhoe the busiest of these (because all express Clacton trains stop there).

On the Harwich branch, with total annual users around half a million, the busiest station is Dovercourt, with Harwich International and Harwich Town joint second, followed by Mistley and Wrabness. Use of Harwich International Port has stabilised, following steep falls over the years, as cheap air travel proved a lot more attractive for travellers rather than slow, expensive ferries. The main users of the ferries these days are HGVs and cars with their drivers. A few seasoned tourists continue to use the ferries for environmental reasons as an alternative to travel by air.

This article should provide RAIL EAST readers with a clear sketch of the Tendring rail network as it has developed over the years. A second article will describe the train services offered today and how they could be developed in the future.

UNACCEPTABLE RECENT TRAIN SERVICE

As an advocate for Britain's railway, wanting a bigger and better rail system, Railfuture likes to be positive, but there are times when it needs to be critical, particularly when passengers are not getting the service that they expect and deserve. In August and early September the Great Northern service provided by the now-nationalised Greater Thameslink Railway (GTR) has been abysmal, arguably a collapse in its service out of King's Cross.

The Fen Line Users Association (FLUA), which is affiliated to Railfuture, has been extremely upset that there were no direct services from King's Lynn to London for several consecutive days, with many cancelled services, and there was a distinct lack of information provided to passengers about the reasons and when normal service would resume. At the time of writing, there are still cancelled trains.

Amongst its members, FLUA has former rail industry management, one of whom said "Whoever is in charge must try harder to communicate directly with its customers at its stations, and not just on its website."

FLUA has provided a copy of a letter from Charlotte Cain, Lib Dem MP for Ely and East Cambridgeshire, complaining to the Secretary of State, Heidi Alexander. The first page is shown on the right, and it was before the recent, more serious, problems.



Charlotte Cane MP
Ely and East Cambridgeshire
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Email: charlotte.cane.mp@parliament.uk

Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

20 August 2026

Dear Secretary of State for Transport,

I am writing regarding the poor reliability of services on the King's Lynn to King's Cross line this summer and the impact this has had on passengers across Ely and East Cambridgeshire.

For many people in Ely and East Cambridgeshire, the railway is not a luxury. It is how they get to work, attend appointments, visit family and access opportunities. When services fail, it has real consequences for people's daily lives.

This summer, passengers have faced a level of disruption that is difficult to ignore. According to the House of Commons Library, data indicates that 473 services (31%) in the past eight weeks were either cancelled or not recorded. Put simply, almost one in every three trains failed to provide passengers with the service they had every right to expect.

I recognise that some of the long-standing challenges affecting services on this route include ageing railway infrastructure and outdated rolling stock, both of which require sustained attention and investment. However, these issues are known and it is therefore important to understand what additional factors have contributed to such poor performance this summer, and what action is being taken to address them.

With services now under public ownership and expectations raised that nationalisation would deliver more reliable and punctual services, many are disappointed that they have yet to see the improvements they were promised.

Constituents tell me they are losing confidence in a service they depend upon. They describe journeys that have become entirely unpredictable. They should not have to wonder whether the train they need will turn up. Passengers pay significant fares and deserve a railway they can rely on.

The impact of this poor performance extends far beyond inconvenience. Missed connections, late arrivals at work, disrupted childcare arrangements and cancelled appointments all impose real costs on passengers and businesses. Improving reliability is not simply about performance

EAST SUFFOLK LINE ENHANCEMENTS FOR SIZEWELL C

In early September, Network Rail issued a press release stating: "The Saxmundham rail junction on the East Suffolk line is planned for a major renewal in autumn 2026 to improve resilience and reliability in advance of future freight trains delivering construction materials to Sizewell. This crucial junction connects the Leiston branch to the East Suffolk line and is part of the designated rail route for heavy freight services delivering the necessary materials to support the construction of Sizewell C, reducing reliance on HGVs, reducing congestion and pollution on local roads."

It further stated: "The manually operated junction requires complete modernisation, by introducing a powered crossover (to allow trains to switch between the branch line and the East Suffolk line) controlled by an integrated signalling system from Saxmundham signal box. These rail improvements are part of the overall plan to bring the Leiston (Sizewell) branch line back into use to support this nationally important long-term construction project..." This is good news.

Railfuture is researching the new track layout around Saxmundham/Leiston for RAIL EAST issue 212. It seems that, bit-by-bit, the East Suffolk Line is being put back together as something like a modern railway.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

Please send articles for possible inclusion in RAIL EAST to **Peter Feeney**, who collates all submissions and prepares them for the newsletter. Good quality photos or graphics are essential in order to make RAIL EAST visually attractive.

This issue of RAIL EAST is, appropriately, the last one to be formatted by former Railfuture director Jerry Alderson, as it covers the opening of Cambridge South station. His first issue, in June 2017, featured the opening of Cambridge North.

Issue 212 onwards will be designed by Soo Smart of Double S Design Ltd. We hope you will like the new look of the newsletter. We are allowing extra preparation time, so please send all submissions by **Friday 16 October 2026**, but articles covering late news will be considered just before sending to the printer in early November.

RECEIVING RAIL EAST BY POST OR ELECTRONICALLY?

Thank you to Railfuture members who have agreed to receive RAIL EAST by email. This helps to keep Railfuture's costs down and so spend funds on rail campaigning.

You can be emailed a copy of RAIL EAST on the same day that it goes to the printer, so you will receive it more than a week before other people. To switch to receiving it by email, please contact Lloyd Butler, who manages our database, at renewals@railfuture.org.uk. Your co-operation will be appreciated.

The latest RAIL EAST is always at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/.

JOIN RAILFUTURE — FOR A BIGGER, BETTER RAILWAY

Railfuture is funded entirely by the public, who use the railway. This means that it can stand up for their interests; hopefully RAIL EAST proves this, with its justifiable criticism (plus much-deserved praise — Railfuture *promotes* rail travel, after all).

Railfuture works *constructively* with the rail industry, government (national and local), businesses and stakeholders to improve and expand the railway.

Annual membership fee is **£20** (£22 for joint membership); under 26 years can join for just £14. Join online at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/ using a credit/debit card or PayPal — the £10 'paperless' option requires a direct debit mandate.

railfuture East Anglia

MEDIA CONTACTS

Chair: Ian Couzens
28 Le Strange Close, Norwich NR2 3PW
Tel: 01603 457518
ian.couzens@railfuture.org.uk

Vice-Chair: Chris Burton
Tel: 01223 352327 / 07780 856212
chris.burton@railfuture.org.uk

Vice-Chair: Peter Wakefield
Tel: 01223 352364 / 07738 085307
peter.wakefield@railfuture.org.uk

OTHER CONTACTS

Secretary: Paul Hollinghurst
110 Catharine Street, Cambridge CB1 3AR
paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

Contributions for RAIL EAST: Peter Feeney
raileast@railfuture.org.uk

East Anglia Membership Secretary: Peter Bayless
3 Queens St, Spooner Row, Wymondham NR18 9JU
petlinbay@btinternet.com

Also see https://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Contacts

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 26 SEPT 2026	SATURDAY 28 NOV 2026	SATURDAY 27 FEB 2027
No meeting but there will be a guided visit to Greater Anglia's Crown Point depot. Limited to 12 people.	Mill Road Community Cent. 6 Hazell Street **CAMBRIDGE** CB1 2GN	Friends Meeting House St John's Street **BURY ST EDMUNDS** IP33 1SJ

A flyer for our meetings is always at: www.railfuture.org.uk/east/meetings.
This includes a map of the venue and directions from the station.

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All other (non-branch) correspondence to 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU