

RAILWAY INVIGORATION SOCIETY
EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH
NEWSLETTER No. 18

May 1976

Branch Secretary: Mr. T.J. Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd., Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1RQ.

NEXT MEETING: CAMBRIDGE, MAY 22nd

The next meeting of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Invigoration Society will be in the Kennedy Room of the Cambridge Union Society, on Saturday May 22nd, commencing at 2.15 p.m.

The Union Society is centrally situated. Walk into the city centre from the station (or take 180 or 181 bus) then along Sidney Street, turning right at the Round Church.

Main items on the Agenda will be:

1. National Report (including discussion of the Government's Green Paper on Transport.)
2. Reports from Line Users' Associations.
3. Reports on Reopening Campaigns.
4. Freight.
5. Cambridge Northern By-pass (discussion to be introduced by Mr. S.F. Wilkinson).
6. Other branch activities.
7. RAILWAYS AND THE FUTURE - a talk by Mr. H.F. Howson, ACIT, of Saffron Walden. Mr. Howson is a writer on transport matters and contributer to Jane's Yearbooks.

NEW ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED AT KINGS LYNN

Just over 30 people braved the cold wind and rain on Friday evening, March 12th, to attend a meeting at the Norfolk College of Arts & Technology, Kings Lynn, organised by the RIS, to launch a local rail and bus users' association, the sixth such body in East Anglia.

Mr. P.R. Lawrence was in the chair. Mr. T.J. Garrod outlined the history of the RIS and its reasons for fighting for greater use of the rail network.

Mr. D. Maudlin (Secretary, Newmarket & District Rail Users' Association) explained the setting up of his association in 1972, amid fears of rail cuts at that time. Their first priority had been to help publicise existing services, and their efforts had paid off: the August 1973 census showed a 26% increase in usage of Newmarket station compared with the previous year. The Association continued to distribute half-yearly Newsletters to all households. As Newmarket station was unstaffed, Mr. Maudlin also acted as a kind of ticket agent, and had taken £3,000 worth of tickets for British Rail since 1972.

A provisional constitution for the new association for the Ely - Kings Lynn line was adopted and a committee was formed. At a subsequent meeting of this committee, the name WEST NORFOLK PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS was adopted, and the following were elected: Chairman - Mr. Rose, 26 London Road, Downham Market; Secretary - Mr. I. Semmons, 21 Orchard Close, Watlington; Treasurer, Mr. C.J. Milnes (an RIS member); Press Officer - Mr. B. Goldstone. Other committee members are; Miss C. Zilahi (an RIS member), Dr. H. Lacey, Messrs. Baker and Howells. The committee has powers to co-opt further members, and a subscription rate of 30p for individuals was decided upon. A newsletter has now been prepared and is to be distributed very shortly.

The meeting continued with a talk by Mr. R.M. Senter, BR Passenger Commercial Officer at Norwich. It was BR's endeavour, he said, to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people. They were aware of their shortcomings. It was important to know what the customer wanted, and to publicise services. The Eastern Region publicity budget was £1,000,000 per annum; but it was still difficult to get through to many people at local level and find out what they really wanted. BR therefore welcomed the formation of rail users' associations which gave "considered comment rather than carping criticism." The feedback of information from such bodies was invaluable - and could otherwise only be obtained through expensive market research.

Mr. Senter went on to say he wished "to kill speculation about any closure or rundown of this line." In fact, he said, the reopening of Magdalen Rd. station demonstrated BR's confidence in the line's future. Plans for it included replacement of MkI by MKII stock soon. It was also hoped that one D.M.U. morning train would soon be replaced by a hauled train, but this would depend on the economic situation.

The question of a halt to serve the Hardwick Industrial Estate was raised. Mr. Senter pointed out the role of local authorities in this matter. Mr. Garrod suggested the new association could undertake research into possible demand for such a halt.

On the closure issue again, Mr. Senter stressed that BR was not "going around looking for lines to close;" but at the same time BR was not fully its own master. Mr. Maudlin enlarged on this, saying that there were people in the Department of the Environment who would like to see wholesale closures. These people must be fought.

In answer to a question on concessionary fares, Mr. Senter explained how the Prices Commission could affect BR. Their regulation meant that there sometimes had to be availability limits on fares concessions. He also argued, "You can't have a sale all the time".

Dr. Lacey paid tribute to the "immense co-operation" he had always had in his dealing with BR; and others present praised the helpful staff at Kings Lynn station.

Reopening lines was also discussed. Mr. Garrod pointed out that any relaying of the Magdalen Rd. - Wisbech section would be very difficult, since the trackbed had been built over at the Wisbech end; a new bridge would also be needed over the River Ouse - indeed, Mr. Senter said that this bridge had been in a very bad state in the mid-1960s and the prohibitive cost of rebuilding it had been a major reason for the closure of the line. Where a line was still in position, however, e.g. March - Wisbech, BR had given a pledge not to dismantle any installations while consideration was being given to reopening of lines to passengers.

RIS TO EXHIBIT

The RIS will be taking part in an exhibition organised by the Conservation Society and supported by 11 other bodies, in St. Michael-at-Plea exhibition centre, Norwich, from June 9th to June 17th. The theme will be conservation, and we shall be stressing the advantages of rail transport in this respect.

The RIS will also be mounting the same, and some additional, material in its own exhibition in the Central Library, Lowestoft, from September 27th to October 9th.

Both exhibitions will mark a major new departure for the Branch, and will, we hope, prove an effective method of getting our message across to even greater numbers of people.

YOUR help is needed. What we especially need are:

- (a) photographs of trains, passenger or freight, in East Anglia today (postcard size at least - or negatives.)
- (b) photographs of road congestion, heavy lorries, houses being demolished to make way for new roads etc.
- (c) documents, e.g. details of surveys; Line Users' Association Newsletters.
- (d) Facts and figures that can be visually presented, e.g. by graphs, and artistically-inclined volunteers to produce these.

Several members have already promised to help - but more will be welcome. Please contact the Branch Secretary.

Please specify if you wish to donate, sell or just loan photographs etc. to the RIS. Every care will be taken with items on loan.

It is hoped to build up a nucleus of material that can subsequently be exhibited elsewhere in East Anglia - and indeed further afield.

BENTLEY STATION ACTION COMMITTEE: completed survey forms are now being analysed. We expect to have the results in time for the next Branch Meeting.

FARES UP ...

Rail fares increased by an average of 12% on March 28th; a similar increase (13%) has been put on Eastern Counties bus fares. Miss C. Zilahi and Mr. T.J. Garrod have both had letters on this topic published in the local press, pointing out how symptomatic it is of public transport policy in this country.

BUT THERE ARE BARGAINS!!

1. Awayday Returns for Children 25p each; Weekend Returns for Children 50p each. From 28th March till 11th September each adult can take up to two children anywhere in the country by train for only 25p each on an Awayday (Day Return) return, or 50p each on a Weekend Return. This is a very welcome step by BR to cater for family travel.
2. Senior Citizen Railcard first introduced last year as an experiment, is to be continued. For £6 senior citizens can travel at half fare on any day of the week - not just midweek as before.
3. Merrymakers: BR have laid on an attractive programme of special trains from East Anglia again this year - details in the leaflet enclosed with this Newsletter. Please help to publicise these - the Branch Secretary has a few spare leaflets; alternatively write for some more to the BR Travel Manager at Norwich, Ipswich or Cambridge Station.

SUDBURY BRANCH

The Branch Committee at its meeting on March 6th discussed the Marks Tey-Sudbury branch - in the most southerly part of our area - and felt that there was scope for increased activity down there, including possibly a survey (like the Norwich - Sheringham one last year) and a Line Users' Association.

The Branch Secretary would like to hear from any member with special knowledge of, or a special interest in, this line and its catchment area; and anyone who could help conduct a survey. There was, a few years ago, an action committee in Sudbury, when the line was being threatened with closure, but we do not know if it still exists; if it does, we would want to contact it. Again, does any member have any information?

STRUCTURE PLANS

Most County Councils will be issuing their Draft Plans later this year, and the RIS will be studying them and preparing comments. Any member willing to assist in the compilation of comments for his or her particular county, or any other county, should let the Secretary know. The Society will purchase one copy of each Draft Plan.

We have already been sent a preliminary discussion document on the Cambs Structure Plan and have made some brief initial comments to the County Planning Officer on the need to promote public transport in the County.

The Norfolk Draft Plan has just been issued and the public consultation exercise is now beginning. One welcome point in it is the selection of six towns for major expansion: Fakenham, Swaffham, North Walsham; Diss, Dereham and Downham Market. All but one is on a railway line; and expansion of Dereham and Fakenham will greatly strengthen the case for reopening that line to passenger services.

It is also stated "further rail closures will be resisted, except where British Rail can show closure would help the overall public transport situation" - we await with interest an explanation of this latter point...

Bedfordshire: in response to a discussion document issued by Beds. County Council, this Branch and the London & Home Counties Branch of the RIS issued, on March 18th, a report of about 1,700 words. Special thanks are due to Messrs. D.W. Green, M.P. Farley, C.J. Wheeler and R.N. Forsythe, and to Rev. T.G. Comber (Oxford Area Representative of the RIS) for their help in the compiling of this report.

Our report calls for the adoption of a strategy favouring growth in places served by public transport, and urges reopening of Arlesey and Sharnbrook stations; three new halts in the Bedford area; electrification of the two main

lines through the county; reorganisation of services on the main line north of Bedford; reopening the Luton - Dunstable line to passengers, as an alternative to the building of an expensive relief road.

We also press the case for relaying the 6 miles between Bedford and Sandy, to provide a strategic link in a rail route for passengers and freight from the northern Home Counties and East Anglia to the Midlands.

NEW SIDING AT GAZELEY

East Cambs District Council is supporting an application by Redland Roadstone for a rail siding at Gazeley, east of Newmarket. Our Branch Committee member Mr. S.F. Wilkinson has written to the Council, congratulating them on their decision and adding, "I sincerely hope this example will give a lead to your neighbouring authorities who, despite stating to the press that they deplore the large numbers of heavy lorries plundering through villages causing pollution and other annoyance to residents, do nothing positive to alleviate the situation."

We are also pleased to hear the Council's view that Gazeley siding, and other private sidings, should be available by agreement for use by other companies.

NENTA

5000 copies for the first Newsletter of the North East Norfolk Travellers' Association have been distributed, and membership of the association is more than 120.

Among the items in this interesting and lively newsletter are details of the negotiations for a halt at Suffield Park; the appointment of Baxter Travel as BR agent in Cromer; developments on the North Norfolk Railway at Sheringham; and information about bargains on British Rail.

One matter being investigated by NENTA is the possible inclusion of Cromer, Sheringham and Wroxham in the Golden Rail scheme.

RIS in the MEDIA

Our members Mr. D. Maudlin and Mr. C.W. Taylor took part in a phone-in programme on Radio Orwell in early March; also taking part was Mr. W. Muncie, Divisional Commercial Manager of BR. Mr. P.J. Killby has had a letter in the Eastern Daily Press on weekly seasons and other reduced fare facilities. BBC television "Look East" reported our comments on the Bedfordshire Structure Plan on March 30th.

The issue of Norwich Extra on 19.3.76 carried an article on the work of the RIS. Norwich Extra is a recently launched paper financed by advertising and delivered free to all homes in the city.

Any member who knows of any other such papers in the area (other than Ipswich Extra) is asked to inform the Branch Secretary. We do, of course, already have full details of all the conventional papers, as listed in Willings' Press Guide.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome more new members:

1. North East Norfolk Travellers' Association, Sec: Rev. A.H.R. Thomas, 28 Alfred Road, Cromer, Norfolk, NR27 9AN.
2. Mr. M.D. Bayes, 5 Eldith Ave., Fordham, Ely, Cambs. CB7 5NZ.
3. Mr. B.H. Johnson, 33 High Street, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge, CB1 5JD.
4. Mr. A.N. Moore, 17 Hill Street, Norwich, NR2 2DT.
5. Mr. J.C. Baker, Pheasant Cottage, Horringer, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk.

Rev. A.R. Woolley has moved to Gestingthorpe Hall, Halstead, Essex, CO9 3BB - still just within the Branch area.

Mr. D.W. Chambers' vacation address is 182 Peterborough Rd., Whittlesey, Peterborough, PE7 1PD.

CRAG: Mr. S.F. Wilkinson is now representing the RIS at meetings of the Cambridge Rail Action Group, which has recently issued a well-reasoned statement on the need for trains to get a fairer share of transport investment.

BLUA: The next Newsletter of the Breckland Line Users' Association is due out this month.

MARCH - WISBECH: OUR CHALLENGE

The following is the text (slightly abridged) of a letter sent by the Branch Secretary on 20.2.76 to every member of Cambs County Council, and to the local press:

"The Highways & Transportation Committee of Cambs. County Council decided that no further action be taken by the Council to secure the reintroduction of a passenger service on the March - Wisbech railway.

We consider this to be a short-sighted decision,... which should be reversed.

Not only did the Committee turn its back on reopening the rail link to passengers, but it also failed to do anything whatever about improving the bus service to Wisbech. This despite the fact that the County Surveyor had suggested 'improved bus services' as an alternative to restoring the train service!

And yet, in a recent survey by the Planning Department (reported in the Cambridge Evening News, 27.1.76), councillors in Cambs. stated that the two major problems concerning them were heavy traffic and (a partly related problem) inadequate public transport.

Perceptive comments. Fine sentiments. But the time has come for action rather than words. Such as devoting a higher share of the County's transport budget to public transport; and pressing the point home when applying to the Department of the Environment for Transport Supplementary Grant.

Reopening the March - Wisbech railway, and an appropriate reorganisation of buses in the Wisbech area, would be a major step in the provision of adequate public transport in the north of the county.

We therefore stand by our call for the restoration of passenger services. WE ALSO CHALLENGE TO PUBLIC DEBATE ANY WHO OPPOSE THE REOPENING OF THIS LINE. The debate could be held at a mutually convenient time and place and under a neutral chairman, and be conducted according to the normal rules of debate. We are open to all suggestions."

A summary of our report (see last Newsletter) then followed.

Only one Councillor has bothered to give any reply at all, and no one has yet accepted our challenge to debate. But that challenge remains.

WAMRAC also distributed a summary of their report to every councillor who attended the Council Meeting on March 2nd.

FREIGHT CLOSURE PROPOSALS

The Society continues to press for a consultative procedure whereby members of the public can object to a freight closure proposal, as they already can to a proposed withdrawal of passenger services. Copies of our correspondence with the Department of the Environment on this issue have been requested by Mr. A. Bevan of the West Midlands Railway Development Association, and we hope to gain the support of this organisation in our efforts.

A letter was received from Mr. R.A. Smith of the D.o.E. at the beginning of February, giving some interesting information on grants for private sidings; agreeing with the advantages of rail transport as set out in our previous letter; stating that BR's freight business is intended to be financially self-supporting; but evading or ignoring other points we had raised. In our reply, dated 16.2.76, we have reiterated these unanswered points, and asked for further information about a possible grant towards repairs to the road/rail bridge at Yarmouth.

The matter will be discussed further at the next Branch Meeting.

EAST MIDLANDS AREA ACTIVITIES

A survey is now taking place on the Grantham - Sleaford - Boston - Skegness line, similar to the one conducted by the RIS on the Norwich - Cromer - Sheringham line last year. Our East Midlands Area Representative, Mr. J. Ginns, became the father of twins just as the survey was about to start! Rather than postpone the survey, however, it was felt that it should go ahead, and Mr. S.F. Wilkinson has kindly taken over the organising of this stage. Thanks are also due to Messrs. C.J. Milnes, M.T. Savage and P.R. Lawrence for their help in the initial research.

AYLSHAM & DISTRICT RAIL ACTION COMMITTEE

ADRAC has produced a leaflet on the case for reopening the Wroxham - Aylsham - Reepham line, and this is now being distributed to all households. Reepham and small villages nearby have already been covered. The County Councillor for Reepham, Mr. A. Fisher, has shown a keen interest.

Mr. P.R. Lawrence spoke on the case for reopening to the February meeting of the Reepham Society.

To further publicise its cause, ADRAC is hoping to have a stall at Reepham Charter Day on June 26th; and is investigating the possibility of an entry in Aylsham Carnival.

WyDFRAC FAKENHAM SURVEY

This is now almost complete, and it is planned to reveal the results at a public meeting to be held in Fakenham, probably in May. Local members, watch out for details.

RAILWAY CONCRETE DEPOT AT LOWESTOFT MAY CLOSE

Five waggon-loads of concrete sleepers, posts, platform sections etc. leave Lowestoft by rail every day, bound for all parts of the Eastern, Southern and Midland Regions. This traffic will cease if BR go ahead with plans to close the concrete section of their Harbour Works at Lowestoft later this year.

The proposal has been described as a "disaster" by Mr. A.W. Godfrey, an RIS member and Secretary of Lowestoft NUR, and the union will certainly be resisting the closure.

The RIS Branch Secretary has written to Sir Richard Marsh, with copies to the NUR and local press. Here are extracts from the letter:

"We cannot understand why the depot should be closed... In 1974 it made a profit of £17,000. New equipment was installed throughout the works in 1975, when a loss of just £323 was recorded. In 1975 the depot was working to full capacity, with heavy overtime being done.

Does it therefore really make sense to close it now? Especially when British Rail are also purchasing 2000 sleepers a week from Costain?

We feel strongly that the Lowestoft concrete depot should remain and the valuable machinery and skills of the men there be used to the full.

If there is spare capacity, why does not the British Railways Board make full use of its rights to tender for outside work? The Lowestoft works have in the past done some jobs for outside bodies... As the depot has a rail connection, its products can easily be sent by rail all over the country. Producing for outside bodies also provides extra income for British Rail, thereby improving its finances."

IN BRIEF

1. A copy of our report on the March - Wisbech line has been supplied, at the Assistant County Librarian's request, to the Cambridge Central Library archives.
2. The Department of the Environment has granted a Light Railway (Transfer) Order to the North Norfolk Railway Company, giving it full responsibility for operating the Sheringham - Weybourne line. A programme of 280 steam trains is planned for the coming season. Details from the Manager, Sheringham Station. How to get to Sheringham? From most areas, it's quickest to take a BR train from Norwich; you have 100 yards to walk at the other end.
3. We have had further correspondence with BR about the Norwich - Birmingham stock. They know the problems but can offer little hope of immediate improvement - it's ultimately a question of investment.
4. Mr. F.I.S. Carter has had encouraging replies from about half the local authorities along the East Suffolk line, re rail publicity. BR no longer have any redundant illuminated notice boards for use in town centres - but we hope ordinary ones can be used to display rail publicity.
5. Results of a survey of local opinion by Cambs. County Council show that, "Many people are calling for less money to be spent on roads and private transport, with the saving being diverted to public transport and cycleway provision." (Hunts Post, 1.4.76.)