

Rail East

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Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society.

REGIONAL RAILWAYS CUTS AND FARE INCREASES

CUTS in train services, mainly on Sundays, were announced in September. Routes affected are Norwich to Lowestoft/Yarmouth, Sheringham, East Suffolk, Breckland, Ipswich to Cambridge, Felixstowe and Sudbury lines. The announcements had all the appearance of a panic measure, and no figures were available to show how much money BR would save or what revenue they would lose.

The East Suffolk and Norfolk Rail Alliance (RDS is a member) called an emergency meeting on September 11th and sent BR management a list of searching questions to which the answers would determine the course of further action. The Alliance also backed an RDS call for a freeze on fares pending the introduction of new sprinter trains, and called for BR to seek compensation from BREL for the late delivery of new stock.

Subsequently Great Yarmouth Borough Council voted £9,000 subsidy to ensure retention of a winter Sunday morning service to the town. The Norfolk Rail Policy group failed to give any constructive reaction, despite much prompting by the RDS. Suffolk County Council tendered for replacement buses and these will run from the 6th October.

RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod was interviewed on BBC Radio Suffolk and by the East Anglian Daily Times. He commended Suffolk CC for their prompt action and said that a bus service was better than nothing but that in due course we wanted to see the trains back. Past experience has shown that only a minority of former rail passengers used replacement buses. The reason for this is not hard to see. When, on September 23rd, the 17.21 Ipswich to Lowestoft train failed and had to be replaced by a bus, the bus (loaded to the gunwales) took over 2½ hours for a journey that normally takes under 1 ½ hours by train. About 40 schoolchildren were left stranded outside Woodbridge station because there was no room for them.

The RDS and ESTA have issued leaflets to passengers on the trains spelling out the reasons for the increasingly unreliable service and urging protests to BR management and MPs.

A GALA PERFORMANCE

THE Branch has recently had two very successful days at BR events. On the August Bank Holiday our stand was at the Colchester Open Day. Splendid weather ensured a good turn out by the public. Our stand was centrally placed among the display of current and preserved locomotives so we had plenty of visitors. Many people enquired about the RDS and we were able to sell about £45 of books.

A few weeks later, on September 14th, we were at the Cambridge Gala Day. Once again the weather was good, even if the wind did blow the stand over a few times! The event was well attended, with various displays, preserved locomotives and special trains to Swavesey and Middleton Towers among the highlights. Over £100 was raised on the stand, with the new RDS booklet 'Switch onto our Trains' and rail guides selling well. The pile of second-hand magazines was greatly reduced by the end of the day.

Many thanks must go to all those who helped on the stands.

NEWS FROM KINGS LYNN

ELECTRIFICATION work is now about 75% complete with only the Ely area outstanding. Unfortunately, problems with signalling design and shortage of technicians has pushed the completion date back to July 1992. On completion of the project, the existing Kings Cross to Cambridge fast trains will be extended northwards to give Kings Lynn a direct hourly service from London. Some morning and evening peak services will run to Liverpool Street.

Some freight services in the area have been affected by the end of the Speedlink System in July. Block trainloads of sand from Middleton Towers and imported coal are unchanged. Imported urea to Ciba Geigy at Duxford is now carried on the new Kings Lynn to Dover International service. There has also been some cereal traffic. Traffic lost with the end of Speedlink are Campbells Soup, Fen Grain, Dalgelyt and some Dow traffic. The situation regarding British Sugar is unclear, the oil traffic will probably remain but the van traffic may cease.

MEETING WITH SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

THE RDS, ESTA, ESTA (Felixstowe) and MISTA recently met representatives from Suffolk County Council (SCC) to talk about a possible SCC Rail Transport Strategy. This was the result of a number of previous meetings. The RDS and the user groups hope that this will eventually lead to more modern rolling stock, improved frequencies and better reliability on all the routes leading to Ipswich. Although depressed at Regional Railways sudden reduction of some services, we were impressed by SCC's rapid response in the provision of alternative services. It is regretted that Regional Railways did not explain their problem to the local authorities like SCC before committing themselves to the cuts. Perhaps a temporary financial response to those problems could have been made that would have benefited RR rather than the bus companies. Those at the meeting looked forward to next March, when changes to Anglia RR management will be complete and long term planning in conjunction with Local Authorities and user groups can get under way.

RDS MEETING NORWICH - SEPTEMBER 22ND

THE cuts in train services and fare increases were the main items discussed at our public meeting in Norwich. Regional Railways Manager Barrie Thomas told our meeting that the cuts were due to the severe financial crisis on Regional Railways caused by the recession. There was an urgent need to save money. He said that most Sunday morning services were lightly loaded especially in Winter, therefore the cuts were designed to cause the minimum of disruption. Mr Thomas hoped that the cuts were a temporary measure only.

At the same time as cutting services, Regional Railways have also increased fares on their routes. Barrie Thomas said that the increases were needed to pay for new investment. New class 158 units were being introduced on Cross Country services and class 153 single units would be arriving shortly for use on local services along with existing class 156 units. Track and signalling were also being improved as funds allowed.

At the meeting the Branch expressed its concern over the way in which the cuts had been introduced. There had been no mention of cuts when we met Barrie Thomas in July, and the new timetable had been printed before the cuts were announced. Stopping the remaining Norwich to Ely trains at some of the other stations, and cheap Sunday fares, were suggested by members as ways of improving the service. Regional Railways were asked to send details of future changes to the RDS so that we would be in a better position to comment when asked by the media.

Apart from the cuts, other subjects discussed at the meeting were additional morning peak trains from Thetford to Norwich and the plans for Lowestoft station. Barrie Thomas accepted that an extra train from Thetford was needed, but said that rolling stock was not available. Even if an additional unit was found, it would be difficult to make use of it throughout the day. A decision had not yet been made on Lowestoft station. It was accepted that a new station on the same site would be the best option, but Barrie Thomas said that the Local Authority would oppose the demolition of the existing station. The choice is between refurbishment of the existing station or a new station building further along the existing platform.

BRANCH 20TH ANNIVERSARY BUFFET AND AGM - FEB. 1992

PREPARATIONS are well under way for our 20th Anniversary buffet at the Ely Maltings on 22nd February 1992. So far around 30 members have said that they are coming. If you have not yet replied but would like to attend, please can you let Clara Zilahi know as soon as possible. Tickets cost £6.50 and her address is on the back page. A guest list has been drawn up and invitations will be sent out shortly.

GREAT NORTHERN LINE NEWS

MEMBERS of the Huntingdon Commuter Group have met InterCity and Network SouthEast managers to discuss future train services from the station.

InterCity stated that they did not intend to reintroduce the morning peak services from Huntingdon however, a number of north bound trains in the morning would stop at Huntingdon to provide direct services to the North East. Likewise, some evening south bound trains would stop at Huntingdon. This is a most welcome development and it is essential that these services are well advertised.

On NSE services the commuters wanted a 45 minute journey time (50 minutes at present), improved seating and air-conditioning. A faster journey time is possible and some existing trains arrive early. However, due to the intensive service on the route, it would be difficult to achieve this on a day to day basis. NSE have agreed to investigate the formation of a small sub fleet of class 317s with 2+2 airline style seating and air-conditioning. These units could also be used on the Kings Lynn services. NSE did warn the commuters that the cost of such work would be difficult to justify.

In the longer term, NSE hope to improve the track layout at Finsbury Park and Huntingdon to reduce congestion. Upgrading of the crossover at Sandy should also be investigated as many of the limited stop trains switch from the fast to the slow lines at this point. The line will get new 125 mph rolling stock later in the 90s as part of the Thameslink 2000 scheme. This project will allow through trains from Peterborough to Ashford (Kent).

THE POTTER GROUP ELY

NICK DIBBEN and Chris Burton joined members of the RDS Freight Committee on a visit to the Potter Group distribution depot near Ely. As reported in Rail East 71, the site is undergoing considerable development and much of this work is now complete. The new discharge pit is in operation and the new sidings and warehousing nearly finished. An improved connection with the main line will be installed as part of the Ely station modernisation work early next year. This will simplify traffic movements and allow longer trains to use the depot.

During the visit there were several ferrywagons in the depot waiting to be loaded with pet food bound for the continent. Since the end of the Speedlink network in July, these wagons now travel by Kings Lynn - Dover International service for the first part of their journey.

FUTURE EVENTS

Sat 16th November	RDS public meeting Little St Mary's Church Hall, off Trumpington Street, Cambridge, starting at 2pm. Guest speaker Julian Crow of Network SouthEast.
Sat 7th December	NENTA Traintours trip to York. Details from NENTA Railtour House, 10 Buxton Road, North Walsham, Norfolk. Tel. 0692 406152.
Sat 22nd February 1992	Branch AGM and 20th Anniversary Event at the Ely Maltings.
Sat 2nd May 1992	RDS National AGM in Birmingham.

IN BRIEF

THE branch has objected to the proposed route of the A428 Bedford Bypass. The route will cut across the route of the former Bedford to Sandy line making reinstatement of the line more difficult in the future.

The Branch has sent Norfolk County Council a list of possible improvements to rail services for inclusion in the County's Rail Strategy.

NE Cambridgeshire MP Malcolm Moss has recently shown interest in re-opening the Wisbech line. The MP has written to the BR Chairman for advice on how to proceed with a study on the route.

Pam Thornhill, who owns a Pullman Coach, is hoping to restore it. If any members would like to help, please can they contact Peter Wakefield.

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The next **Rail East** will be issued at the start of February 1992. Items for the next edition should be sent to Nick Dibben by the end of December.

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