

RAIL EAST

Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society

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RAIL SERVICES IMPROVING

The latest report by the Transport User's Consultative Committee for Eastern England (TUCC), reveals a 10% drop in complaints received from passengers. Although several areas showed this improvement, they were partially offset by increased complaints about cancellations, overcrowding, and cycles on trains.

TUCC Chairman, David Bertram, highlighted some of the steps being taken to improve passenger wellbeing, such as the Charter Mark awarded to Anglia, contrasting this with the negative and sometimes downright inaccurate image of the railways portrayed in the media. Indeed, the sparse coverage of this 'Good News' TUCC report was a case in point.

Besides the many positive general observations of our local railway, particular concern was expressed about understaffed stations and vandalism, noting that £1 spent combating vandalism is £1 less to spend on improving the rail service. The final section of the report looked to the future remarking that, "All too often too wide a gap exists between theory and reality and our concern is that it is not the passenger who suffers as a result", a view shared by all in the RDS.

SUDBURY LINE

The allocation of rolling stock for the new train operating companies means that only a single coach unit is available to work trains on the Sudbury line. Although perfectly adequate for most services, some trains are now overcrowded. The fear is that more London commuters will now drive to Marks Tey to catch their train, depriving the line of much needed revenue: a move that could see the start of a general rundown in the service.

It is, of course, lunacy that there should be any need at all for diesel traction in this location; the line ought to have been electrified years ago. But a shortage of diesel units there certainly is, to the extent that the East Anglian Museum has suggested that one of its preserved diesel units might be used.

So, local members, do please write to your MP urging adequate provision of rolling stock for the route. And, if you are interested, the Sudbury Rail User Group is being relaunched; David Bigg is the person to contact at: Eyelevel, 76 Maldon Road, Witham, CM8 1HP.

BRANCH AGM 26 FEBRUARY 1994

A near record attendance at the Ely Maltings heard Regional Railways Manager, David McIntosh, give an upbeat talk on

prospects for East Midlands and Cross Country services from East Anglia. He thanked the RDS for helping persuade the civil servants not to break up Cross-Country services as part of the privatisation process. The service was now safe and money was being spent on improving the facilities at Ely station to further enhance its role as an important rail interchange.

To enthusiastic murmurings, he stated his wish "to make Dr Beeching turn in his grave by re-opening many of the stations closed in the 1960s". The success of the Nottingham to Newstead line, currently being extended, exemplified what could be achieved when the will exists.

The meeting discussed the implications for rail development of the threatened break-up of County Councils. In recent years some local authorities have shown greatly increased interest in rail matters, supporting services and undertaking feasibility studies into new stations. The prime concern is that proposed district authorities would be poorly positioned to consider wider planning issues, as well as possessing inadequate resources.

This resulted in a formal resolution calling for the retention of the existing county structure, or the creation of a strong regional co-ordinating body for transport matters.

RDS CELEBRATES YARMOUTH'S 150 YEARS OF RAILWAYS

Members of the RDS played a major role in the events surrounding the 150th anniversary of the Norwich-Reedham-Yarmouth line, the first railway in Norfolk. Stewart White of BBC Look East, started proceedings by unveiling a plaque at Yarmouth station. He also presented prizes to the four winners of a colouring competition for children sponsored by the Yarmouth Mercury. In one sense the week came to a head with the launch of a new beer, Great Eastern, from local brewer Woodford, plus a Rail Ale Trail featuring pubs along the route.

Small exhibitions were held in the Bridewell Museum, Norwich, and Yarmouth Town Hall. Also in Norwich and Yarmouth respectively, talks on the line's history and future were given by RDS General Secretary, Trevor Garrod and historian, Dr Richard Joby.

But the true climax of activity was a Rail Pageant at Reedham, at which the RDS stand did steady business.

A further significant RDS contribution was the publication of a booklet 'The First 150 Years of the Norwich-Reedham-Yarmouth Railway'. Recounting not only the building of the line, but also its fortunes in more recent years, it included the successful action taken to save the Reedham-Yarmouth section during the 1980s. The book costs £1.75 from our Sales Officer, Chris Milnes; or direct from John Laycock, 15 Sandhole Lane, Little Plumstead, Norwich, NR13 5HZ. Cheques/PO payable to RDS.

A big thank you to the many members who helped with the anniversary, especially Mike Taylor, Rod Lock, Denis Perkins, and Ben Walsh. Similar celebrations take place next year on the Norwich-Ely route; and in 1996 on the Dereham Line, or what's left of it. These provide further occasions to promote rail in

these areas, so if you have any ideas and offers of help, do please contact Trevor Garrod.

FUTURE EVENTS

Saturday June 18 - RDS sponsored cycle ride. Branch members Trevor Garrod, Richard Pill and Clara Zilahi will be taking part. The route is between Braintree and Stansted Airport to draw attention to the possible reinstatement of this route.

Saturday June 25 - Branch meeting at the Assembly House, Theatre Street, Norwich starting at 2pm. The guest speaker will be Andy Cooper, Director of Anglia Railways, who will talk about future plans for the railways in the east of the region.

Saturday July 16 - A special train run by the chemical firm Ciba-Geigy from Royston, Cambridge, Ely, March and Peterborough to York. Tickets cost £25 and are available from David Pepperell, 15 Vine Close, Stapleford, Cambridge CB2 5BZ. Please enclose a first class SAE.

Saturday September 17 - Branch meeting at the Novotel Ipswich starting at 1.30pm. Richard Middleton, East Anglian Zonal Railtrack Director, will be talking about the role his company will have in future rail development.

SUMMER READING - TUNNEL VISION IN TWO PARTS

Some of the new travel opportunities opened up by the Channel tunnel are detailed in a new RDS book 'Europe Beyond the Tunnel'. Published by Leading Edge, the book costs £7.99 and should be available at our Norwich meeting in June.

And so to tunnel vision 2, and a splendidly entertaining read called 'Thomas the Privatised Tank Engine', a collection of anecdotes which first saw light of day in Private Eye. Often about the Department of Transport, but certainly unauthorised by them, the book sells at £4.99 (including shop access charges and a minimum 8% return on investment)! The royalties have generously been donated by the publishers to the coffers of RDS.

ELY INTERCHANGE

East Cambs District Council has ordered a study of rail/bus interchange possibilities at Ely Station. The idea has been given a boost by the news that West Norfolk District Council are pressing for half-hourly services on the Kings Lynn route.

WISBECH

Money from European Union funds might be on offer to help restore passenger services to this town. Cambridgeshire CC have done a cursory study which indicated a cost of £1.6m for re-opening. Several councillors remain sceptical of the accuracy of this figure and are demanding a more detailed review.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE ST IVES SAGA

Public Transport Minister Mr Roger Freeman's visit to the line is now to take place on 21 June - full report therefore at the Norwich meeting.

PRIVATISATION - WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

As a national rail user organisation we certainly cannot adopt the attitude of, "Well, let's hope it all goes wrong", just so that we can say "told you so"! It is in virtually everybody's interest that the new system does work. With this in view the RDS has met with both Railtrack and the Rail Regulator, ensuring that rail user concerns are well to the fore. In addition, each RDS Branch is writing a sample Franchise Document setting out minimum service levels and ideas for future investment. Any suggestions should be sent speedily to Nick Dibben.

Given its complexity, privatisation problems are bound to arise. When they do, RDS members should make their MP, of whichever party, well aware that they expect the problem to be tackled constructively, and not slide into a negative party political slanging match. Thus far the signs are encouraging; Ministers accept that investment will be effectively encouraged only by longer franchise periods.

The main concern at the moment is the threat to railway running costs from the Treasury's notion that railways have hitherto made wholly inadequate returns on investment. A possibly reasonable stance, but certainly not whilst competing road transport is allowed a quite different set of rules. A motion to this effect was passed at the RDS National AGM, calling on road and rail users to be charged on an equal basis. An RDS meeting with Treasury officials is planned to discuss this imbalance.

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LAST CALL

Don't forget the RDS National Draw tickets which you got with the last Railwatch - sell as many as you possibly can. And of course, items for the next Rail East to Nick Dibben by August 20th. Have a splendid summer, and see you all in Norwich!