

St Ives reopening moves nearer

The prospects for the re-opening of the Cambridge to St Ives railway are at their brightest ever following Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman's invigorating visit to the area on June 21. Invited by S E Cambs MP, James Paice, the Minister met Anne Campbell MP, councillors and officials, and the RDS represented by Peter Wakefield and Nick Dibben.

County Transportation Director, Mike Sharpe, outlined the work carried out so far, and indicated that using diesel units rather than electric trains, would reduce the initial cost by about £1.6m. The target date for completion could be 1997/8, dependant on the time taken for Government approval of funding. According to Mike Sharpe, the Government grant would be about £5-6m, a small sum compared with other transport projects. He added that, last year, the County had scrapped the Cambridge Southern by-pass saving £17m.

The reasons for the project were then reinforced by the other people present. Nick Dibben, speaking for the RDS, welcomed the progress made so far and suggested that a quick positive response from the Minister would help attract private sector money for the scheme.

Responding to the arguments, Roger Freeman said that he was impressed by the local support and

considered that the re-opening made sense, urging all involved to work for a 1997 re-opening, the 150th anniversary of the original line. He added that he would like to see many more lines re-open. He agreed with the DMU option and confirmed that Sprinter units would be available from the stock leasing firms(!). He thought that the line was too small for a separate operator suggested one of the existing train units that served Cambridge run it. He proposed Railtrack as Project Managers for the scheme and offered to set up a meeting between the County, Railtrack and the Department of Transport to discuss this.

All present were most impressed by the Minister's positive attitude to the re-opening. Roger Freeman was moved on in the cabinet reshuffle, and we trust his successor, John Watts, will further the cause.

Thameslink 2000

A consortium of local authorities, led by Bedfordshire, has been set up to promote Thameslink 2000, one of the cheapest and the most cost effective projects in the London area. Trains would run from Kings Lynn, Cambridge and Peterborough across London. RDS has long campaigned for this scheme and welcomes the growing interest of local authorities.

Dates for your diary

The National Conference of Rail Users 11 a.m. Saturday October 8th at the Friends House, Euston Road, London. The cost is £6 plus £5 for lunch. Bookings to David Soames, 158 Atherstone Avenue, Peterborough, PE3 6DN.

St Neots Green Fair on Saturday October 8th. RDS East Anglian Branch will have a publicity stand. Volunteers to help are welcome - please contact Nick Dibben.

Fen Line Users AGM Saturday November 12th at 2pm at the Ely Maltings. Local railway management and train makers ABB will there.

Branch meeting at Cambridge will be on 19 November. We hope to have someone from the Thameslink 2000 project as our guest speaker.

Thank you to all those who sold tickets for the RDS national draw, over £2000 was raised for RDS funds.

Branch meeting

Thirty five members attended our Norwich meeting in June to hear a highly lively and positive talk from Andy Cooper, Director of Anglia Train Operating Company (TOC) about the new railway organisation and its prospects.

With the aid of colour slides, Mr Cooper energetically explained the function of his company and how it related to the operations of Railtrack and the rolling stock leasing firms. Anglia TOC is unique in that it combines both former InterCity and Regional lines. This provides opportunities for integrating the services between the main line and branch lines, to their mutual benefit. Examples of this integration were better connections at stations, and the extension of the London Day out ticket to all stations in the area. It is hoped that, by better marketing, to encourage the growth of travel to London from the branch lines.

Anglia TOC is keen to develop its relationships with local communities and local authorities and equally welcomes input from rail user groups and, of course, the RDS. Mr Cooper preferred local authorities to help pay for new trains rather than subsidise certain services.

Customer priorities and complaints were similar on both main and branch line services and were being addressed as funds allowed. Anglia had been awarded a Charter Mark last year in recognition of its success in improving services. Responding to the oft heard call for more investment, Mr Cooper noted that, in fact, some £350m had been spent in Anglia or was planned for the period 1982-1997. Currently, money is being spent on the resignalling of the route between London and Colchester.

He warned that too much talk about under funding might create a negative image that would put people off using the railways. There was, he concluded, a need to talk up the benefits of rail travel.

Breckland line

The May 1994 timetable brought service improvements to all East Anglia routes with one exception, the Breckland line service to intermediate stations between Ely and Norwich. For the operator, Regional Railways Central, this is no easy service to timetable as there are two distinct markets to be catered for: long distance travellers from Norwich to the Midlands and North West and people using the stations between Norwich and Ely. This May Regional Railways tried to combine the two services, a move which pleased no one; long distance passengers complained about extra stops, local passengers complained about fewer trains. The branch wrote to Mark Causebrook, Director of Regional Railways Central to ask what was going on.

Mr Causebrook replied that he had conflicting timetable requirements on certain key trains. For example, the 15.55 from Norwich could not leave any earlier because of school traffic but had to be in Peterborough at a fixed time to make connections. As a result, it cannot stop at all the local stations. Following discussions with passengers and local authorities, some additional stops were introduced. RDS feels that a long term solution is required, for example: more rolling stock to enable a Norwich-Cambridge stopping service to operate, with the possibility of some trains being extended to Yarmouth and Stansted Airport.

These problems have led Breckland Line User Group being reformed. Those interested in joining should contact John Saunders, Sawyers Lane, Sutton, Wymondham, NR18 9JH.

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New trains

Production has started on the new Networker Express trains for use between Kings Cross and Peterborough or Kings Lynn. Fen Line group members Peter Harding and Robert Stripe have visited the the ABB works in York were impressed with what they saw.

Each 100 mph (160 km/h) train will have 268 seats in a 2+2 layout. Power can be drawn from both overhead lines and from the third rail, making these trains suitable for the Thameslink 2000 services. The first train should start trials at the end of this year, with regular services starting in 1995.

In brief...

CAMBRIDGE RETAILER
ROBERT SAYLE has announced plans for an out-of-town superstore next to the M11. The Branch has written to the store's Director suggesting that the new store should be built next to the railway line, possibly at Cherterton Junction, to attract people from a wider area and to comply with the Government's latest planning guidelines.

ALCONBURY US AIR FORCE BASE is due to close in the next few years and could become a freight interchange with a rail connection from the adjacent East Coast Main line.

RAIL TRAFFIC FROM FELIXSTOWE DOCKS represents about 17% of the port's container traffic and has increased by 20% this year. A new £45m terminal is planned to increase capacity by 200,000 containers a year. At present, there are no plans to extend the railway to this new facility.

SUDBURY TO MARKS TEY services have been revised by Great Eastern to ease overcrowding in the morning peak. Three suitable trains for London commuters leave Sudbury at 05.51, 06.34 and 07.17. The recently formed Sudbury Rail Support Group has delivered 4000 leaflets promoting the line. Further details on the group can be obtained from David Edwards, 13 Longleaf Drive, Braintree, Essex, CM7 7XS.

The strike

At the time of writing there appears to be no end in sight to the dispute between Railtrack and the RMT over signalman's pay. It is RDS policy not to take sides, but to urge for a speedy and fair settlement.

The longer the dispute continues the greater the risk that both passenger and freight traffic will be lost. Branch lines, which have a large number of old signal boxes, have been closed on strike days and are most at risk.

A resolution calling on both sides to end the dispute and explore less disruptive ways of resolving problems will be discussed at our next meeting.

Suffolk rail study

Consultants carrying out a strategic rail study for Suffolk County Council have produced some detailed costings and benefits for the proposals.

Upgrading of the East Suffolk service between Ipswich and Lowestoft including additional passing loops, resignalling, passenger information system and extra trains would cost around £35m. Electrification of the Felixstowe Branch would cost £9m, and Ipswich to Peterborough £39m. Possible new stations include Bramford, Felixstowe Dock, Claydon, Moreton Hall and Soham.

The Suffolk Rail Policy Group now has to decide with which of these schemes they wish to proceed.

RDS EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH PUBLIC MEETING

Saturday 17th September at 1.30 pm
at the Ipswich Novotel. Richard Middleton, Director of Railtrack East Anglia will be the guest speaker. The meeting will finish at 4pm to allow Cambridge members to catch the 16.19 train home.

Directions: From Ipswich station, go straight ahead, cross the road and the river, turn right into Commercial Road and continue to the end. The hotel is to the left. The entrance is on the left of the building. Food and drink are available from the bar.