

Future looks good for Dereham

Within a few years, passengers could be alighting from a Liverpool - Norwich Sprinter at Wymondham's tastefully restored station, as the first stage of a day trip to mid Norfolk. They might have time to visit the "Brief Encounter" refreshment room or even walk into the historic town centre with its unusual market cross and Abbey before boarding a restored Derby Lightweight diesel unit waiting in the newly constructed platform on the branch to Dereham.

Those able to sit at the front or rear of this 1950's train would have a panoramic view as the unit proceeded up the Tiffey valley and through the undulating countryside, calling at Kimberley, Hardingham, Thuxton and Yaxham. Enthusiasts might alight at Hardingham or Yaxham to view the railway relics. Ramblers and cyclists might also alight, while local people would join the train to Dereham.

On arrival at Dereham, there would be a restored station building with cafe and conference centre to view; a large supermarket just opposite; a unique collection of diesel multiple units and a Museum of Goods Handling to explore. The centre of this large market town would be only a few minutes' walk away. Meanwhile, a modern Sprinter might head back along the branch taking local people to Wymondham and Norwich.

This vision of the future has come much nearer in recent months. Breckland District Council agreed in January to buy the line and lease it to the Mid Norfolk Railway Society. The Council's bid was subsequently accepted by the BR Property Board. The Society has been changed into a Charitable Trust, which means it cannot be taken over but has greater scope to raise funds. It has been promised £20,000 from the Architectural Heritage Foundation for work on Dereham station.

The Society's A G M held in Wymondham on 25th March was

attended by over 100 of its 700 members. RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod was guest speaker. He described the increase in local authority involvement in rail services, and the progress made around the country with re-openings since the Dereham campaign was first launched back in 1974. Chairman John Hull, one of the founder members of the campaign, described the present state of progress as "the end of the beginning".

It is hoped to open a cafe in Dereham station this summer, and to start running trains over the two miles between Dereham and Yaxham - to be extended gradually towards Wymondham. Already, with BR Property Board permission, members of the Society have cleared undergrowth from the track over the section.

Dereham will be the destination for this year's RDS Sponsored Cycle Ride on Saturday, 24th June. Clara Zilahi, Trevor Garrod and Rob Archer will be among local members taking part. Full details can be obtained from Rob at 62 Checker Street, Kings Lynn, PE30 5AS

The Mid Norfolk Railway Society welcomes new members. To join send £12 to the Membership Secretary, Stuart Moye, 21 The Brambles, Ware, Herts., SG12 0XU (£9 for junior or retired, £27 for family members, £150 for life.)

Branch meeting

The next meeting of the RDS East Anglian Branch will be held in the Town Hall, Ipswich beginning at 2pm on Saturday 3rd June.

Come straight out of the station, cross the road at the traffic lights and carry straight along Princes Street, under/over the roundabout, until you reach a pedestrianised area. The Town Hall is on the building on the left.

East - West leaflet launch

The Branch is to launch its high quality leaflet calling for the establishment of the East - West main line at the next Branch Public Meeting on Saturday 3rd June at 2pm in Ipswich Town Hall. County Councillors in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, and Avon will be sent copies of the leaflet and urged to support the idea. I hope to see you at the meeting to tell you more about this. The meeting will also be addressed by a speaker on East Anglian freight topics.

P.Wakefield.

Bury St Edmunds Station facelift

RDS and MISTA were among the many organisations invited to a celebratory lunch on 30th March to mark the completion of the first phase of restoration work on Bury St Edmunds station. Richard Middleton, the Zonal Director of Railtrack, praised the partnership which had secured the striking improvements. Plaques were unveiled by Councillor Mrs Jane Bone, the Mayor of St. Edmundsbury, and an Anglian flag was raised by Andy Cooper. Expressing his pleasure at the work so far completed, Sir Graham Macmillan recalled the decades of previous neglect, praised the quality of station staff and called, like the Mayor, for the earliest possible start on a Phase Two, to include a decent waiting room. Sir William McAlpine explained the funding and purpose of the Railway Heritage Trust. Viewed from Station Hill, the station is now a fine 149 year old building.

The involvement of the RDS in these celebrations will not simply be to remember the past but to promote the present day railway and to help secure its future.

Trevor Garrod

Transport studies

King's Lynn

News that the Area Transportation Strategy identifies two sites for new rail stations is welcomed by the branch. A rail halt at Hardwick Bridge, costed at £386,000 is in the Capital programme for 1998/99. A station at Whitehouse Farm, costed at £995,000, is not yet included in the capital programme and is unlikely to be built before 2001. A Long Line information system has also been planned into the capital programme at £15,000 for the year 1997/98.

Norwich

The Area Transportation Strategy, while accepting the need to restrict access of vehicles to Norwich city centre, fails to mention the need to improve services on rail corridors into the city. The Norfolk County Council Draft Framework for Submission of Transport & Programme 1996/97 to 2000/01 seems to suggest that commuters will drive to the edge of the built up area and transfer to public transport at that point - i.e. Park and Ride buses. There is a clear need to provide earlier trains into the city in the morning peak to cater for the ever increasing numbers of workers taking advantage of "flexi-time" working. Electrification of the Norwich to Great Yarmouth line and the provision of capital funding for a Long Line System for the Norwich to Ely line will be part of our submission to Norfolk County Council for inclusion in the TPP.

Wisbech

Wisbech Town Council is backing restoration of passenger services to the town. The RDS has been doing that for years and Cambridgeshire County Council has been looking at the project too. The Council wants passenger service restoration linked to a railway museum. The project is costed at £5m. for a museum building and upgrading of the track to March. The Council will not provide any money(!), wanting the Millennium Commission to pay up to 50%. Some cash could come from the European Community, payable as Wisbech is a depressed area. Perhaps one reason it remains depressed is the absence of a passenger railway.

WAGN news

West Anglia and Great Northern Railway has put a manager in charge of each of the seven services it runs; each service now has a "brand" name. These are:

Cambridge Cruiser - the off-peak half-hourly non-stop Cambridge - Kings Cross service.

Stansted Sky Train - the service between Stansted Airport and London.

Fen Line - services between Cambridge and King's Lynn.

Heron Line - services between Cambridge and Liverpool Street.

City Hopper - stopping services between Hertford, Enfield, Chingford and Liverpool Street.

Great Northern - stopping services between Cambridge and Kings Cross and Peterborough and Kings Cross.

Capital Connect - stopping services from Kings Cross/Moorgate to Welwyn Garden City, Hertford and Letchworth.

1995 Annual General Meeting

Many members attended the Annual General Meeting held in Bury in February. Barry Woodgett and Brian Smith gave an excellent illustrated talk concerning the trials and tribulation of getting the Wymondham - Dereham branch re-instated.

A motion urging early progress of the Thameslink 2000 proposals was proposed and passed. This was duly sent to Railways and Roads Minister Brian Watts. A legalistic longwinded reply has been received that does not get us much further.

The Branch's response to the Office of the Rail Regulator's Ticket Retailing Proposals was also sent to the Regulator, Roger Salmon. It is good to report that the Regulator has listened to the users' comments in that his "Policy Statement" published in April concludes that "B.R.'s current arrangements for retailing tickets generally meet customer requirements." He has set out "criteria and procedures to allow changes to current arrangements when they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest".

Sunday to Sudbury

Great Eastern had intended to axe Sunday services on the Sudbury - Marks Tey branch. An alliance of Local Authorities has guaranteed the £29,000 Great Eastern said they would save by withdrawing this service. The Branch Committee has given £100 to the alliance funding. Our donation is for publicity for the service.

Anniversaries

The 1990's mark the 150th anniversary of "Railway Mania" - the decade in the 19th century when so many railways were planned and built. Already we have seen the 150th anniversary of the Norwich - Yarmouth line, where the RDS played a key role in the celebrations. Our commemorative booklet sold out and as a result we have some £220 profit. This has been earmarked largely to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Reedham - Lowestoft line in 1997. A special circular has been sent by the General Secretary to over 30 local individuals and organisations seeking ideas and interest, and it is planned to call a meeting in Lowestoft later this year.

June 1996 will see the 150th anniversary of the Colchester - Ipswich route and Ipswich Borough Council is planning celebrations. There are likely to be similar commemorations at Bury St Edmunds, St Ives, King's Lynn, and Dereham during the next two years.

Rail East will have news of the events to celebrate these anniversaries in future editions.

The Anglia Ranger

This little publicised and overpriced ticket has been withdrawn. However, to be introduced shortly is its successor - the Anglia Plus One Day - priced for an adult at £7.00 (£4.60 with Railcard), solo child 5 - 15 years £3.50 and accompanied child £1.00. It is valid all points east of Thetford and Bury as far south as Ipswich. Good value, but it seems to have cut East Anglia in half! There is also a three day version.

The Community Railway

Branch Committee member John Saunders attended a conference organised by Transnet Research on railways in the community in Manchester on 16th March 1995. The consultancy has been working on a "partnership" development scheme along the Sheringham line for Norfolk Rail Policy Group. Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire county officers were represented at the conference, along with three Train Operating Units, a leasing company, user groups, PTE's, politicians, consultants and potential bidders for micro-franchises.

"Community Railways" is a loose grouping of about twelve businesses, political and preservation interests who may bid to run individual rail routes under contract to the Franchising Director (OPRAF) or under sub-contract to a main franchise holder.

There were three speeches to the Conference, including the keynote speech from solicitors Michael Whitehouse on the mechanics of micro-franchising and two workshop sessions.

The advantages of a local management focus were stressed, as well as the proven commercial expertise of several of the bidders. Bidders must produce business plans and prove that they can deliver value for money, with service standards higher than "the old BR". Delegates were warned that in twelve pages of lecture notes for a recent speech, Roger Salmon had not once mentioned passengers, while one TOU director has predicted that, by 2001, there will be branch closures and only four franchises.

Many points were made in the workshops and the reporting sessions

which followed. Among these were:

- 85% of costs on a rural route relate to infrastructure or overheads.

- Any plan for a rural route should begin by identifying passenger needs, designing a timetable to meet those needs, then planning with the minimum staffing levels to deliver that timetable.

- On some Swedish routes, the driver not only cleans, fuels and drives the train, but checks tickets and serves refreshments.

- Holders of a micro-franchise for a rural route would mainly wish to hire or buy simple, standard, off-the-shelf rolling stock.

- Porterbrook Leasing Company believes it is time to question the "safety fascist regime" now in place.

- Passengers require a safe, secure environment and have reacted well to developments in West Yorkshire with closed-circuit television and security lighting.

- User groups are increasingly promoting and working to develop their routes.

- Partnership schemes can involve local civic groups, voluntary groups such as Womens' Institutes, or "Friends of Clitheroe Station" support groups for flower beds and amenity work.

- Stations can become focal points for the community, with as many business uses as possible, including linear development, where you would use the train to reach one business from another.

- Special Trains, cycle hire centres and folk music or poetry reading on evening trains can all add value to the basic social service.

Privatisation ... the bad news

"It's a Shambles" is the title of a new booklet produced by the RDS to illustrate "a few of the many realities of the unwanted rail privatisation". One example quoted is our own much missed Harwich - Liverpool train ... its April 1994 replacement arriving at Peterborough five minutes after the R.R. Central Service to Liverpool has gone. Later in 1994 even the Birmingham connection was re-timed to miss it, leaving passengers from Suffolk one and a half hours to contemplate the beauty of Peterborough station. Obtain your copy from Chris Milne, Sales Officer, at the next meeting.

No Sunday trains

In spite of great efforts by Whittlesford Parish Council led by RDS member Basil Bonner, Sunday services are still not stopping at most stations between Cambridge and Harlow Town. No attempt is being made to tap the potentially lucrative market of Duxford's Air Museum. Liberal Democrat Councillor for Thaxted John Gibb says "Sunday stopping should be re-instated... Residents have been left isolated and new commercial operators will be unwilling to finance unprofitable services". Uttlesford Labour Party has called for Uttlesford District Council to subsidise Sunday services on the line, pointing out that other Counties and Districts already do so.

Essex members should support these councillors by writing to their councillors asking for their Sunday rail to be re-instated, or maintained.

Freight proposals

The Regional Group of Labour MEPs in their April 1995 document "Routes into Europe" propose that the conventional rail links from Kings Lynn to Ely and Norwich to Great Yarmouth be designated as Trans European Networks. Also, the freight link into Kings Lynn docks be restored and a new connection for freight be made into the new Great Yarmouth docks scheme.

Stansted Airport - Braintree?

Anne McIntosh, Conservative MEP for North East Essex and South Suffolk, says "It is absolutely vital to promote rail links between Cambridge - Witham and Braintree and the Airport. Such a permanent fast speed rail link will assist local businesses and leisure travellers to access the airport by public transport links in an environmentally friendly way". The Uttlesford Labour Party agrees, call-

ing for the railway to Stansted Airport to be extended to Braintree, providing an alternative to the A120 for people in the Dunmow area and a useful link between the London - Cambridge and London - Colchester lines.

In 1994, East Anglian branch members taking part in an RDS sponsored cycle ride selected the route from Stansted to Braintree to draw attention to this missing link.

Eastern Region Rail Users Consultative Committee

Peter Bayless reports that, at the Committee meeting on 22 March 1995 great concern was shown by the East Coast Main Line Train Operating Unit (TOU) about the lack of good connections provided by other TOUs into and out of its services at Peterborough.

The RUCC Chairman reported the committee is to be reduced from 17 to 12 members. He expressed regret at the departure from BR of Chris Green and Theo Steel.

Inter City East Coast are to reinstate stops at Newark and Grantham which were withdrawn last year. There will be no Sunday service on the Harwich line this summer.

The RUCC is to have a stand at the Peterborough 150th celebrations.

Major General Lennox Napier, the retiring Chairman of Central RUCC, listed the following points:

- 32 out of 52 routes now giving worse performance.
- Telephone Enquiry Bureaux performing worse.
- 13 routes triggering Season Ticket refunds.
- Borrowing limit cut from £1,070m

to £970m this year.

- 13 speed restrictions between Newcastle and Edinburgh due to lack of money.
- Sir Bob Reid had said £1bn annually was needed to prevent further deterioration of the network.
- 1300 staffed stations currently exist.
- A National Transport Policy is needed.

Franchising Executive, Jonathon Myers, then outlined future developments including:

- invitations to tender for franchises to be issued in May 1995.
- first franchises to be awarded at end of 1995.
- Senior Citizens, Young, and Disabled Persons Railcards are mandatory requirements.
- the London Travel Card is to continue.
- OPRAF and TOCs will have a close working relationship.

The expected programme for Crossrail was outlined by Chris Yew of the Project Team:

- final decision on the Project in 1997.
- Work to start in 1998.
- Train service starts in 2002.

- Direct service across London to Heathrow to be available.

- All underground stations to be able to take 12 car trains.

Ken Bird announced that WAGN run 962 trains a day on what is now a fully Driver Only system. The Peterborough cheap fare promotion had been successful and would run again and he was looking forward to the arrival of the Class 365 trains.

Chris Kinchin-Smith from LTS said that cancellations were now down to 2% thanks to some good work by Railtrack. Out of 24 stations all but 3 had 2 shift cover.

John Wilson from Railtrack East Anglia said that Liverpool Street to Colchester resignalling would be completed in April 1996 and LTS in October 1996. Consultants were currently looking at re-routing freight away from the North London Line and on to the Ipswich - Peterborough axis.

Anglia TOU is to have its fleet strengthened by a further Class 153 DMU from May.

The recent price increase in Car Park charges was most unwelcome and roundly condemned.

In brief...

Welcome to new members:

Laurel Walpole of Norwich
Mr. J.A.R. William of Hitchin
Mr. D.J. Hardwick of Oundle
Mr. Costin of Cambridge
Mr. Haynes of March.

Real Time Information is on its way for unstaffed stations. It is based on satellite technology...pie in the sky?

Apologies to Anglia TOU

Anglia's free travel promotion was repeated on the Felixstowe line on December 10th, 17th and 24th after problems led to buses being substituted for trains. A broken rail was the caused of the disruption, not a shortage of stock as we reported in the last issue of Rail East.

Channel Tunnel

Eurostar services are to be stepped up in May, including an early departure from Waterloo to Paris which will give the opportunity for an extended day visit.

Meanwhile freight train services are being increased as demand is growing on many routes.

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Dates for your dairy

3rd June - RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at 2pm in the Town Hall, Ipswich

3rd June - Breckland Line Users Association Annual General Meeting at Brandon.

30th September - RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at 2pm at St Giles Rooms, 47 St Giles Street, Norwich.

25th November - RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at 2pm in Little St Mary Church Hall, Trumpington Street, Cambridge.

24th Feb. 1996 at 1.30pm - RDS East Anglian Branch AGM in the Library, Bury St Edmunds.