

Thameslink 2000 gets green light

The Government has finally given the go ahead to the important Thameslink 2000 project. Despite the headline, completion of the reconstruction will not be until 2002. The £650 million scheme will increase capacity on the existing cross London route and enable Cambridge and Peterborough to be added to the Thameslink network. The Government will contribute about £100m. The decision came after years of pressure by the Thameslink 2000 consortium. Led by Bedfordshire County Council, the consortium comprises over 130 local authorities, businesses, and

environmental groups including the RDS.

It is uncertain what the new train service pattern will be. To obtain the maximum benefit, any new services will need to be coordinated with existing trains. How this will be done in the context of a fragmented railway system is not clear. The signs are not good. It appears that OPRAF does not intend to award any new franchises, instead, any existing operator will be able to run trains over the link. There are fears that only long distance limited stop services will operate, depriving people around London of the full benefits of the investment.

WAGN News

At the RUCC meeting at Hitchin in March, WAGN announced that they were looking for additional staff. This is in stark contrast to the recently privatised train operators who have all announced job cuts. The new staff will be used to extend ticket office opening hours and ensure that when the new class 365 trains enter service they will always have conductor on board.

The unofficial car park at Waterbeach has been closed for safety reasons as the entrance is considered too close to the level crossing. WAGN, Railtrack and the County Council are working towards providing a proper car park on an adjacent site.

Mid Norfolk railway moves forward

British Rail Property Board has accepted the £100,000 offer from the Mid Norfolk Railway Preservation Trust for the freehold of the track bed between Wymondham and Dereham. This represents a major step forward to getting the line reopened to passenger services.

Trust Chairman John Hull is hoping that trains will be running to Wymondham in a year's time.

If the Mid Norfolk Railway can get trains moving in this short space of time, why is it taking so long for Bedfordshire County Council to reopen the St Ives line?

Branch AGM

There was a good turn out at our Branch Annual General Meeting in February despite problems with engineering work on the lines to Bury St Edmunds. Guest speaker, Grace Taylor from the RUCC Eastern England gave a highly informative account of the work of the RUCC. The 1993 Railways Act has resulted in additional responsibilities and lots of extra paperwork. Mrs Taylor emphasised the need for the RUCC, rail user groups and local authorities to work together with the train operators to obtain better services. The RUCC had been in contact with the Government Office for the Eastern Region who may have funds to support various projects. The RUCC were keen to see new developments such as Cambridge to St Ives and the upgrading of the Felixstowe to Holyhead route. The idea of an additional crossover on Platform 5 at Peterborough to ease congestion at the station was being discussed and could happen when the area is resigalled in a few years time.

During the business part of the meeting, the existing committee were re-elected and have been joined by Tony Albert.

The next committee meeting will be held on June 22nd and, as usual, your suggestions are always welcome. Please let Peter Wakefield or Nick Dibben know your suggestions and concerns.

Anglia moves towards private sector

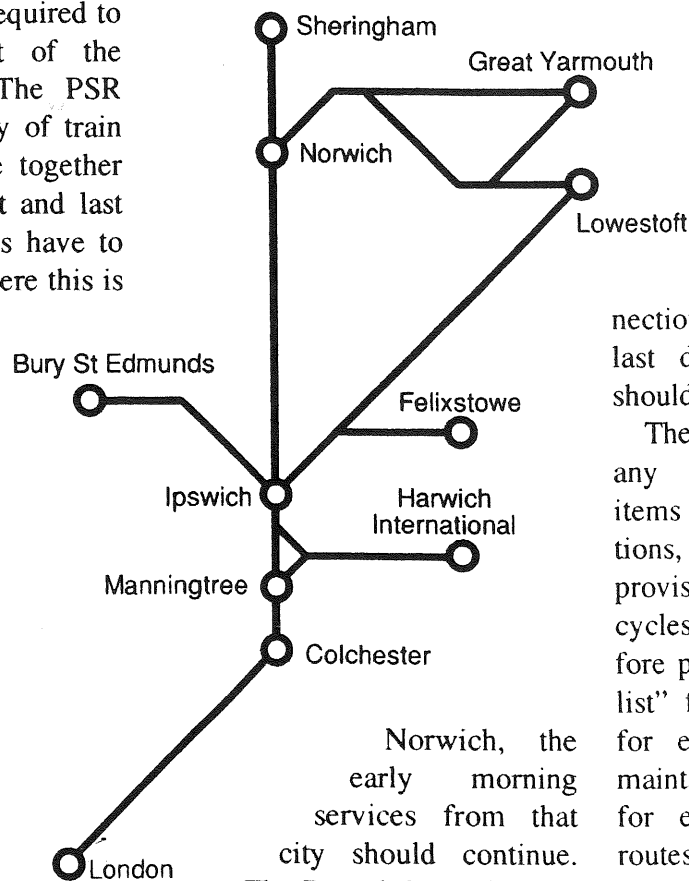
The process to transfer Anglia to the private sector started in March when the Franchise Director issued the draft Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). The document sets out the minimum level of train service required to be operated as part of the Anglia Franchise. The PSR contains the frequency of train service on each route together with times of the first and last trains. Generally trains have to call at all stations. Where this is not required the minimum number of trains to call at some of the smaller stations is also specified.

Following a successful High Court action last December by the Save Our Railways, the PSR must closely match the existing level of service. However the draft Anglia PSR does allow any future operator to make some cuts. Details of the PSR and the Branch's comments are given below.

The largest potential for reducing services occurs in Essex. There is no requirement to run services between Harwich International and London which connect with shipping services. Sunday services at Manningtree are cut by 45% from 9 trains a day to just 5. The Branch has stated that these reductions are not acceptable.

On the London to Norwich route, the PSR requires the first

arrival in London from Norwich as 08.15 compared with 06.53 at present. However earlier arrivals in the capital are required from Ipswich. Providing the franchise holder maintains the InterCity trains at



Norwich, the early morning services from that city should continue. The Branch has asked for the PSR to require an earlier arrival in London from Norwich.

On the branch lines where many feared there would be substantial cuts, the PSR is much closer to the existing service. All services between Peterborough and Ipswich are protected, but the existing extension of the service through to Harwich International which connects with the sailings to the Hook of Holland are not.

Elsewhere the PSR is one train a day below the existing level. Typical of the unpro-

tected services is the 06.00 Ipswich to Felixstowe. However as it's return journey is protected it is likely that this service will continue. A similar situation occurs on the other branch routes. For some routes, the PSR gives both the minimum number of trains to run and a maximum interval between services. The Branch has asked for this to be included for all routes and that connections giving first arrivals and last departures from London should be included.

The PSR does not contain any requirements regarding items such as staffing at stations, cleaning of trains and the provision for the disabled and cycles. The Branch has therefore produced a separate "wish list" for these matters, calling for existing provision to be maintained and developed and for extra trains on selected routes.

A 1000 copies of a leaflet outlining our requirements have been produced and are being distributed to local rail users. Similar leaflets are being planned in cooperation with other RDS Branches for the other train operators in our area.

Although the PSR does not specify the full existing timetable, this does not mean that services will be cut. To date, successful franchisees have committed themselves to running more trains than the PSR. Public pressure can ensure that the Anglia franchise will continue this trend.

Anniversaries

Eastern Union Railway

This summer sees the 150th anniversary of the Eastern Union Railway's (EUR) arrival in Ipswich from Colchester. Ipswich Borough Council have organised a number of events including the EUR 150 Exhibition at the former locomotive depot in Croft Street on June 15/16th. There will be a free bus shuttle from the railway station. The RDS has booked a stand at this event and we are

looking for helpers. Please contact Chris Milnes if you are able to assist. There will also be mainline steam between Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

Bury St Edmunds

Also celebrating their railway 150th anniversary will be the people of Bury St Edmunds. There will be a special exhibition at the Moyses Hall Museum, Cornhill, Bury St Edmunds from May 24th to the end of the year.

Breckland line news Branch meeting

Passengers on this route will get additional train services when the new timetable starts in June. There will be an additional early morning service into Norwich and a later evening return service.

On the negative side, one Liverpool to Norwich train will be lost. Regional Railways claim that there is a shortage of rolling stock. There are still no orders for trains!

Our summer meeting will be held in Ipswich Town Hall starting at 2pm on Saturday June 22nd. Please note the change of date. John French, from Suffolk County Council, will give a talk about future rail developments in Suffolk. The meeting should finish by 4.30pm. The Town Hall is 15 minutes walk from the railway station. There is also a bus service.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 8th June - RDS sponsored cycle ride.

Saturday/Sunday 15/16th June: EUR 150 Exhibition, Ipswich

Saturday 22nd June: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting
Ipswich Town Hall, 2pm

Saturday 29th June - RDS Reopenings Conference in Bicester.
Tickets £8 including lunch from David Soames, 158 Atherstone Ave, Peterborough PE3 9UN.

Saturday 21st September: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting
in Norwich

Saturday 28th September: RDS National Conference of Rail Users, London

Saturday 23rd November: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting
in Cambridge

Saturday 30th November: RDS Extraordinary General Meeting, venue to be agreed

Little change in attitudes

After the hype of the Government's Great Transport Debate, the resulting Green Paper says very little. The summary document hardly mentions rail except to list the franchises that have been let. The paper proposes that there is to be no national coordinated action to reduce road traffic; it will be left to local authorities to find their own solutions.

This situation is reflected locally in Norwich. Following the Transport Debate held last November, it had been expected that the various groups represented would continue discussions and establish common ground on a future transport strategy. So far little has happened and the road lobby appear to be operating business as usual.

An essential part of any future transport strategy must be to ensure that road and rail compete on an equal basis. The RDS Freight committee is collecting reports on lorries that break the law. If you see any press cuttings on the subject please send them to Ken Cropley, 37 Parklands, Rochford, Southend, Essex SS4 1SH.

RDS raffle

Don't forget to sell the RDS National Draw tickets enclosed with the last Railwatch. The first prize is £400, and the proceeds will help fund campaigns to improve rail services. Extra tickets will be available at the Ipswich meeting and the EUR 150 Event.

Tales from abroad

New Zealand

Tranz Rail was privatised some time ago, with Wisconsin Central being a major partner. There is an extensive freight network with many factories being linked into the network. Considerable investment is being made into renewing infrastructure and modernising the rolling stock.

Passenger services are restricted to only a few routes. On long distance services, staff on the train acted as baggage handlers (all luggage is checked in), ticket collectors and buffet attendants. Free orange squash and tea and biscuits were served during the journey.

The railway preservation movement, is supported by Tranz Rail. There seems to be no problem running private trains on Tranz Rail tracks. On the South Island, the private Taieri Gorge line starts from Tranz Rail's Dunedin station. Near Queenstown, Tranz Scenic (part of Tranz Rail), with the help of a local supporter's group, operates the steam Kingston Flyer line which celebrates 25 years of operation next October.

Australia

Melbourne has an extensive tram and light rail (LRT) network. LRT moves smoothly from street running to dedicated railway line which allows for faster running.

In Sydney, the passenger trains are double deck. New stock is being brought into service and a new line is under construction. Excellent travel-card type ticketing gave access to all modes of transport. The journey up into the Blue Mountains is not fast but the climb up to Katoomba is spectacular. The stations (several are of recent construction) are spotless and manned!

Singapore

The MRT (Mass Rapid Transport) is an excellent example of modern urban transport (much of it British built). The air conditioned trains have much standing room - including in the wide corridors between coaches. Ticketing here is on a stored value basis with the amount being deducted on completion of each journey. The tickets can also be used on the buses.

Tony Albert

General election

There has been much speculation in the press about the date of the next general election. At the latest, it is only a year away but an election this autumn cannot be ruled out. At the last election railways were not a big issue. We all need to ensure that a proper debate on the future of our railways is included in the run up to the next election. All members are therefore asked to raise railway issues with their local candidates. Branch committee member Shirley Dex has produced a candidates list for the region and can also supply copies of various RDS leaflets.

Ideally questions should encourage candidates to think about local issues rather than recite party sound bites. For example, ask what they feel the advantages and disadvantages of rail privatisation have been in the area rather than simply do you agree with it? Other subjects include ways to ensure road and rail compete on an equal basis, improvements to the rail network, how will candidates improve their knowledge of rail issues and represent rail users in parliament.

Contact Shirley Dex at 71 Queensway, Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 2AY. Please enclose an A4 size sae if you want copies of leaflets.

Rail East

The next edition of Rail East will be published in September. Contributions are welcomed and should be sent Nick Dibben by 5th August please.

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