

“From strength to strength”, says Chairman

The Committee has again had a busy year, with increasing requests from the media for comment. Particular thanks need to be given to Nick Dibben and Peter Lawrence for all their hard work in this regard. Just as important have been the press releases, sales and publicity where Ken Burton, Agnes Harknett, Chris Milnes, Ben Walsh and Clara Zilahi deserve special thanks. Much effort has been made, by them and others, to raise awareness of rail issues and Branch funds! Despite problems in obtaining speakers, our public meetings were well attended.

The year has had many highlights, in particular the progress made by the various local rail user groups. They, like the RDS, go from strength to

strength and it is good to see the various train operators appreciating their input.

Now all but one of the region's train operators are in the private sector, we wait with interest and vigilance for events to unfold. I really do wish that some of the millions that have been conjured up for the directors of some of the new companies could have been produced as easily for the reopenings and new services that we have been pushing for. How do they do it?

The St Ives route has been a major success for us, so far. We have won the arguments locally, but the money to provide a line to serve the people is hard to come by. Our campaign for the East-West route to Oxford took a big step forward last year with

the issue of a feasibility study report which vindicated our ideas. But we must not become complacent and need to keep the campaign going.

The newly privatised freight company, EWS, might be the great success of the privatisation programme with large numbers of new locomotives and wagons on order. If EWS has its way and Railtrack cooperates fully, over the next few years we should see freight moving by rail in much greater quantities.

Finally, you are reading this in Rail East which is put together regularly and efficiently by Nick Dibben and Tony Albert. A great effort, many thanks to them for their dedication.

Peter Wakefield, Chairman.

March celebrates 150 years of railway

Few towns in Eastern England have been so affected by the railway as March, so it was most appropriate that, in the presence of Barry Diggle, Chairman of Fenland District Council, the plaque to commemorate 150 years of passenger trains to the town was unveiled by a working railwayman, Town Mayor Barry Howlett, resplendent in his cocked hat and red robes. In his speech to the dignitaries and a class of immaculately behaved flag-waving children, Barry

recalled how, in his 45 years' service, the railway workforce at March had declined from 2,000 to 20. Councillor Diggle, in his speech, stressed the importance of tomorrow's railway in attracting firms and people to the area.

In his address, Mark Causebrook, Managing Director of Central Trains Limited, outlined the quality of service today by air-conditioned 158s and underlined the company's commitment to continued excellence of service. The simple ceremony,

expertly organised on a limited budget by Public Affairs Manager John Dawson, took place in warm winter sunshine and was followed by a buffet lunch.

Celebrations began on 12th February with a service of thanksgiving. At the March Museum, there is an exhibition showing the story of the railway in the town for the next two months. Your correspondent thanks Mrs Wright of the Station Bookstall, which is always well stocked with railway items, for her excellent mince pie.

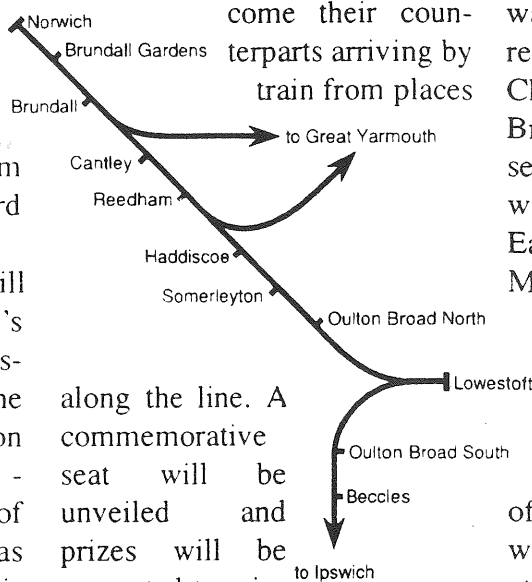
Lowestoft - Reedham 150th anniversary

The 150th anniversary of the opening of the Lowestoft - Reedham line falls on Saturday May 3rd, which also happens to be the date of the RDS National AGM in Norwich. Events to mark the anniversary will, in fact, start on Monday April 14th, with a lecture in Lowestoft Library at 7.30 pm by railway historian Dr Richard Joby.

Also in mid April, RDS will publish a new book, "England's most easterly railway", an illustrated history of the line. In the book there will be a description of the Lowestoft - Reedham - Norwich line and the places of interest along it, as well as special messages from Anglia Railways and Railtrack. As a special pre-publication offer, RDS members can order the book at only £2.50, postage free, from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ. The offer lasts until April 15th. Please make cheques/POs payable to RDS

East Anglian Branch.

On May 3rd, Waveney District Council are organising a morning event at the station, when civic leaders will welcome their counterparts arriving by train from places



along the line. A commemorative seat will be unveiled and prizes will be presented to winners of a competition organised by the Lowestoft Journal. In the evening, there will be a reception at the George Borrow Hotel, next to Oulton Broad North station, hosted by the Lowestoft, Reedham & Norwich 150 Committee of which RDS members Trevor Garrod

and Rod Lock are respectively Chairman and Secretary.

The following Saturday, May 10th, will see a Rail Day with large specially built model railway and many stalls and refreshments, at St Marks Church Centre, next to Oulton Broad South station. A preserved bus will link the stations with the Church Centre and the East Anglian Transport Museum. Carlton Colville, who will have a special open day.

At least three operators of special trains are interested in running to Lowestoft during or after the main period of celebrations, the aim of which is not just to commemorate the past but also to attract visitors to the town by train.

Other projects in hand include an exhibition, a specially commissioned painting and commemorative mugs. For full details of the events, please send a SAE to Rod Lock, The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, NR32 3AW.

Cycles on trains

The first Anglia units modified to carry additional bicycles have entered service on local routes out of Norwich and Ipswich. The provision of more cycle space on trains has been a long running RDS campaign and our positive comments on this development have been reported in the local media.

If you wish to try out the new facility please ring Pat Johnson, Anglia Customer Relations on 01473 693464 for details of where the units are operating.

Dereham progress

Some track has been relaid at Dereham by the Mid Norfolk Railway Preservation Trust and rolling stock has been moved to the station site. So that trains can then run from Dereham station itself, members of the Trust will be busy until Easter completing this task. Practical help will be very welcome. Ring a 24-hour information line, 01362 690633, to find out about working parties, trains and other up-to-date news of the Mid Norfolk Railway.

Local transport

On Saturday March 1st, meetings and events are being held around the country to focus on what can be done locally to promote environmentally friendly transport. The East Suffolk Travellers' Association, which is affiliated to RDS, will be holding a meeting, with local authority speakers and transport operators, in the High School at Beccles. Full details can be obtained from John Brodribb, 12 Kemps Lane, Beccles, NR34 9XA. (Tel: 01502-716961.)

1997 Annual General Meeting

The 1997 Annual General Meeting of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society will take place on Saturday 22nd February at Bury St Edmunds Library, starting at 1.45pm.

Agenda

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| 1 Chairman's welcome | and committee: |
| 2 Apologies for absence | a) Chairman |
| 3 Guest speaker: | b) Vice-Chairman |
| Michael Holden, Director | c) Secretary |
| East Anglia Railtrack | d) Treasurer |
| 4 Questions and answers | e) Sales Officer |
| | f) Minutes Secretary |
| | g) Membership Secretary |
| | h) Press Officer |
| | i) Other committee members |
| 5 Minutes and matters arising from the 1996 AGM | 10 Appointment of Honorary Auditor |
| 6 Chairman's report | 11 Motions |
| 7 Secretary's report | 12 Branch President's closing comments |
| 8 Treasurer's report | |
| 9 Election of Branch Officers | |

Branch Annual General Meeting

The Library is located on Sergeants Walk between St Andrews Street North and St Johns Street and is a short walk from the station. The Library has a buffet which sells teas and light snacks.

Nominations for Officers and Committee, duly proposed and seconded, must be in the hands of the Secretary by the 15th February.

Notices of Motion, duly proposed and seconded, must be in the hands of the Secretary by the 15th February.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 15th February: RDS Election Forum. Friends Meeting House, St Martins Lane, London at 10am. MPs from the three main parties will speak and answer questions on rail issues.

Saturday 22nd February: Branch AGM in Bury St Edmunds

Friday March 7th: Question time on environmental and community issues at 7.30 pm in the Friends' Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, Norwich. Kim Riley of BBC Look East will be in the chair and there will be speakers from the main political parties.

Saturday 8th March: Reopening the Oxford to Bletchley line - meeting at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes at 2pm. Details from Chris Wright, Tel: 01908 502473.

Saturday 3rd May: RDS National AGM, Maids Head Hotel, Norwich. The guest speaker will be from the Piggyback Consortium.

Charter Mark

Congratulations to Anglia Railways who have become the first train operating company to gain a second Charter Mark. The award was collected at a special presentation in London on 2nd December. During that week, all services carried a special Charter Mark headboard and gifts were presented to both passengers and staff.

To win the award, Anglia Railways had to demonstrate continuing improvement to standards of service. These included better punctuality and reliability, projects to provide disabled access ramps and bicycle space on trains and large print guides for the partially sighted.

365s enter service

After many delays due to obtaining Railtrack approval, the new Class 365 trains started regular service on 20th January on WAGN services. The 100mph, 4 coach trains will operate the main services between Kings Cross and Peterborough/Kings Lynn. The new trains feature 2+2 seating and extra facilities for the disabled, internal information displays and an automatic public address system to announce each stop as the train arrives at the station.

The RDS, members of rail user groups and the RUCC were invited on a demonstration run just before Christmas. The ride is very smooth and the extra leg room and space created by the seating layout is very noticeable.

Branch meeting

A well attended meeting in Cambridge during November heard Geoff Butterwick, Public Transport Manager from Suffolk County Council outline aspects of the County's Rail Policy.

Improving access was a key issue. This included providing ramps, the signposting of stations and increasing the bicycle capacity on local trains. An application had been made to provide real-time information at stations in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

A number of studies were being undertaken into new stations at Moreton Hall, to serve a new housing development near Bury St Edmunds, and at Bramford near Ipswich. Plans for Felixstowe Beach and Leiston might be dropped as P&O Ferries had pulled out of Felixstowe and Sizewell C power station was unlikely to be built.

Improved frequency of service was essential to get people out of their cars and the County had wanted all local routes to have an hourly service specified in the PSR. They would continue to press GB Rail on this matter.

Services transfer to private sector

Most of the region's passenger services were privatised on Sunday 5th January when the new franchisees took over the Anglia, Great Eastern and West Anglia Great Northern. Each franchise will last 7 years 3 months, a period designed to match rolling stock leases. In keeping with previous franchise winners, the amount of subsidy received will reduce over the years. As potential cost savings are limited, and operators have to provide the train service specified in the PSR, any financial improvement will have to come from increased revenue - meaning more fare paying passengers.

Anglia: GB Railways have promised to introduce a half hourly London to Norwich service using new rolling stock by September 2000, a through service from London to the Norfolk coast and a bus link between Colchester and Stansted Airport. There are no firm plans to increase local services; the Branch was looking for extra services on the Ipswich to Peterborough route. However current train miles will be maintained for the first 5 years. This

should mean that services which were not specified in the PSR will continue to operate.

The subsidy from the Franchise Director (OPRAF) will reduce from £35.9m in the first year to £6.3m in 2004.

Great Eastern (GER): First Bus commitments include hourly through trains between London and Harwich, London and Walton and extra services on the inner suburban route to Gidea Park. Competition with Anglia on the Ipswich to London route will intensify with additional GER services. There is an £8m package of station improvements including better security, parking and cycle facilities. However First Bus have no plans to replace the old Class 312 slam door units. The OPRAF subsidy will start at £29m and by 2004 will turn into a payment to OPRAF of £9.5m.

West Anglia Great Northern (WAGN): Prism, who already operate three other franchises, plan to spend £3m upgrading stations and refurbishing Class 313 and Class 317 electric units. There will be additional trains between London and Stansted Airport but no mention of any services from Stansted to Cambridge and beyond. More fast services from London to Peterborough are proposed to provide competition with GNER. The Cambridge Cruiser services which were not included in the PSR will be retained. Like GER, the initial subsidy will turn into a premium payment by the end of the franchise.

BRANCH OFFICERS

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