

Report backs East-West rail link

As mentioned briefly in the last edition of Rail East, the second stage report of the consultants to the East-West Consortium has concluded that the link would be viable. The Branch has now been able to study the full document and can report in more detail. The second phase of the study has been to look at the investment case for the link and to assess the practical aspects of the route where new construction is required.

The consultants developed two options for the route; Option A would comprise a mainly single track scheme with the capacity for 1 or 2 trains per hour but little scope for freight traffic. Such a scheme would cost around £98 million.

Option B, at £172 million, would provide a higher specification railway with lower journey times and would allow for significant freight traffic.

A target completion date of 2003 would be feasible.

The report looked at the investment case of each option for three main organisations involved in the railway network: Railtrack, The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the general Public Sector. The report concluded that for each of these groups, the scheme would meet their funding criteria.

The report also concluded that the western section between Milton Keynes and Oxford was a viable project on its own and could be built first.

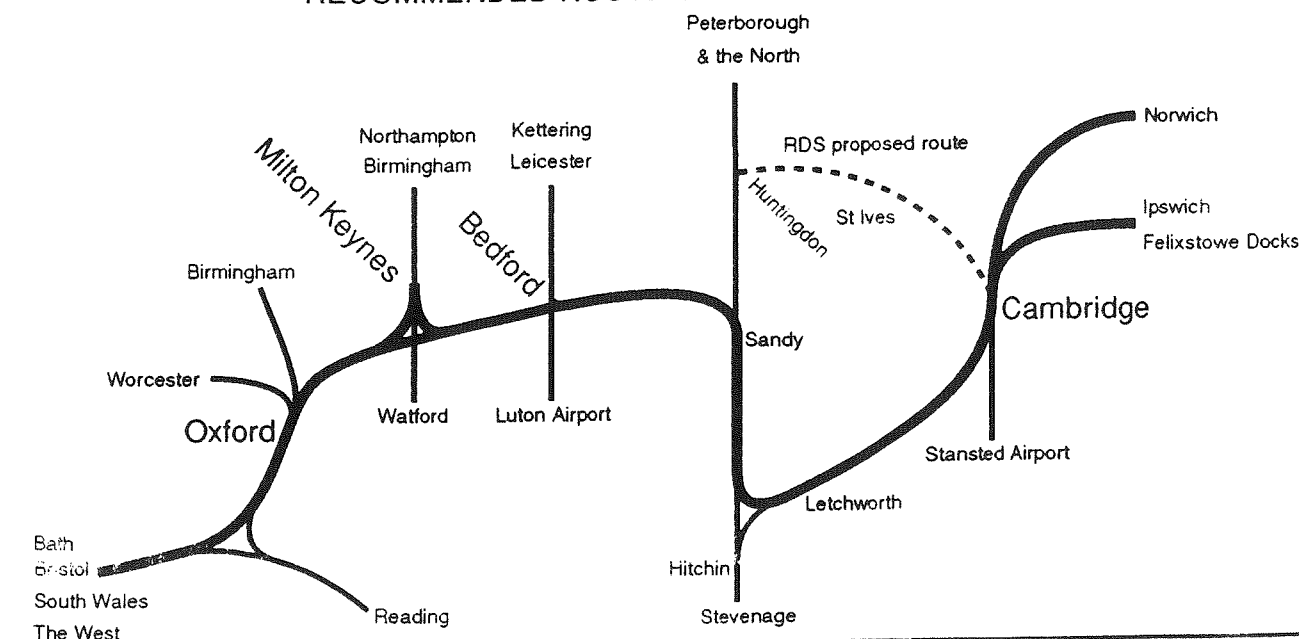
Various schemes were considered for the two sections of new construction. These are a curve from the Cambridge Line to the East Coast Main line at Hitchin and the section between Sandy and Bedford. The main problem is at Bedford where new road schemes are proposed over part of the route. The report

identified a possible solution to allow both road and rail to be built but also suggested an alternative which would bypass the centre of Bedford and provide a parkway station south of the town where the line crossed the Midland Main line. The town centre solution was preferred.

It is good to see such a detailed report backing one of the RDS's main campaigns. Rapid progress of the scheme should be seen as a test of the new Government's commitment to rail. The alternative South Midlands Road was not cancelled in the recent Government announcement so it is important that members write to their MPs in support of the rail scheme.

The East Anglian Branch published a leaflet in June 1995 proposing an East-West Rail Route using the St Ives line. This was considered by the consultants but rejected.

RECOMMENDED ROUTE OF THE EAST-WEST LINK



St Ives 150

St Ives station opened on the 17th August 1847. Although passenger services ended in 1970, it was decided to mark the anniversary as a way of remembering the past and looking forward to the future and a restored rail link. A Rail Day was arranged in the town centre with the help of Huntingdon Friends of the Earth. The event comprised model railway layouts, old photographs and displays of current rail projects by Cambridgeshire County Council and local train operator, West Anglia Great Northern and was attended by over 650 people.

The show was formally opened by the Deputy Mayor of St Ives who noted the importance of the restored link to encourage new companies to the town.

A new RDS leaflet, partly funded with proceeds from the RDS National Draw, was produced for the occasion entitled "Why do we still ignore this valuable local asset?". Copies are being sent to all councillors in the area to coincide with the County Council debate on the route later this year.

In order ensure maximum impact, all members in the area covered by the St Ives line and Huntingdon are urged to write to their district and county councillors. Members living elsewhere in Cambridgeshire should write to their county councillors.

The re-opened line could provide a traffic-reducing cross Cambridge service and give access to Addenbrooke's hospital at the new station that is proposed for this location for patients living north of the City.

Lower fares

Central Trains have reduced the cost of off peak day return fares on a number of routes under the slogan "under a fiver, under a tenner" Typical examples are Peterborough to Birmingham and Peterborough to Norwich both at £9.90. In addition, Apex fares, which have to be booked one week in advance, have been introduced on long distance services. Examples are Cambridge to Birmingham at £17 and Peterborough to Manchester at £21.

Anglia Railways have introduced a Day Ranger ticket for the Norwich to Sheringham line which costs just £5.

West Anglia and Great Northern Railway have special fares from Peterborough to London to compete with GNER. The day return ticket costs £15 and season ticket fares are to be

Naming...

From the ideas submitted, Great Eastern have selected the name "Mayflower" for the Harwich branch. It is a well kept secret the Mayflower started its voyage to the Americas from Harwich and not from Plymouth. True that she did call at the latter place but her captain came from Essex.

Great Eastern have published a leaflet "Great days out on the Harwich branch line" which gives information on what to see at various stations. Outside peak hours, bicycles are carried free on GE services, in the peak when travelling in the opposite direction to the commuter flow and on slam door stock.

GE guards...

The Great Eastern Railway requires guards for the slam door trains that it uses for some peak hour services. Having unsuccessfully tried to find part time staff to fill these posts, it decided to offer the jobs to commuters. The story which made the headlines in the national papers and on television, raised concerns about safety with the RDS being quoted in the local press. The Branch contacted GE who reassured us that all training as covered by its safety case had to be independently approved. There were however practical problems such as arranging training for those who also had full time jobs.

Following the publicity, Great Eastern received many applications for unemployed people and it now seems unlikely any commuters to need to be employed.

RDS news

The RDS is looking for sponsors for the next edition of our popular A-Z Reopenings. Members willing to make donations should write to Alan Bevan, 12 Morris Field Croft, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0RN.

The 1998 Annual General Meeting of the RDS will take place in Shrewsbury on Saturday, 2nd May. More details will be published later.

Campaign funds have benefitted from the RDS National Draw to the tune of £2000. This large sum has been the result of all those who sold tickets. Many thanks to those who sold tickets.

RUCC meeting in Boston

In July, the RUCC for Eastern England met in Boston. Several branch members attended as observers who are invited to make comments at the start of the meeting. Mr Carr, Rail Officer for Essex County Council, expressed concern at the impact of the proposed additional Anglia services on those of Great Eastern.

The RUCC has made arrangements for procedures to approve minor closures that would expedite improvements. For example, the works being undertaken at Braintree and Tilbury Town had been dealt with in this way. At Boston there were proposals from Railtrack that were felt to be detrimental to the comfort of passengers; these concerns would be taken up. With the re-opening of the Boston Docks to rail traffic, there could be a better service for passengers either by modernising the signalling or keeping the numerous signal boxes open for longer periods.

The ongoing problems of possession of the ECML south of Peterborough was raised. Railtrack have indicated that a shuttle service ought to be pos-

sible in 1998.

Central Trains confirmed that there will be an hourly service into Stansted from Birmingham. Connections between operators were especially important for Central Trains. As a joint project with Lincolnshire County Council, a real time information system was running experimentally at Sleaford.

GNER reported on their plans for rolling stock and the plans to improve customer care. The problem of capacity south of Hitchin was raised as well as the lack of electrified diversion routes. Reliability, although improving, was still causing problems.

WAGN were struggling to bring the 365s into service and looked forward to an improved service with more trains to Stansted and Cambridge from London.

LTS had won an award for the improvement in security. LTS have a Disabled Persons Protection Policy which includes the auditing of stations by an Accessibility Panel. The results of the first survey will be shared with the RUCC and could benefit other users.

Saved...

Protests by the RDS, user groups and the Rail Regulator have forced train operators to withdraw plans to add restrictions to the use of the popular Network Card. The intention had been to prohibit journeys using the Card during the evening peak period.

The RDS view was that this would be unenforceable and would deter from many people making day trips into London. Visitors would either have had to return at 3pm resulting in a very short stay or wait until 7pm which would be too late for many. The change of mind by the train operators shows that campaigning can be effective and should encourage us to continue our work in many other areas.

Cyclists

Improving facilities for cyclists both on trains and at stations has been a long-running RDS campaign. Sustrans and the Cyclists Touring Club have produced a code of practice for train operators to provide information and facilities. The Code addresses two distinct groups of potential rail users: those who cycle to and leave their bikes at the station, and those who travel with their machines on the train.

Passenger feedback forms are available to enable Sustrans to monitor the performance of every train operator. Those who meet the requirements are awarded a Cycle Mark. Anglia Railways are the first operator to be awarded a Cycle Mark, having invested in modifying trains to enable cycles to be carried.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 20th September: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at the Assembly House, Norwich (recently reopened after a fire) starting at 2pm. Our guest speaker will be Liz Rushmore from the Sheringham Line Partnership

Saturday 27th September: RDS National Rail Users Conference in London. Bookings to David Soames, 158 Atherstone Avenue, Peterborough PE3 9UN. The cost is £8 plus £7 for a buffet lunch.

Saturday 29th November: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at the Little St Mary's Church Hall, Cambridge at 2pm. We are hoping for a speaker on the East-West Rail link.

Freight on the move

The growth of rail freight continues with a number of new flows in the region. EWS, the main freight operator, now runs a daily "Enterprise" service from Doncaster to Harwich to connect into the Stena line sailing to Zeebrugge. The Enterprise network which caters for small consignments of freight, often only a single wagon, has seen significant growth in the last year especially with loads to and from Scotland. Grain traffic from East Anglia to Scotland which has not used rail for several years is expected to return this autumn.

There have been two short term flows of metal pipes from

the north east to Peterborough and to Ipswich Docks. A contract to move building blocks from Doncaster to Biggleswade has been extended for another 6 years. Elsewhere in the country trials have been taking place to move milk and supermarket products by rail. Both have been successful and should develop into significant new traffic.

There are a number of large development projects in the region that could create new rail freight flows. The former USAF base at Alconbury near Huntingdon could be turned into a major freight distribution centre. The site is adjacent to the East Coast Main line and the

local council have hinted at setting targets for the amount of traffic from the site that goes by rail. On the other side of the region there are plans to expand the docks at Great Yarmouth. This could be used as an excuse to upgrade the A47 but the branch will campaign for rail to be used. In a separate development at Great Yarmouth, several oil rigs are due to be dismantled resulting in large amounts of scrap material to be recycled.

To cope with the increase in traffic, EWS has signed a deal with the American wagon manufacturer Thrall to build a minimum of 2500 new wagons at the reopened York works.

Branch meeting in Colchester

We were joined at our Colchester meeting in July by members of the regional environmental group STEER (Sustainable Transport and Environment for the Eastern Region) to hear Great Eastern Director Bob Breakwell outline the future plans for the company.

Mr Breakwell noted that the franchise agreement was very tight and that he had little control over most fares and timetables.

The only way that GE would survive was to grow the business, an aim they shared with the RDS.

Resignalling of the route was nearly complete and was already resulting in a more reliable train service. During the last three months 99.9% of trains had been run with well over 90% arriving within 0-5 minutes. Plans for the next few years included increasing the Liverpool Street to

Shenfield service to 6 trains per hour and faster services on the main line. Over £9m is being spent on station improvements including long line public address and better security. Through bus/rail tickets are being introduced to link a number of towns into rail the network. Any new services would have to pay their way, and no amount of lobbying would persuade GE to introduce trains that did not meet that criteria.

Following the meeting, GE have confirmed to the Branch that single car "Heritage units" will replace the Sprinters on the Sudbury line when their lease runs out later this year. These units will be serviced at Colchester which should give better reliability. The long term situation regarding rolling stock for this line is unclear.

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