

More trains on Anglia

The new timetable introduced at the end of September saw the introduction of additional services on the Anglia main line. There is an extra London to Norwich train in each direction and the service that used to terminate at Stowmarket now runs to/from Norwich.

One of Anglia's franchise commitments was a through service to the Norfolk Coast. This has been introduced as the 0623 London to Sheringham and the 1955 return. Trains are formed by a refurbished Sprinter unit. Ipswich now has a half hourly Anglia service to London for most of the day. Off-peak, these trains use Class 317 electric units hired in from West Anglia Great Northern. A combined Anglia/Great Eastern timetable from Ipswich to London has been produced, a welcome bit of cooperation between the two operators even if the train times are not evenly distributed across the hour.

Better service to Peterborough

West Anglia Great Northern have increased the number of trains to Peterborough providing a half hourly service throughout the day to London. The company has also introduced a cut price season ticket between the two cities in competition with GNER services. This new ticket complements the lower priced day return ticket introduced earlier this year. Users at March and Stamford are asking for through tickets at the reduced fare to be available from their stations.

This is one of few examples of competition between train operators. The Rail Regulator is currently looking at ways to introduce further competition. There is some evidence that total competition in bus services has resulted in chaos and very little benefit to passengers. How much competition should there be? If you have any views on this subject, please write to the Branch Secretary so that they can be considered by the Branch.

GNER orders tilting trains

Great North Eastern Railway is to order two high speed tilting trains for use on London to Edinburgh services cutting journey times by up to 30 minutes. Passenger numbers are increasing rapidly on GNER, and Chief Executive, Christopher Garnett, told the recent RUCC meeting in Peterborough that they would run out of capacity unless new trains were added. He noted that the rolling stock companies (ROSCOs) were being difficult and that the short 7 year franchise did not allow GNER to order more than the two trains.

Later at the RUCC meeting, the Rail Regulator, John Swift, recognised the problem of rolling stock but suggested that extended franchises were not the only solution and that other methods were possible to ensure that Railtrack and the ROSCOs took a long term view.

John Swift went on to open the new RUCC office in Peterborough.

Government seeks contributions on transport strategy

The Government has issued a consultation document on future transport strategy and it is looking for comments from all sections of the community. The topics which the government is concerned about include:

- Better land use planning to reduce the need to travel;
- Improving and integrating public transport;

- Funding options given limited public money available;
- Pricing mechanisms such as car park charges and other taxes.

The Railway Development Society is making a response at national level and some Branch members have already contributed to this.

Individual members of the RDS who wish to send in their own views direct to the Government should do so by writing to: Clare Spink, Integrated Transport Division, Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, Zone 1/26, Great Minster House, London SW1P 4DR by 14th November.

Branch meeting in Norwich

Liz Rushmore was the guest speaker at the RDS East Anglian Branch Meeting in Norwich in September talking about the Sheringham Line Development Partnership (SLDP). The SLDP was set up in 1996 to promote the use of the line by getting the community involved in the small scale improvements to facilities at stations and in the general promotion of the route. The group has over 60 members who include the Anglia Railways, Railtrack, local authorities, operators of tourist attractions and other local organisations.

Following a local competition, the route has been called

the Bittern Line. A line guide leaflet has been produced highlighting the attractions along the route. Other developments include providing timetable information in town centres and creating a series of walks starting at each station. One of the long term aims of the Partnership is to rebuild the connection at Sheringham between the Railtrack line and the North Norfolk Railway to allow the running of through services.

If the SLDP proves successful in increasing the number of rail passengers, other partnerships could be formed for other lines in the region.

Further blows to the road lobby

A few years ago, the SACTRA report on road building concluded that new roads simply encouraged more traffic. This was a major blow to the road lobby and was one of the reasons why the road building programme was cut back. The Government is now reviewing the National Roads Programme. There is not much left of the 1989 Roads Programme, and what there is, lacks any strategic purpose. The schemes that remain in East Anglia generally have parallel railway routes where the train operators and Railtrack have planned improvements. For example, the

proposed Central Trains service to Stansted Airport plus Anglia's plans to go half hourly to Norwich may help take traffic from the M11 north of Stansted. Elsewhere, the reopening of the St Ives line would take local traffic off the A14 and could reduce the cost of the proposed £122m scheme to widen it.

As part of this review, a new SACTRA report which looks at the claim that "new roads are essential to create new jobs" is expected soon. An interim report is due at the end of the year and is expected to conclude that there is little evidence to show such a connection is true.

GE developments

Great Eastern have embarked on a refurbishment of the slam-door 312 trains. For the passenger, the most noticeable difference will be the sealing up a number of doors; this will reduce the draughts and increase safety as there will be less chance of a door being opened inadvertently. New seat covers and carpets will also be fitted. Externally the trains will be repainted in GE colours. At the same time some attention will be given to mechanical parts to improve reliability. The first train to be fully refurbished is expected to enter service in November.

Class 321 trains are to have the first class area stripped out. This will include the removal of a bulkhead. New seats and carpets will be installed and this should result in much improved ambience. Externally, these trains will not be repainted but plastic panels will be used on the lower body sides which will give an appearance closer to the GE design.

Along with other train operators, Great Eastern is setting up a web site - it is hoped it will be operational by the end of the year. Apart from timetables and fares, there will be interactive section and it will be possible for passengers to send comments to GE. Although one operator has a web site with on line information about the actual running of the trains (in practice the departure times), GE is not intending to do this immediately. The problem is the interface between the signalling system (which identifies individual trains) and the output in a meaningful form for the customer.

Date for your diary

Saturday 29th November: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at the Little St Mary's Church Hall, Cambridge at 2pm. Our guest speaker will be John Jacobs who will be talking about the East-West Rail link.

Cheap electrification

Peter Bayless, a member of the Branch Committee, has recently written to a railway magazine about an electrification scheme. The article below is based on his letter.

One very important gap in the network that has not yet been electrified and needs to be is the 28 mile section between Ely North Junction and Peterborough. This would probably be the cheapest (in terms of cost per mile) electrification scheme in the whole country because it appears that there is not a single overbridge that needs raising and it is mostly straight double track.

The benefits of its completion would be as follows:-

1. The introduction of an hourly Skytrain Shuttle service between Stansted and Peterborough, providing a fast and reliable service to the north. The proposed Central Trains Birmingham/Liverpool to Stansted service, due to be introduced in May 1998, will have similar problems to the previous service, which was withdrawn because of lack of patronage. Reliability is the most important factor with Airport services if people are to be persuaded to leave their cars at home.

2. The extension of Liverpool Street - Cambridge services to Peterborough to provide travel opportunities and connections from North East London and the Lea Valley to the North. It would also provide an improved direct service from Whittlesey, March and Manea and, because of the extra trains at Ely, a better service south for Ely - Norwich. Further if the Stansted to Brain-

tree line is rebuilt, it would provide direct connection to the north from all stations on the Great Eastern line between London and Braintree.

3. A diversion route for GNER trains when there are (not infrequent) infrastructure problems or when there is maintenance needed to be undertaken on the mainline between Peterborough and Hitchin.

4. If Ipswich - Ely and Ely - Norwich were wired, electric haulage of freight would be possible direct from the East Coast ports and would relieve pressure on the North London line which is close to capacity.

The problem at present appears to be that there is nobody prepared to get schemes like Ely - Peterborough, which would benefit several operators, off the ground. Railtrack management have suggested that there are to be Area Business Managers within each Railtrack Zone whose job it will be to progress projects such as this. Passenger Train Operating Companies with 7 year franchises cannot be expected to finance large schemes which have a working life of, say, 30 years but would probably be prepared to make a contribution to the capital cost based on their use of the completed facility.

Therefore it is up to Railtrack to make these schemes happen through sensible financial partnerships with TOC's for the benefit of the travelling public.

The Government is considering establishing a Strategic Rail Authority. One of its tasks would be to promote the development of the rail network.

Rail User Group has vision

The Peterborough to Norwich Rail Users Group have published a document setting out their aspirations for the route. The report notes that the existing service is good and well managed but makes suggestions on ways to improve all aspects of the railway.

On the basic infrastructure, there is a need for greater capacity at Peterborough station to reduce delays. A modest acceleration to the service would increase the attractiveness of the service. The Class 158 Sprinter units are expected to continue in operation; a number of modifications are required to make them more reliable and access for disabled requires ramps to be fitted.

The route has to cater for two sorts of passengers. The long distance travellers and the local passengers from developing towns such as March, Attleborough and Wymondham as well as Ely, Norwich and Peterborough. The report identifies changes to the existing train service, fares and connections that will enable the line to achieve a better balance between these two roles.

Station improvements include better lighting, cycle racks and access for the disabled. Closer coordination and through ticketing with local buses are called for at some stations.

The report concludes with the suggestion that the parts of the route could justify a half hourly service. It is hoped that Central Trains will make an early and positive response.

TR&IN conference

The theme of the latest conference organised by TR&IN (Transport Research and Information Network) was "Working with the new Train Operators". John Saunders attended the conference and gives this report.

The keynote speaker was Adrian Shooter, Managing Director of Chiltern Railway, who outlined the steps his company were taking to become the best train operator. Most of his potential customers were affluent with two or three cars. To tempt them off the M40 and onto the railway required very high standards of reliability, punctuality, security and customer service. Chiltern Railway has frequent dialogue with user groups and local authorities. Through ticketing has been introduced on High Wycombe buses. Train lengths are adjusted between two- and three-car units based on data from the recently installed ticket barriers at Marylebone. Four new three car trains are on order to provide a half hourly service from Solihull to London, double track is being reinstated between Bicester and Princes Risborough for the enhanced service. A limited range of tick-

ets can now be bought from local village stores. To avoid the need for expensive ticket machines, shops are issued with pre-printed tickets.

Other speakers included John French from Suffolk County Council on how partnerships had developed with train operators, starting with the provision of cycle racks and a real time information system involving two operators and three County Councils. Brian Sutcliffe of the Friends of the Settle - Carlisle line spoke about their fund raising shop and the money which the group is investing in station improvements. Such work is made more difficult by various legal and bureaucratic hurdles.

The afternoon session included clear warnings from both Northhamptonshire County Council and the Cyclists Public Affairs Group for realistic expectations of getting people to take the bus to the station and the number of cycles that would be carried on trains. The first task for the railways is to get people out of their cars, they might consider reaching the station in a more environmentally friendly way if the local bus service and cycle facilities were right.

David Spaven, from the Spaven Mc Crossan Partnership, gave an upbeat assessment on the prospects for the return of rail freight to the Maxwellton Branch in southern Scotland. Potential traffic included timber and products from a plastics factory. The final presentation came from the Marketing Director of the Cardiff Railway Company who noted the large amounts of money being spent on the area's road network. The local authorities were helping to fund improvements to the track and signalling, but there was no money to support additional fast train services to take advantage of the new infrastructure.

On the buses...

Bus-rail coordination is de-veoping in many areas. Recent developments in East Anglia have included through ticketing and dedicated bus services. The current Great Eastern timetable has no less than six bus routes that connect towns off the rail network to stations served by GER. Anglia have introduced a dedicated bus link from Colchester to Stansted Airport.

Increasingly, through ticketing is being developed enabling passengers to use town services to complete their journeys. At Chelmsford, where First Bus operate a comprehensive network of routes in the town, through ticketing is particularly advantageous. For it is where there is a frequent bus service, that passengers feel that there is greater certainty of being able to use the bus to reach the train.

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