

The good news and the bad news...

Peter Lawrence, our Branch Chairman reviews the last twelve months.

During the course of the year the East Anglian Branch has had presentations from Bob Breakwell of Great Eastern Railway, Liz Rushmore on the Bittern Line Partnership and John Jacobs from the East-West Rail Link Consortium as well as from the Manningtree, Sudbury - Marks Tey and Peterborough Rail Users Associations. We were delighted to host the RDS National Annual General Meeting on 3rd May 1997 in Norwich, when our guest speaker was Lord Berkeley of the Rail Freight Group.

Performance declines

News from the Central Rail User's Consultative Committee just before Christmas painted a rather sad picture concerning our railway system. Complaints totalled 4,450 - a 96.1% rise on the July - September figures for 1996. Reliability and cancellations soared by 226%, while complaints concerning the national rail enquiry system rose to 322%. The north of England had seen trains cancelled simply because operators had insufficient train staff. Virgin Trains were continually suffering from delays and Connex Trains had problems with overcrowding, but more was to come. Recently John Welsby, British Rail, stated that services throughout the UK were worse now than since be-

fore privatisation and a recent opinion poll result suggested 82% of respondents considered rail services were indeed worse. All sectors of the railway system have come in for criticism although the recent RDS National Rail Passenger Survey gave East Anglia a reasonably good picture.

Tribulations

Last autumn saw the Norwich to London line closed for 4 days when a freight train ripped up the track after becoming derailed. Great Eastern continued to have problems with the class 121 units (which replaced a 153) on the Marks Tey - Sudbury line. Part time guards were also another issue, thankfully now dropped. Two derailments at Harwich within a week at the beginning of January this year gives cause for concern. One was a derailment of an Anglia Railways InterCity train and the second, worryingly, involved a nuclear flask being shunted.

Good news

The Felixstowe line - once dubbed the worst line - is having a £100 million investment by Railtrack on signalling and infrastructure improvements. Freight traffic to the docks continues to increase traffic and the installation of Real Time Information bodes well for passengers. The Bittern line from Norwich to Sheringham is to be resignalled and will probably be second for real time information.

Central Trains are to reintroduce a Birmingham to Stansted service but we still await news on new rolling stock for Anglia Railways InterCity services. November 1997 saw the announcement of plans for Thameslink 2000. The Mid-Norfolk Railway will introduce passenger trains between Wymondham and Dereham from Easter 1998.

Freight traffic grows

At the end of the year English Welsh and Scottish Railway won a 24 week contract to transport twenty 1500 tonne trains of soil from Norwich Riverside to Buckinghamshire. This is a saving 3000 lorry movements. The Ministry of Defence also announced that 60 combat vehicles will be moved by rail over the Wymondham - Dereham line for onward transport by road to Swanton Morley barracks. The trains will be accompanied by armed guards. Revival of freight traffic to Kings Lynn docks and further traffic to the Norwich area also look possible.

In the next twelve months, the St Ives line and the East - West Rail Link proposals will require the attention of the Branch Committee. A sub-committee has been set up for the St Ives line. Peter Wakefield, the branch's immediate past chairman, has been asked by RDS National Executive to co-ordinate all matters relating to the East-West Rail Link.

Sudbury line woe

The replacement of the sprinter unit on the Sudbury branch with old diesel units has resulted in frequent disruption due to mechanical problems with the stock. The Branch has written to Great Eastern expressing our concern over the poor service.

In theory Great Eastern had three of the older trains available, however on many days all of them were out of action leading to a bus service replacement. Things had improved by the start of December, and some services were being formed of two units joined together. The long term solution to this issue is unclear; at present there is no spare stock available for leasing in the short term. Once other operators start to receive their new stock, it is possible that some older sprinter type trains may become available, but this will not be for many months.

Anglia's trains

A telephone conversation with Anglia Railways just before Christmas revealed that they are still some months away from placing an order for new rolling stock. Following problems that other train operators have had with finalising details after making preliminary announcements, the company is reluctant to give any details about the new trains.

The franchise commitment was for around 20 new four coach electric trains in order to provide an all day half-hourly service between London and Norwich. Anglia may also be looking for some diesel units to operate through services between London and the Norfolk Coast. In the meantime the existing coaches are being refurbished at Wessex Traincare in Eastleigh and will be repainted in the company's house colours of green, mustard and white.

East-west link

Future progress of the East West rail link between Ipswich/Norwich via Cambridge to Oxford may hinge on a meeting by the consortium of local authorities and Transport Minister Glenda Jackson. At the meeting the consortium will ask the minister for significant funding to get the scheme underway. It appears that Railtrack would be happy to develop the project providing that the Government will pay around half of the £180m costs.

John Jacobs, secretary of the consortium of the local authorities backing the scheme, spoke at our Cambridge meeting last November. He was optimistic, noting that it is being developed at the right time. The new government is keen to improve public transport; Railtrack is under pressure on to expand the network to cope with increasing amounts of rail freight

Dates for your diary

Saturday 21st February: Annual General Meeting of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society at Bury St Edmunds Library starting at 2pm.

Saturday 2nd May: National RDS Annual General Meeting in Shrewsbury. Details will be published in Railwatch.

Saturday 20th June: National RDS Re-openings conference in Cambridge.

Saturday 26th September: National RDS conference of rail users in London. Details will be published in Railwatch.

Campaign dates

30th May-6th June: Don't choke Britain Week

13th - 21st June: Green Transport Week

Tuesday 16th June: Car free day

More details should be available from your County Council.

Cycle ride

Each year the RDS arranges a sponsored cycle ride to highlight the need to re-open a particular railway line and to raise funds. When the route is not in this region, the Branch has often organised an alternative local ride.

This year Clara Zilahi is hoping to organise a ride on 7th June. She is looking for fellow riders and sponsors! If you wish to take part please write to her at the address on the back page. More information will be announced at the Branch Annual General Meeting on 21st February when there will also be a chance to sponsor a rider.

1998 Branch Annual General Meeting

The 1998 Annual General Meeting of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society will take place on Saturday 21st February at Bury St Edmunds Library starting at 2pm.

Agenda

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| 1. Chairman's welcome | 9. Election of Branch Officers and Committee |
| 2. Apologies for absence | a) Chairman |
| 3. Guest speaker: Andy Cooper
Director Anglia Railways | b) Secretary |
| 4. Questions | c) Treasurer |
| Branch Annual General meeting | d) Sales Officer |
| 5. Minutes of 1997 Annual
General Meeting and matters
arising | e) Membership secretary |
| 6. Chairman's report | f) Press Officer |
| 7. Secretary's report | g) Other committee members |
| 8. Treasurer's report | 10. Appointment of Auditor |
| | 11. Motions |
| | 12. Branch President's closing
remarks |

Nominations for Officers and Committee, duly proposed and seconded must be in the hands of the Secretary by 14th February. Notices of Motion, duly proposed and seconded, must be in the hands of the Secretary by 14th February 1998.

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

Down under

At the end of last year, I visited New Zealand and Australia. The most interesting thing about NZ is the approach to levelling the playing field between road and rail. I quote from "Rails", a magazine published in NZ:

"At this stage the reforms are on track. There seems to be widespread agreement that roading needs to be placed on a business footing or something close to it... If Rails reads the signs correctly, road transport will sometimes end up paying more for public roads but any increase will not - because it cannot - be set at a ruinous level. In the end some private motoring too, mainly in urban areas in peak times, is going to become more expensive, i.e. more close-

ly related to the costs involved." The following sentence appears elsewhere: "Do we really believe that just one sector of transport - commercial road transport - should not be charged full commercial rates for the infrastructure it uses?"

In Australia, railways are, for the most part, a state responsibility and each state has its own gauge. Standard gauge (4' 8½" as in the UK) is used in New South Wales and for the interstate lines such as the 2461 mile one connecting Perth in the west to Sydney in the east.

There are two points worth noting: the franchise holder for this and the Adelaide Alice Springs passenger routes is a consortium that has a connection

New members

We would like to welcome the following new members who have recently joined us and look forward to seeing you at our Branch meetings during the year.

P Gardiner of Woodbridge
Rev A Thomas of Beccles
D Hastings of Norwich
R Saunders of Ipswich
B Green of Ipswich
G Stone of Baldock
C Hawes of Woodbridge
T & J Forster of Peterborough
S Baines of Wivenhoe
G Bryan of Halesworth
C Terrell of Woodbridge
I Yates of Colchester
G Smith of Norwich
A Rust of Woodbridge

We need to enrol more members to add to this list.

with Anglia Railways whose services operate rather more frequently than thrice weekly and over journeys that include at least 3 nights on the train.

The other point is the open access freight operations which operate over the standard gauge network. EWS are lucky just having to negotiate with Railtrack: operators in Australia have to negotiate with each state and, also with the Commonwealth government which can add up to 5 different track authorities! The competition with road haulage is a bit one sided on occasions with lorries legally weighing in at over 70 tonnes and illegally delivering grain at more than twice this weight.

Alconbury airfield development

Developers have put forward plans to convert the former United States Air Force base near Huntingdon into a major air/rail/road distribution centre. The site would comprise around 700,000 m² of warehouse space and would be connected to the East Coast Main Line by a triangular junction giving direct rail access to both north and south. Sidings would be installed early in the project to allow construction materials and site waste to be transported by rail. Once the site is operational, there is potential for up to 12 freight trains per day, accounting for 50% of the goods handled at the site. In addition to the rail connection, the developers have put forward traffic calming plans for the local villages and 6 new bus services serving the surrounding area.

The plans, especially the possibility of reusing the runway, have created much local concern. It is RDS policy to remain neutral about the need for the development, but we have submitted comments to Huntingdon district council on the rail aspects of the project.

Real time

One of the interesting aspects of the Internet is the ability to watch what is happening in other countries, in particular the transport scene. Two news-groups that I have been following have had articles on real time information systems applied to public transport. The method being employed to track buses in Western Australia (and in many parts of the world) uses satellites to determine the current position of a bus and a computer to calculate its expected time of arrival. The information is displayed at bus stops includes a countdown. Of course if the bus is halted in traffic this might slow the bus down or even stop it. The display ceases to countdown and may even countup as the time actually increases from say arrival in 3 minutes to 4 minutes.

A similar real time system is being tested by North West Trains to give anticipated departure times from stations although the basis for this is information from the signalling system.

It is by using these techniques that the waiting passenger can be kept informed of the progress (or lack of it) of the train they are intending to catch.

New trains

Although the Central Trains franchise did not include the provision of new rolling stock, the company looks set to order at least 13 new Interurban diesel trains. The "under a fiver, under a tenner" promotion has proved very successful and is the reason for the new stock; a further 25 units could be ordered.

Central Trains Director, Mark Causebrook made the announcement at the Cambridge RUCC meeting in December. He added that the new trains would be used in East Anglia especially on the Stansted Airport - Birmingham - Liverpool services.

Green signals

Railtrack have recently announced two major resignalling contracts - the first to be awarded to overseas firms - in this area. They are part of Railtrack's strategy to increase the number of suppliers and to investigate new and cheaper technology.

Around £6m will be spent to resignal the Norwich to Cromer route and to upgrade some of the level crossings. The contract has gone to the American firm Vaughan Harmon Systems and will use a type of signalling equipment widely installed in the USA but new to this country.

The second and larger contract worth around £13m is for the resignalling of the Peterborough to Nuneaton route. The 54 mile line will use conventional signalling equipment provided by the French company CSEE Transport.

BRANCH OFFICERS

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