

A crumbling railway?

Pick up any newspaper, or listen to a transport debate on the radio or television, and you will get the impression that our national railway network is falling to bits and passengers are in a

constant state of revolt. A familiar message - but is it true? A more balanced view on the state of our railways can be found by reading the shadow Strategic Rail Authority's annual report.

The back of the report contains details of the passenger train operators with a list of improvements carried out over the past year. Here is a summary for the train operators in the region.

ANGLIA RAILWAYS

- New Class 170 units introduced
- Services between London and Norwich doubled
- New Crosslink service to Basingstoke
- Direct trains from London to Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds
- Station improvements at Norwich and Ipswich
- Help points at local stations

CENTRAL TRAINS

- New Class 170 units introduced
- New maintenance depot built at Nottingham
- CCTV at many stations
- Help points and information screens at stations

GNER

- Bus links and through ticketing at Peterborough
- Additional services using Eurostar trains
- New travel centre at Kings Cross

WAGN

- Refurbished Class 317 units
- Extra trains to Stansted Airport
- More trains on Sundays
- Tourist package fares to Ely and Cambridge including admission to key attractions.

GREAT EASTERN

- Additional services to Ipswich
- More bus/rail ticketing
- CCTV at 14 stations
- Help points installed at stations
- Extra cycle facilities at Chelmsford and Billericay
- New trains on order (see later)

Although there is a lot more to be done, the list of achievements is very encouraging.

Freight news

The region will benefit from a rail freight innovation competition organised by the Strategic Rail Authority. One of the three winners, Blue Circle Cement, will use its prize money to develop a service to carry cement tankers on rail wagons from Hope in Derbyshire to Ipswich for onward delivery by road.

The RDS working with other environmental groups and the rail industry has produced a booklet to help local authorities and the new government regional agencies develop a proper rail freight strategy. Called "Goods without the Bads", the book contains many useful facts and figures on current freight transport and suggests ways to encourage more freight to travel by rail. There are many examples of the work already done by local authorities including the air survey carried out by Norfolk County Council to identify former rail routes that needed to be protected.

Cambridgeshire County Council has agreed to revise plans for the Fordham by-pass to enable future rail connections to be installed to new factory units in the area. Although there is no short-term prospect of rail freight to the factories, the County considered it might happen in the longer term and felt that the new road should not prevent this from happening. The decision was not without controversy and the Branch had a letter published in the Cambridge Evening News supporting the council's action.

The RDS National Freight Committee and East Anglian Branch are supporting the planning application by Derek Cooper (Road Hauliers) to build a proposed Intermodal Rail Link at Wymondham.

National Draw

Don't forget your RDS draw tickets. The closing date is 4th October; Lewis Buckingham (address on back) has extra supplies of tickets if you need them.

Signals at danger

There have been some incidents on the Great Eastern mainline that have caused concern. The first happened on the 3 May when a First Great Eastern Colchester bound train was authorised by a signal man to proceed at caution at a red signal near Kelvedon station. To quote from a Railtrack letter "On following these instructions the driver immediately recognised he was routed over a cross over onto the adjacent track towards a stationary Freight liner. The signalman quickly realised his error and sent an emergency stop notice. On seeing the Freightliner the FGE train driver immediately applied the brakes and brought his train to a stand well clear of the stationary freight train." An investigation ruled out an equipment failure and has "centered on human error".

More recently at another incident a FGE train passed through a red signal. Although in this instance there is reason to believe the driver was at fault, there is a common factor. In both cases there was maintenance in progress that gave rise to changes to the normal routine. The Branch is concerned about these incidents.

Rail User Group Conference

The Rail Passenger Council (ex RUCC) are to hold a Rail User Group Conference in Peterborough in September 2000. It is expected this conference will be for RUGs and RDS representatives. Do you have any comments or topics you wished raised?

EVENTS FOR YOU DIARY

Saturday 30th September: RDS East Anglian Branch Public Meeting at the Assembly House in Norwich starting at 2pm. The guest speaker will be Chris Hayward from the East-West Rail Consortium. We hope that the scheme will have been given the go-ahead by then!

Saturday October 7th: National Conference of Rail Users
More details in Railwatch.

Saturday 25th November: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting at the Novotel in Ipswich.

Saturday 24th February 2001: RDS East Anglian Branch Annual General Meeting at Bury St Edmunds

Station plans

Railtrack has submitted plans for the redevelopment of the area around Cambridge station and it is pleasing to note that many of the suggestions made by the RDS and other local groups at a consultation exercise have been included. The plans provide for a new pedestrian area in front of the station building and improved cycle facilities and bus interchange. A new bus only link to Hills Road is proposed. The existing car park is replaced by a new multi-story car park. The space saved will be used for new housing, retail units and a budget hotel. There are also plans for the Government Office for the East of England to have their headquarters building in station road. (Would they do this if the East-West Rail Link was not going to be built?)

The Branch has also responded to a consultation document for the development of Peterborough station. We have generally supported the concept which includes better walking and cycle links to both the city centre and to the west of the station.

FGE order new trains

New trains have been ordered by Great Eastern and, whilst the final details have not been decided, the Branch has been told that they will have air conditioning and other quality features. The trains will be built by Siemens which have supplied the trains for the Heathrow express and the Leeds suburban services. The new GE trains will

WAGN break up

The shadow Strategic Rail Authority has announced the break up of the WAGN franchise. Prism, who currently operate the franchise, will retain the West Anglia route of services out of Liverpool Street. Services out of Kings Cross will be handed back in March 2001 and will become part of the much-expanded Thameslink franchise. The sSRA has not ruled other further changes so that the West Anglia route could be merged with the Great Eastern franchise and all the London inner suburban routes may be combined at some stage.

The franchise split will mean that two different operators will run services between Cambridge and London. This could result in cheaper fares due to competition, but also result in the loss of inter-available ticketing between the two routes. The Branch has written to the sSRA on this matter and also on the future of direct services between Liverpool Street and King's Lynn.

We understand that Prism have been bought by the National Express Group.

have a similar body but, internally, the seating is likely to be 2+3 to meet peak hour seating requirements.

At present there are delays in introducing new rolling stock but the Branch hopes that Siemens will not have similar difficulties and the new trains will enter service on time in 2002

100 at RDS meeting

Over 100 people attended our public meeting in June to discuss the Cambridge - St Ives - Huntingdon railway re-opening. There was good coverage of the meeting in the press and on local radio. At the start of the meeting, messages of support for the scheme were read out from local MPs Anne Campbell and Andrew Lansley.

An additional potential benefit of the re-opening has been identified; providing extra network capacity to relieve the bottleneck at Ely North Junction. The railway just north of the town splits in three directions with lines to Norwich, Kings Lynn and Peterborough. Proposals by both passenger and freight operators could see traffic double with around 20 trains per hour in each direction over the junction. A new flyover would rightly attract considerable opposition as being intrusive in a flat landscape, so additional capacity will need to be provided elsewhere.

Many thanks to all those who wrote letters in support of the re-opening after the meeting. The RDS has had meetings with senior staff at both Railtrack and the shadow Strategic Railway Authority, and there does appear to be genuine interest in the strategic benefits of the route.

Rail East

Material for the next edition of should reach, Tony Albert by 31st October 2000.

Government announces 10 year rail spending plans

Capital investment of nearly £50 billion in the rail network and £11 billion revenue support for rail services is included in the total transport package of £180 bn that was announced by the Government as part of its 10 year spending review. £35 bn of the capital investment will be private sector funding. This investment is intended to cater for a 50% increase in passenger kilometres and an 80% increase in rail freight by 2010. Although the sums of money are large, there are few details as much depends of the current round of passenger franchise renewals.

The Government has included a £7 bn Rail Modernisation Fund that will allow for an expanding rail network including some new lines as well as providing extra capacity at existing bottlenecks. This sum excludes funds for two major projects: a separate allocation of £9 bn will be available for the West Coast Main Line upgrade and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

At a regional level, there is Government money for the freight route upgrade between Felixstowe and Nuneaton. This scheme will provide extra capacity and it will allow larger containers to be carried on normal wagons. The improvements will enable some existing freight services that currently run by the congested North London Line to run via Peterborough. It was disappointing that there was no green light for the East-West Rail Link, although the regional fact sheet described the project as having "enormous importance to strategic economic development". The branch understands that the the western section between Oxford and Milton Keynes is included in the award of the new Chiltern franchise to the existing holders, M40 Group, also known as Chiltern Railways. Included in the potential projects (subject to franchise renewal) are an extra platform at Cambridge and new stations at Addenbrooke's Hospital and Chesterton.

The Branch's views on the 10-year transport plan were reported in many local newspapers and on local radio. Our new Branch Vice-Chairman Ivan Ivanovic was featured on Anglia TV. The lack of details for the schemes in the Region meant that we were unable to gain as much publicity as we would have liked.

Before the announcement of the spending plans, the Branch had issued a press release giving our top priorities as the East-West link and the Felixstowe - Northampton route freight upgrade. We are pleased that one of these has been given the go-ahead and we trust the other will be announced soon.

For those with access to the Internet, there is a summary of the transport schemes for the region (both road and rail) on the Government web-site: www.detr.gov.uk/trans2010/factsheets/east/index.htm and www.detr.gov.uk/trans2010/factsheets/east/index.htm

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Branch changes

In the last Rail East we reported that Peter Lawrence had decided to step down from being Branch Chairman following his appointment as national Chairman. At the June committee meeting Peter Wakefield was appointed as acting Branch Chairman and Ivan Ivanovic acting vice-chairman until the next Annual General Meeting.