

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of RailFuture

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Cities regain rail link



Photo. Anglia Railways

MP Charles Clarke was joined by the Lord Mayor of Norwich and representatives from Cambridgeshire for the launch of Anglia's new Norwich to Cambridge service. Also present as guests of Anglia Railways and their parent company, GB Railways, were, among others, many councillors, representatives of the local media and stakeholders including members of the East Anglian Branch of RailFuture. One of the 4 two car diesel units which have been specially bought for the service was well laden for the 70 minute journey from Norwich which called at Wymondham, Attleborough, Thetford, and Ely before reaching Cambridge.

The service has been enabled by a £9.2 million Rail Partnership grant from the Strategic Rail Authority. The class 170 two coach trains are air conditioned and are equipped in accordance with current disability regulations.

The Anglia Plus pass area which already has been extended to include Ely and Cambridge has been extended again to include the route which means that the maximum off-peak ticket price is £9. There are 15 services a day in the week and 10 on Sundays so it should prove attractive for business people as well. One comment made by a potential business user was "How nice it will be not to have to drive along the busy A11".

The Gainsborough Line joins

The Marks Tey to Sudbury 'Gainsborough Line' has joined the extended and renamed Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership. The Community Rail Partnership (CRP) is funded by Essex and Suffolk County Councils, and other local authorities, First Great Eastern and Railtrack and was originally formed to develop business on rural Essex branch lines including the Manningtree to Harwich 'Mayflower Line', the Wickford to Southminster 'Crouch Valley Line' and the Colchester to Clacton and Walton route.

Dave Kaye, First Great Eastern's newly appointed managing director, said "I am delighted that the two authorities have been able to work together so that the Gainsborough Line could become part of this very dynamic local partnership." The partnership will develop lineside action groups involving the local community and take other initiatives to encourage use of the line. First Great Eastern has laid on extra trains for the Chappel Beer Festival.

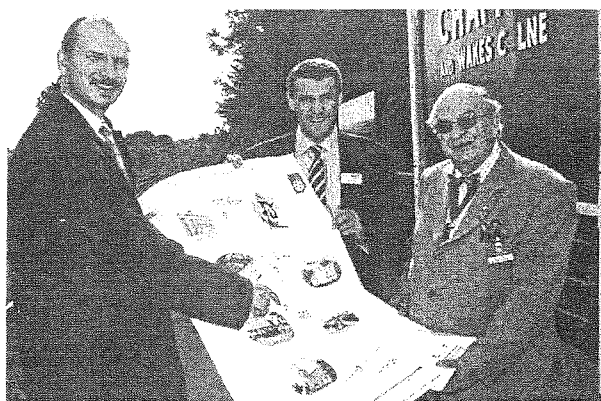


Photo: First Great Eastern

Recent developments on the 'Gainsborough Line' have seen a year round Sunday service introduced thanks to Rail Passenger Partnership funding from the Strategic Rail Authority and to meet the peak demand, the train is now a two coach unit. Automated information systems have been installed at each station on the line.

Greater Anglia Franchise

The SRA specification for the new Greater Anglia franchise, due out in July, has been put back at least until the middle of October. The delay of a few months even before the process has really started does not give great hope that the new operator will be in place and up and running before the existing franchises run out in early 2004. The problem appears to be the amount of engineering work due on the main routes out of London in the first few years of the franchise which will affect the services and therefore the amount of subsidy that operators will require. Another uncertainty is the length of the franchise. Twenty years was originally proposed by the SRA to allow time for significant investment. However the recent reduction in the newly agreed South Central franchise from 20 to 7 years suggests that the Greater Anglia franchise may go the same way. The concern is that a shorter franchise will increase costs, discourage innovation, and will mean more management time spent on bidding rather than trying to improve services.

There seems little that the bidders can do until the specification is issued. First Group have put forward their ideas if they were given a blank sheet of paper. As expected they include new trains for the Norwich - London service, clock face services on the branch lines, and upgrading of stations, amongst other things. The Stansted Airport service would have new trains. Bus-rail integration featured strongly in the presentation.

Hopefully by the time you read this, the specification will have been issued and will contain a number of the improvements that we have campaigned for such as an hourly service on all rural routes and new trains on the London to Norwich route. The Branch has received invitations to meet with First Group, National Express and Anglia Railways to discuss our aspirations for the franchise.

Airport strategy

The Government has issued a consultation document on future airport strategy. Under the maximum growth option, there are plans for a number of additional runways/new airports that will affect East Anglia. The options show possible new rail connections at Stansted and at Alconbury if these sites are developed. There will be a discussion of our response at our Cambridge meeting in November. A key issue is how we should respond to the need for extra capacity, and if we should state a preference for where this capacity should go.

Details of the report can be found on the Department of Transport's website. Any comments should be sent to Nick Dibben.

Access with difficulty

Ipswich station, with 1.8 million passenger journeys, is one of the busiest stations in East Anglia. Served by both Great Eastern and Anglia Railways, there are frequent services to London throughout the day. It is an important hub on the Anglia network of local services serving rural Suffolk as well as the important (although currently underdeveloped) interurban routes to Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge, Ely and Peterborough. The links with Harwich and the ferry services are limited, however Ipswich is an important interchange station.

There is an island platform connected by a footbridge which has steep stairs that are very difficult with luggage. The only option for those in wheel chairs is to cross the busy tracks at the London end of the station which can involve a lengthy wait exposed to the weather for a suitable gap in the traffic.

It is very disappointing that there is no proposal to install lifts at the station. It was extremely short sighted to remove the lifts that were there many years ago and it will be a major expenditure to put in place a facility that is needed now. The disabled, those with luggage and others with problems deserve better. Since the Strategic Rail Authority is now taking the lead in these types of projects, we hope that the Greater Anglia Franchise specification will have something to say on the matter.

The Branch website

The Branch now has its own website, which is being developed, and can be found at:

<http://freespace.virgin.net/martin.thorne/snippets/>

A number of members have inquired about receiving Rail East via e-mail. This would save on postage and you would get your copy much more quickly. We hope to have a pdf version of Rail East available for download soon. If you are interested in this arrangement, please send an e-mail to the Secretary at:

nick.dibben@ukgateway.net.

Please include your RailFuture membership number.

The Branch welcomes contributions to Rail East. Short articles are particularly welcome. Material for the next edition should reach Nick Dibben by 31st December 2002.

Railway renewals

Blockade Strategies

The Strategic Rail Authority has announced that the West Anglia Line will be closed on Sundays so that progress may be made more quickly (and at less cost) on the route modernisation project. Much comment has been made in the press about the closure of the line and the replacement bus service to Stansted on one the busiest days of the week for the airport.

The Great Eastern Mainline from Ipswich to Shenfield is one of the busiest two-track railways in the country. The infrastructure is becoming fragile and needs to be upgraded to a more robust standard. There are probably some enhancements needed to give a greater resilience when things go wrong, for example dynamic passing loops and better single line operations. The

tunnel south of Ipswich station will need to be altered as part of the cross country freight strategy to divert container trains away from London. The intention is to allow the increasingly common 9 foot 6 inch containers to be carried on normal wagons rather than the pocket wagons which are less economic.

At some date it will be necessary to close the line to enable work to be carried out at Ipswich and at other locations. The SRA has yet to set out its proposals but, unlike on the West Coast Mainline, there are no diversionary routes (except routing London - Norwich trains via Cambridge) and the parallel A12 is already congested and so it will be difficult to run a reliable substitute bus service.

There is a need for innovative thinking and the Branch is seeking ideas to put to the SRA. Have you any ideas?

Dates for your diary

Saturday 9th November: Branch Meeting at 2 pm at Little St Mary's Church Hall, Trumpington Street, Cambridge. A speaker from GBRf has been invited but confirmation is awaited.

Saturday 16th November: East Suffolk Travellers Association meeting at 2.15 pm in the Parish Church Hall, Church Street Saxmundham.

Saturday 23rd November: Peterborough-Norwich Rail Users Meeting at 11.15 am in the Maltings, Ely. The guest speaker will be Jon Quarmby.

Saturday 23rd November: Fen Line Rail Users Group Annual General Meeting at 2 pm in the Maltings, Ely. The guest speaker is Chris Austen from the SRA.

Capacity Study

The SRA has issued a consultation document on how it should optimise the capacity of the existing rail network before spending money on major new enhancements. The Branch is concerned that extra train paths will go to long distance services at the expense of local trains especially on rural routes, for example the small country stations between Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

What do you think? Please let us know.

RPC on the web

The Rail Passengers Council for Eastern England now has its own web-site at: www.railpassengers.org.uk/eastern

In addition to information about the RPC, the site also has links to local rail user groups and Railfuture. By typing in a station, details of the local rail user groups and the relevant Railfuture Branch will appear. There are items of news and copies of the Committee's publications are available for downloading. Information about the composition of the Committee and how to become a member are also to be found. Likewise links to train operating companies are also there.

Railfuture was represented at the official launch at the London Transport Museum in London and took part in a "pub quiz" along with teams from other parts of the rail industry. The Railfuture team, despite a bright start and being good at music and geography, finished well down the list. The winners were a team from the Department of Transport.

Guided bus plans advance

In Chester, councillors on the planning committee have thrown out plans to build a busway in the City to serve a Park and Ride site; rising costs were given as the main reason. The scheme was well advanced with construction due to start shortly. The scheme will now go to the full council meeting for a final decision. In Luton, an independent assessment of that busway scheme has also highlighted rising costs and disputed the claimed benefits. The revised figures show a cost benefit ratio of around 1:1, meaning that Government backing is unlikely unless there is a major contribution from the private sector. In Germany, the world's first busway in Essen is currently being dismantled.

In Cambridge, councillors and officers appear unconcerned by these developments and at the end of July, a "more detailed" assessment was submitted to the Government to secure funding to take the proposals to Transport and Works Act stage. The Branch

has seen a draft version of this submission but not the detailed figures and maps that went with it. The County Council is suggesting an open access arrangement, with a "Railtrack type" operator looking after the busway with a number of different operators running the service. There are no details of the proposed bus priority measures within Cambridge, although the cost allocated to them is small suggesting they will be quite limited. The cost has increased from the £56m in the CHUMMS report to £73m. The County say this is due to various contingencies being included, but it does not reflect the fact that the section by the railway line from Chesterton is not in the present scheme. The costs also show normal buses being used rather than the tram like vehicles proposed by SuperCam – hardly a step change in provision claimed by the report. There is no indication that Railtrack are happy with the proposals; the route affects Cambridge station and runs close to the existing power signal box. The integration with the existing bus network is not included. The report notes that a limited bus service will remain along the A14.

The Branch has written to the County with comments on the proposals suggesting that the scheme is far from complete and there are still too many risks involved, especially following the experiences at Chester and Luton.

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