

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of Rail Future

railfuture

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National Express Group preferred bidder

The Strategic Rail Authority has announced that National Express is the preferred bidder for the Greater Anglia Franchise. GB Railways and Arriva also submitted bids for the franchise. The new operator will take over in April 2004. Details of what has been included within the bid are scarce but we hope to have some information in time for the Branch Annual General Meeting in Bury St Edmunds on 21st February 2004

2003 - A year of progress?

2003 has proved to be another eventful year for the region's railways. Despite what many people read in their newspapers there have been a number of successes and improvements to the railways within East Anglia. Here are just a few examples. The first year of operation of the Cambridge - Norwich service carried over half a million passengers, nearly half of them former car users. Other lines have seen more passengers than ever and at a national level, over 1 billion passengers used the railways in 2003. New trains have been introduced on the Great Eastern Route and some rolling stock on Anglia, WAGN and GNER has been refurbished. Time keeping on Central Trains services to Stansted has improved following the timetable changes in September. Network Rail has completed the new signalling on the West Anglia Route and the TPWS safety system work to both track and rolling stock has been completed on time and on budget. There has also been new freight traffic on the railways especially from Felixstowe.

Towards the end of the year, a series of announcements about the Greater Anglia Franchise, Alconbury, Stansted Airport and the Cambridge guided bus system illustrated what the future might bring. Some of these issues are referred to later in this edition.

All this is good news, but there is still much to be done. Although punctuality in this region is better than most, there is still room for improvement. An article in "Modern Railways" magazine on the reliability of various types of train, not only shows scope for improvement but also highlights the inconsistencies between operators using similar types of train. Such inconsistencies also appear between different parts of Network Rail when it comes to the cost and time taken to carry out maintenance work. It is perhaps not surprising that the Government is showing signs of impatience and wants to remove some powers from the Strategic Rail Authority.

What of Rail Future? As many of you know, the Society is developing a new business plan and that Peter Lawrence is standing down as National Chairman. So there are likely to be some changes at national level after the national AGM on 2nd May. Such change is to be expected and encouraged as we consider how best to respond to the very changing railway industry and how best to use our resources in campaigning for better rail services. For the Branch, 2004 means getting to know the new operators of the Greater Anglia franchise and considering our response to the proposed guided busway between Cambridge and St Ives.

Government funds for busway - with strings

The Government has agreed in principal to give £65m to help fund the Cambridge to St Ives guided busway. The announcement formed part of the annual settlement for local authorities' transport plans made just before Christmas. The remainder of the estimated £73m cost will come from developer contributions. The amount appears far more than the County Council had expected, so they are likely to agree to progress to the Transport and Works Act stage. The Council are likely to issue details of the scheme on the 19th February with 6 weeks for people to make their comments. About a week after the announcement, the County Council decided that the busway would run under Hills Road adjacent to the railway in Cambridge

rather than having a ramp up to the road. Network Rail had expressed concern at this option as the route would run close to signalling cables and the Cambridge signal box. £5m has been added to the cost of the busway as a result of this change. Since the Government has stated that it will not fund any additional costs, this money will have to come from developers or local taxpayers.

Although the Government appears to have approved the scheme, many local people are still sceptical. For example, St Ives Mayor, Kevin Reynolds, in his New Year's message on the future for the town said "The ill conceived and unpopular guided bus proposal that has little support outside Shire Hall will be imposed upon us, despite all its obvious drawbacks and lack of com-

munity support."

The most curious response has been that from the local bus operators – nothing at all! They are certainly not rushing forward with plans for new services to use the busway. Their situation is easy to understand. If they want to use the busway, they will have to pay the access charges, buy new buses and there will be pressure to retain existing bus routes along the A14. The simple question they will be asking is will the additional income cover these extra costs? This silence from the operators means that the public have no details on what services will be run and what will happen to existing bus routes. Without this information, how can anyone consider what benefits or problems the busway might bring?

Alconbury freight terminal approved

The Government has approved plans to build a large road/rail interchange facility on the former USAF base at Alconbury near Huntingdon. The site is adjacent to the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and close to the junction of the A1 and A14. Originally, Huntingdon District Council had rejected the scheme, largely due to local opposition at the prospect of air freight using the site. The approval prohibits its use of the runway.

The developers have agreed to limit the amount of road traffic entering the site that means that a large quantity

will move by rail. Included in the conditions for approval is the point that the site is not allowed to start operations until the rail connection to the ECML is made. Although much of the material from the old buildings is expected to be re-cycled on site and reused in the new development, any material taken off site must be by rail. Some of the other imposed conditions that affect the railway include noise limits and hours of operation. The Branch has contacted the developers asking for a meeting and further information on the scheme.

Bittern line booms

Record numbers of passengers have used the Bittern Line train services in 2003. The number of passenger journeys was over 440,000 - an increase of 19.3% compared to the previous year.

Anglia Railways credit much of the increase in passenger numbers to the proactive and positive work of the Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership, led by Norfolk County Council, and the introduction of late night services (running for one year) which have already attracted over 10,000 passengers since their introduction in May.

CAST.IRON - the hardware

Much has been written about the busway proposed by Cambridgeshire County Council. The two pictures on this page show locations on the St Ives branch. To the right is shown the track at Histon station which was cleared in July 2003 is shown the track to the west of the station in remarkably good shape considering the years of neglect.

CAST.IRON has received permission from Network Rail to clear a further stretch of track to enable a clearer idea of the amount of work

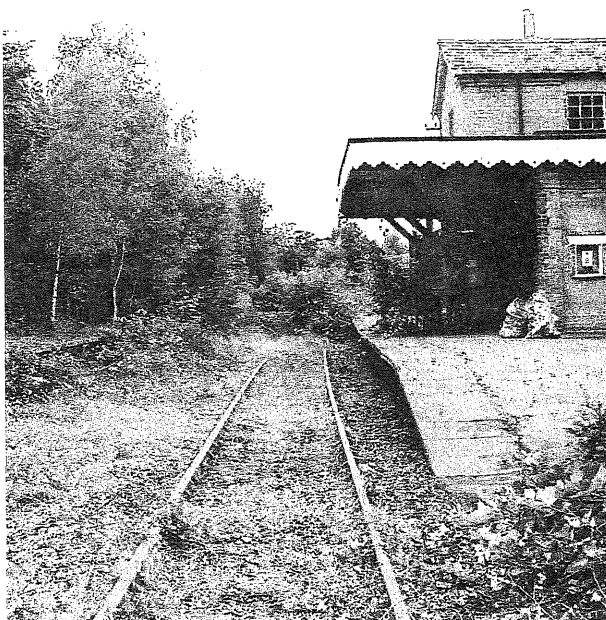


Photo: Martin Thorne



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needed to restart a train service.

The proposal is to open the route by stages but, unlike many heritage railways, the intention would be to operate a train service that serves the needs of the communities it passes through. The costs of rebuilding the line to enable trains to run at 70 m.p.h. are lower than that of building of the busway. Although there are regulatory hurdles to be overcome, it would be possible to have the trains at an early date.

Full details are on the CAST.IRON web site www.castiron.org.uk.

Thameslink 2012

Following the rejection of the scheme at Transport and Works Act (TWA) stage, Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority have established a "joint team" to take the project forward. Although the benefits of the scheme were accepted, questions were raised about the architectural quality of some building elements. The SRA and Network rail had hoped that the Government would allow some work to start whilst these issues were resolved, but this was rejected. Following discussions with the Government, new information and a new environmental statement for the scheme is expected to be submitted before the summer with the planning inquiry being complete about a year later. If all is well, the Government should grant the TWA powers early 2006 to allow work to start soon after. A 5 year construction period is expected allowing trains to start running in 2012. (Let us hope this date is the right one!)

Dates for your diary

Saturday 21st February 2004 - East Anglian Branch Annual General Meeting at 2 pm in the County Library at Bury St Edmunds. (Agenda and other details are on the back page.)

Saturday 8th May 2004 - Rail Future Annual General Meeting in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. (Full details in Railwatch.)

Branch Annual General Meeting

The 2004 Branch Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 21st February at Bury St Edmunds Library, starting at 14.00. The Library is around 10 minutes walk from the station. Nominations, duly proposed and seconded, for the Branch Committee with should be sent to Nick Dibben by the 14th February. The Branch is always looking for more helpers, so if people are unwilling to join the committee, there are still many tasks that need to be done. Please contact Nick Dibben if you are interested in helping out.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes and matters arising from the 2003 Annual General Meeting
4. Branch Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Election of Branch Officers and Committee:
 - Chairman
 - Vice Chairman
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Sales Officer
 - Membership Secretary
 - Press Officer
 - Other members of the committee
7. Appointment of auditor
- 9 Motions

The Library is situated in Sargeant's Walk between St Andrew's Street and St John's Street and is about 10 minutes walk from the station. The meeting is timed to suit arrival of trains from Cambridge and Ipswich and should finish by 16.30.

BRANCH OFFICERS

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Around East Anglia

Both GB Railfreight and Freightliner have added **extra container** trains from Felixstowe to the Midlands. Another new freight flow is aggregate traffic from South Wales to Harlow in Essex.

Network rail has completed the upgrade of signalling on the line from Liverpool Street to Bishops Stortford (W A R M). The project was completed on time and within budget.

Work to install the TPWS safety system that reduces the risk of accidents caused by trains going through red signals has been completed. The system has been fitted to some 12000 signals and over 6000 items of rolling stock over the last 3 years. The total cost was around £500m and is already proving the safety benefits.

Since the programme started there has been a 80% reduction in high severity SPADS (signals passed at danger) where TPWS is fitted.

Anglia Railways, Great Eastern, Network Rail, Suffolk and Essex County Councils are working together to deliver a range of **station improvements**. The intention is to spend around £1m to improve 5 stations within the next 18 months.

The amount of **subsidy paid** to Great Eastern has reduced from £41m per year when the franchise started to the company paying a £9m premium to the Strategic Rail Authority at the end of the franchise.