

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of Rail Future

railfuture

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A memorial to Ron Callaby

Ron Callaby, who died a few years ago, played an important role in the reopening of Watlington Station on the Ely to Kings Lynn route. Clara Zilahi and a number of other Branch members raised around £600 by selling cakes and plants to help pay for a cycle rack at Watlington Station as a way of commemorating Ron's work in getting the station re-opened. After much discussion with WAGN, the new cycle shed has now been installed at the station. The final piece of work is to get a plaque made up.

A bright future for our rural routes

At the end of September, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) will be celebrating the role that railways in rural areas can play, by holding a Community Rail Event in Norwich and surrounding towns. It is sometimes difficult to imagine that the route between Norwich and Sheringham, that has seen more trains and a 150% increase in traffic in recent years and now has station staff at North Walsham, was actually being proposed for closure by the politicians 20 years ago. The fact that the line and many others did not close can be put down to strong local opposition including Railfuture and other rail user groups.

But what of the future for these lines? As noted elsewhere in this Rail East, the expectation is that the growth in passengers will continue. Increasing traffic congestion and the prospect of road pricing will make these lines more valuable than ever. The ACORP event will highlight best practice from around the country of promoting these lines and making them an integral part of the community. At a time when Government expenditure on rail development is very limited, it is worth noting that many of these ideas can be achieved a minimum cost.

Railfuture will have a stand at the Norwich event and we are producing some new display material. So do come along to the event, pick up the ideas and join us in pressing the politicians into making them a reality.

Sheringham goes from strength to strength

On 13th June 'one' announced that passenger journeys on the Norwich-Sheringham Bittern Line have risen by 192% since 1997 with almost 585,000 passenger journeys made on the route in the year to 31st March 2005. There were just over 200,000 journeys in the year up to 31st March 1997.

Norfolk County Council and the Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership are credited with improving and promoting the service over the last eight years. However, the recently introduced all-day-long hourly service, two late night trains and improved Sunday services have contributed. Better integration with other transport modes has also played its part in the success story.

East Anglian Branch: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/martin.thorne1/RailfutureEA-Snippets>
Rail Future: www.railfuture.org

ATOC's view of the future

The Association of Train Operators (ATOC) made the media headlines earlier this summer when it suggested that train fares may have to rise in order to discourage demand on some peak hour services. This statement was however just one sentence contained within a 30 page document that looked at how the passenger railway might develop in the next 10-20 years. Naturally the media ignored the rest of the document and any discussion of the issues raised.

The report notes the recent increase in passenger travel on all parts of the network. There has been especially strong growth on many of the regional inter-urban routes such as Southampton to Bristol and Manchester to Leeds. ATOC are predicting a 28% overall increase in passenger kilometres over the next 10 years which represents slightly slower growth than in recent years. This figure is dependent of many factors including the introduction of some form of road pricing.

To cope with the growth ATOC says there are a number of low cost schemes that need to be implemented that would provide additional seats and improve track capacity. Network Rail has a modest annual fund of £50m for small infrastructure schemes. However, ATOC warns that there will come a time when future growth can not be accommodated within the existing infrastructure. Major investment will be required otherwise the lack of capacity will start to affect the national economy. It was in this scenario that the need for higher fares was put forward.

As noted in the last Rail East, housing growth in the region will lead to a huge demand for rail travel. The West Anglia route between London, Bishops Stortford and Cambridge, already close to full capacity, will see the largest increase in demand and is highlighted in the ATOC report as a priority for action.

It has been suggested that the future railway budget only has enough to cope with the needs of serving London, with no money for other areas.



Photo: one railway

Station adopters

The Sheringham Evening Women's Institute the official adopter of Sheringham station and have developed the gardens over many years and also report to the train operator any areas that need repair or attention. Sheringham station has been nominated as one of 14 finalists in the Best Station Award category of the Anglia In Bloom competition.

Station improvements

The National Audit Office has carried out a study into the way that railway stations are maintained and improved. It carried out surveys at 120 stations to assess what facilities were being provided. The report noted that although the SRA originally had a £225m plan to upgrade 980 stations, the scheme was cut back to £25m and just 68 stations. The Audit Office has made a number of recommendations to the Government including:

- Setting minimum standards for different categories.
 - Make these standards clear to passengers.
 - Encourage more involvement from passenger groups in monitoring stations .
 - Tackling the high fees charged by Network Rail and consider other parties doing their work.
 - Find ways of encouraging outside bodies to invest in stations.
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Thameslink/GN franchise bidders

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has issued tender documents to the five selected bidders for the new Thameslink/Great Northern Franchise. Bids are due in September with the winner being announced at the end of the year. The companies bidding are:

- DSB (Danish Railways)/EWS
- First Group
- MTR (Hong Kong metro)/Laing
- National Express
- Stagecoach

The SRA has also issued a stakeholder briefing document which sets out the key requirements that the bidders have to meet. The document contains a table of objectives which makes it very clear where the priorities of the Government are. The primary objective is "To improve the financial position of the UK Rail Industry by improving the premium position of the franchise". In other words the company that offers the most money to the Treasury wins. This approach gives a strong disincentive to invest in improvements and we could be faced with the situation where local rail passengers are giving millions to the Government and seeing no improvements authorised.

Overcrowding is considered a secondary issue although the bidders are expected to include an investigation for some additional trains to serve Peterborough and Cambridge. The document does note however, that due to power constraints, these trains may have to be diesel trains. In order to provide the train paths over the Welwyn Viaduct, some Letchworth trains may have to terminate at Welwyn Garden City.

The Branch has attended a number of presentations by the bidders and put forward our own ideas on how the existing service can be improved.

Branch news

Members attending our July meeting in Bury St Edmunds discussed the proposed Railfuture Business Plan that sets out how the society will develop over the next few years. The key elements of that discussion were where do we focus our campaigning should it be on major projects or on small improvements: do we need an office and full time staff; how do we get a better balance of members and how can we work better with other organisations? Our next meeting will be in Norwich on Saturday 1st October at the Assembly House, Theatre Street starting at 14.00. Our guest speaker will be Mike Young, Rail Freight Officer at Norfolk County Council talking about recently updated county rail freight strategy.

News in brief

The Great Eastern Mainline is the most densely used railway line in Great Britain with 18,400 passenger kilometres per route kilometre per day against a national average of 5,800.

"**The East Suffolk Railway into the 21st century**", ESTA's latest publication, assesses the progress made over the last decade and looks ahead to desirable improvements over the next decade which include improving the infrastructure so that an hourly train service can be run between Ipswich and Lowestoft.

The £356,000 car park extension at **St Neots** station, adding 70 more spaces making a total of 335 was opened in May.

It has been reported that Cambridgeshire County Council, intends to bid for funding from government in 2006 for **Chesterton** station with an opening date of 2011.

The Essex Rail Users Federation has called for a second operational platform at Colchester Town station so that a more frequent service can be operated. The station is situated near the main shops and bus station, unlike the main Colchester (North) station, which is some 20 minutes walk from the town. In the days of Railtrack, developer funding for the additional trackwork and second platform was obtained, but it is now insufficient because of cost escalation.

Dates for your diary

Friday 23rd September to Sunday 25th September: Community Rail Event at Norwich Station. The Branch hopes to have a stand at this event.

Saturday 1st October: East Anglian Branch Meeting at the Assembly House, Norwich. Mike Young will give an update on the county's rail freight strategy.

Saturday 1st October: Bedford Railway and Transport Association Conference in Biggleswade. Details Richard Pill on 01234 405 268 or www.brta.org.uk

Saturday 22nd October: East Suffolk Travellers Association meeting in the Victory Hall, Wickham Market starting at 14.15. Speaker from Eastern Counties buses.

Saturday 5th November: Rail Users Conference in Manchester.

Saturday 10th December: East Anglian Branch meeting at Little St Mary's Hall, Trumpington Street, Cambridge.

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Yes! I would like to help a Railfuture!

Please return the completed application form to:

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