

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of Rail Future

railfuture

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Felixstowe line capacity to be improved

Hutchinson Ports, the owners of the Port of Felixstowe, have applied for an order under the Transport and Works Act to build a section of double track on the Felixstowe line and new and longer sidings in the Ipswich Yard.

An 8 km section of double track is proposed west of Trimley Station towards Ipswich with new signalling and pointwork. Level crossings along the route will be upgraded to suit the new trackwork; a new footbridge is to be provided at Westerfield station. Within Ipswich Yard,

3 new 24 wagon length sidings will be created to enable longer trains to be run. Currently there are 22 freight trains in each direction to the port and the new double track section will enable this to increase to 38 each way per day. The port estimate that this will save nearly half a million lorry movements each year.

Consultation, carried out by the Port in May 2005, showed that a considerable majority of local residents supported the scheme. Concerns have been raised regarding noise and level crossing down time and

these are being addressed.

The Branch has written to the Department of Transport giving its total support of the scheme. Once the February deadline for comments is reached, the Secretary of State will decide if a public inquiry is needed into the proposals or whether the concerns of any objectors can be resolved by discussion.

The Port of Felixstowe have published their proposals in considerable detail on their web site:

www.portoffelixstowe.co.uk/fsr/branchline/plansfbl.htm

East - West by stealth?

Although the Government appears unwilling to give approval for the first stage of the East-West Rail Link between Oxford / Aylesbury and Bedford, it has agreed to fund a new station north of Aylesbury and an additional platform at Milton Keynes station. Both these schemes are part of the works required for East – West Rail. At the same time, Network Rail has announced that it is going to restore

around 8 km of the route over the Bletchley Flyover and onto the former Swanbourne Yard west of Bletchley to allow ballast trains serving the new virtual quarry at Forders Sidings to run round before returning up the West Coast main Line. With both these schemes in place there is only a short 14 km section of out of use track on the existing formation to be restored that would enable east-west trains

to operate.

The need for the new train service was demonstrated by a trip from Cambridge to Oxford using the X5 “express” coach service undertaken by the Branch Chairman and Secretary. Although the return fare is just £7, the journey time of nearly four hours meant there were only two other passengers making the entire journey and most of the passengers were only making short trips.

East Anglian Branch: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/east.html>
Rail Future: www.railfuture.org

Busway approved

Early in December, the long awaited Government response to the Cambridge to St Ives guided busway inquiry was published. Both the inquiry Inspector and the Minister have recommended that the Transport and Works Act Order should be granted allowing the scheme to be built. Although the Inspector, in his report, noted many of the concerns of the objectors, he did not consider that they were sufficient to stop the scheme. No new conditions were added by the Inspector.

However before work can start, the funding package needs to be agreed and put in place. Although the Government has already agreed to fund £65m, the initial cost is predicted at around £86m. Private developers will be expected to pay some of this,

but Cambridgeshire County Council may be looking to Government for additional money. Guidelines issued by the Government on the funding of cost increases suggest that they will only pay 75% of the increase, the rest has to come from other sources. It is therefore still possible that the busway will not be built. In addition to the initial costs, the ongoing costs of maintaining the busway and charging operators to use it have also not been established.

Other issues that were noted by the Inspector that will need to be resolved include the technical problem of providing gaps in the guideway for wheelchair users and resolving the routing the buses through the villages for those who would find it difficult to access the busway stops.

First wins franchise

First Group have won the new combined Great Northern/Thameslink franchise. The new franchise to be known as First Capital Connect will take over operations in April 2006. The length of the franchise is dependent on meeting strict performance criteria and will be for a minimum of 4 years with two extra years if targets are met. A further 3 years may be added with agreement of the Government and this is likely to depend on progress with the Thameslink 2000 project. A total of £52m

of new investment is promised in the first few years of operations with money being spent on upgraded trains and station facilities. First will however be paying £808m to the Government in premium payments, although the majority of this will be in the last few years of the franchise.

It is of concern that there are few details of the planned improvements which is in total contrast to the many commitments made by First when they won the Greater Western franchise on the same day.

Bathside Bay

In a separate but related announcement concerning Hutchinson Ports, the Department of Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have stated that they are minded to approve the planning application to build a new container berth at Bathside Bay, Harwich. Following a public inquiry in 2004, they have concluded that the terminal is needed but recognise the potential impact on the environment. The scheme will therefore be dependent on the creation of new wildlife habitats, the development of new rail infrastructure plus upgrades to local roads and limits on the number of lorries.

Additional capacity - or a cut in passenger services - may be required on the Great Eastern Main Line.

Crossrail

The Crossrail Bill is now before parliament. The limitations on the capacity of the main lines both east and west of London are causing much concern to the rail freight companies. Additionally it appears that there will be a restriction on the development of passenger services for 30 years to prevent any abstraction of revenue from Cross Rail. As the rail network is reaching saturation and passenger numbers are increasing on the routes, this could be storing up difficulties ahead.

Cambridge meeting

Graham Ellingham and Stuart Towler from 'one' Railway were the guests at our December meeting in Cambridge to talk about the impact of the proposed new development adjacent to the City's station. As the operators of the station, they welcomed the potential for improved interchange and that the plan had managed to coordinate facilities for the various transport modes on the site. Their concerns over the development were the possible impact of 8 years disruption during the works, the provision being made for cyclists and car parking. There was also the need to maintain key facilities such as deliveries to retail units, space for replacement buses during engineering works and a base for the British Transport Police.

The extent of improvements to the actual station that the developers would be asked to pay for were not yet agreed but members at the meeting suggested extended platform canopies and a wider platform 3.

Avoiding London

The lack of progress on the Felixstowe to Nuneaton route to enable it to take traffic from the Haven Ports remains a concern. This is a major development which is needed to speed exports and reduce traffic congestion. The longer it is delayed the worse the problems on the North London line.

West Anglia timetable

The introduction of the new timetable on the West Anglia Route between London Liverpool Street and Cambridge in December was marred by industrial action by train crew. Sunday services rely on extra working by staff and many staff refused to turn up leading to the cancellation of many trains. In response to the dispute, Tim Clarke has been replaced as Managing Director of 'one' by Dominic Booth.

It is sad to see Tim depart in this way, especially after the many positive new developments in local train services that had been introduced during his period in charge of both Anglia and now 'one' Railway.

'one' have recently announced a number of changes to the West Anglia timetable from February. These include the withdrawal of inner suburban services, adjustments to the Stansted services including cancellation of some of the new services linking the airport and Stratford.

Through trains review

'one' Railway is carrying out a review of the through trains between London and Lowestoft / Peterborough introduced in the December 2004 timetable. Concerns have been raised about the time-keeping of these services which have resulted in some trains being terminated before their final destination. Overcrowding on the section between London and Ipswich has also been an issue. The Class 170 units used on these trains are to have the amount of first class seating reduced to provide more standard class seats.

The Branch and the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, the local user group for the Lowestoft – Ipswich route, have written to 'one' Railway highlighting the benefits of the through trains. In their reply, 'one' have stated that no decisions have yet been made and that consultation with passengers would be undertaken in the early months of 2006.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 11th March 2006 – ESTA meeting at the Kings Head Hotel, Beccles starting at 14.30. Guest speaker will be Guy Dangerfield of the Rail Passengers' Council.

Saturday 6th May – Railfuture National Annual General Meeting in Swindon.

Saturday 24th June – East Anglian Branch meeting in Bury St Edmunds Library starting at 14.00.

Saturday 1st July – Railfuture Campaigns Conference in Stoke on Trent.

Saturday 9th September – East Anglian Branch meeting in Norwich at the Greenhouse, Bethel Street starting at 14.00.

Branch Annual General Meeting

The 2006 Branch Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 4th March 2006 at the Elizabeth Orwell Hotel in Felixstowe starting at 14.00. The existing Branch Committee have indicated that they are willing to continue for another year, however additional assistance either as a member of the committee or offering to help with particular tasks are always welcome. Nominations should be sent to the Branch Secretary by the 25th February.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes and matters arising from the 2004 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
8. Motions

The change in venue is to enable the Branch to mark the "retirement" and say thank you to Charles Taylor for the valuable contribution he has made over many years to the work of Railfuture and the local rail user group. Jonathan Denby from 'one' will be giving us an update on recent developments.

The Elizabeth Orwell Hotel is a short walk from Felixstowe Station.

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Snippets is an e-mail newsletter for members of the East Anglia Branch of Railfuture. To receive a copy, please send an e-mail to jerry.alderson@virgin.net asking to be added to the list. Remember to let Jerry needs to know if you have changed your e-mail address or you will not receive a copy.

Material for the next edition should reach Nick Dibben by 30th May 2006.