

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of Railfuture East Anglia Branch

rail

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GOOD NEWS ON EAST-WEST RAIL

Prospects for the creation of a new rail link linking Oxford and Aylesbury to Milton Keynes and Bedford have moved a step closer following two Government announcements. Firstly, the Government has given the go-ahead for a new railway station to be built a few miles north of Aylesbury and associated upgrade of the existing freight only line to serve a new housing development. Existing train services on the Chiltern Line will be extended to serve the new station.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has issued its report on the transport schemes required to serve the major expansion of Milton Keynes. The report found that a re-opened rail service between Oxford and Bedford would initially carry 1220 passengers a day increasing to 2410 daily passengers by 2031. By comparison, an express coach service would only be expected to increase passengers by 150 per day by 2011. No long term bus usage figure were given perhaps suggesting that bus passenger growth would not continue to rise.

Although the study figures show that rail would attract ten times the number of new passengers than an express service, the report conclusions claim that the bus would benefit traffic congestion more than rail! This does not make sense, and the traffic congestion relief, at least in the short term, appears to come from some proposed road widening schemes rather than bus travel.

To accompany the ODPM report, the East-West Rail Consortium comprising many local authorities, issued their own report that look at the way the rail scheme integrated into the new housing development. This report noted that the new rail link would dramatically increase the access to good public transport needed to support employment opportunities and would enable the new housing to be built at higher densities. This would save land and minimise the impact on the countryside. The report also looked at ways in which this land saving could be turned into money from developers to help pay for the railway work.

Following the issue of these reports the ODPM gave support to the idea of a rail link and new work has been commissioned by the E-W Rail Consortium to provide more detailed figures of the costs and benefits to hopefully enable a final go-ahead for the scheme to be given. The new work will also look at the impact of an half hourly train service to reflect the increase in the number of new houses to be built in the area.

A possible intention to proceed with the first stage of the East-West Rail link has come from the Government's latest report on the West Coast Main Line upgrade. The section on the Milton Keynes and Bletchley part of the route has several references to the provision being made for future Oxford to Bedford services.

A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR RAIL?

The railway in the Eastern Region is characterised by success and strong recent growth in demand according to a Department of Transport report. The report "Eastern Regional Planning Assessment for the railway" looks at the future requirements for the rail network to match the forecast changes of housing, jobs and other development. It is the first of a series of documents that will cover the entire country and will consider the next 20 years.

Rail passenger trips in the region rose from 45m to 70m between 1995 and 2002. London obviously is the key destination with 78%, 17% of trips are within the region itself and just 5% to other regions. Overall, passenger trips are expected to increase by 15% by 2016, although this figure hides some significant growth on some routes. For example, West Essex: 201%! Cambridgeshire 39%, Peterborough 36%, Bedfordshire 33%.

The report notes various constraints to future growth, but then effectively rules out major investment in the next 5 years. In the short term, the emphasis will be on trying to maximise the use of the existing network. Enhancements in the medium term are likely, with longer platforms and trains, new stations to serve new development and some increase in capacity. Possible schemes include the following:

- Platform extensions for 12 car trains on most routes
- New stations on north Thameside.
- New station north of Chelmsford with loops on main line
- Passing loop on the Braintree branch
- Extra capacity on West Anglia route
- Chesterton Junction station north of Cambridge
- New station at Elstow near Bedford.
- Gauge enhancements between Ipswich and Peterborough
- Additional frequency on key inter-urban lines e.g. Norwich to Cambridge

There is much in the report that matches Railfuture's own ideas for the future. The key exception is the lack of interest in developing East-West rail links between Bedford and Cambridge.

Some of the possible schemes will be looked at in more detail during the Route Utilisation Studies being undertaken by Network Rail. The study covering the East Coast Main line is already underway and the study for the routes out of Liverpool Street is about to start.

FELIXSTOWE PLANS CHANGE

Hutchinson Ports have submitted revised plans for the upgrade of the line between Ipswich and Felixstowe. The majority of the changes affect the status and routing of the footpaths and bridleways that cross the line. The proposed new footbridge adjacent to Westerfield Station has been deleted.

The changes mean that the public consultation period has been extended until 16th June and copies of the plans are available at local libraries until that date. It is not clear if the Secretary of State will accept new objections / support for the scheme or only new comments regarding the changes for those who have already responded. The Government will decide if a public inquiry is needed for the scheme at the start of August.

LONG SERVICE REWARDED

Charles Taylor was presented with a book of railway paintings at the Branch AGM in Felixstowe as a thank you gift for all the work he has done over the years for Railfuture and the local rail user group.

Robert Stripe has had a Class 365 unit, 365 522, named after him for his services to the Fen Line Rail Users. Robert is also a Branch committee member.

Thanks are also due to Tony Albert who has stepped down from the role of putting Rail East together.

IN BRIEF

GB Railfreight have started a new flow of used rail ballast from March to North Walsham. The material is sold to local firms for use in the construction industry.

Following the fire at Huntingdon station last year, the station building has now been repaired although some are unhappy with the new plastic sheet roof.

The Branch has responded to plans to redevelop the centre of Great Yarmouth by rejecting proposals to move the locations of the stations. We have argued that the stations need to remain close to the town centres to be useful to incoming passengers and have suggested improvements to the train service, stations and bus interchange.

The Branch has written to Stena Ferries about possible cuts in the service. We have urged the company to do more to promote the service to non car users.

A study looking at linking Network rail to the North Norfolk Railway at Sherringham has concluded that the existing NR station will need to be replaced shortly and that re-opening the level crossing and sharing a station would be cheaper than a new halt.

Dates for your diary

Sat 24 June – Branch meeting in Bury St Edmunds Library starting at 14.00. The main item for discussion will be future Branch activities (see above).

Sat 1 July – Railfuture Campaigns Conference in Stoke on Trent.

Sat 9 September – Branch meeting in Norwich at the Greenhouse, Bethel Street starting at 14.00. Clive Morris from One railway will be talking about development of the rural routes.

Sat 2 December – Branch meeting in Cambridge at the Little St Mary Church Hall starting at 14.00.



**Railfuture – the national
independent voice for rail users**
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FCC IMPOSE NEW TICKETING RESTRICTIONS

From the start of the new June timetable, First Capital Connect, who have taken over from WAGN have imposed new restrictions on off-peak passengers. The return portions of day returns, off-peak travelcards and family travelcards are no longer valid on trains leaving London between 16.30 and 19.01. FCC say they need to introduce these measures to reduce overcrowding. It appears the change was a franchise commitment agreed with the Government.

The Branch has written to FCC objecting to the change on the basis that it is unlikely to solve the problem and will create bad publicity for the railway. The letter was copied to local MPs and the media. The Branch accepts that overcrowding is an issue, but we have asked FCC to delay any changes to the ticket restrictions until the East Coast Route Utilisation Study is complete options for running additional or longer trains have been investigated. We have also asked FCC to ensure the passengers are fully aware of the changes as people being issued with penalty fares is an excellent way of discouraging rail travel.

Members travelling during evening peak from London are asked to monitor the provision of information on the platform and on-train announcements regarding these ticket restrictions and send any observations to the Branch Secretary.

WHAT NEXT FOR THE BRANCH?

When the Railway Development Society was formed many years ago, there appeared to be little interest by government or local authorities in future development of the railway. Indeed many assumed that apart from a few key routes, there was no future for the railways as everybody would have access to a car. In those days RDS could put forward a simple message to highlight the importance and benefits of rail and suggest some simple improvements.

How things have changed! There is now widespread recognition that we can not build our way out of traffic congestion, and growing concern about the environmental impact of car and air travel. Most local authorities now have a rail development officer and Railfuture gets invited to county council rail strategy meetings. As noted above, the government is producing long term rail strategies to a level of detail and using information that simply is not available to organisations such as ours. At a local level, most routes in our region has very successful rail user groups that look after many of the day to day issues affecting the railway.

The result is that Railfuture has to ask itself some important questions as to how we should evolve in the coming years in order to continue to contribute positively to the discussions regarding future railway development. Here are some questions to consider:

1. What role can Railfuture play in the development of the region's rail network?
2. What are the key issues we should be addressing?
3. How can we "add value" to the discussions on these issues?
4. What skills and abilities do we need to develop to enable us to do this effectively?
5. How can we work better with other (non-rail) groups?
6. How can we increase our membership generally and increase the diversity of our membership?
7. What tasks can the members get involved in to assist our work?

The Branch wishes to discuss these issues at our next meeting in Bury St Edmunds Library on Saturday 24th June starting at 14.00. Please send comments and suggestions to the Branch Secretary and come along the meeting and join in the debate.