

RAILEAST

The Newsletter of Railfuture East Anglia Branch

railfuture

Number 132

August 2006

A CHANGE OF PLAN?

The contribution by Railfuture and other regional environmental groups at the East of England Plan Examination in Public have resulted in wholesale changes being recommended to the Regional Transport Strategy. Last year, the Branch submitted comments on the draft East of England Plan which sets out how the region will develop up to 2021. The Branch with other groups such as Friends of the Earth, STEER (Sustainable Transport in the East England Region, the regional transport campaign group (to which the Branch belongs) noted that the proposed transport strategy was not sustainable. Although many new roads were planned, it was predicted that traffic congestion would still increase by nearly 50%. Despite the plan including a number of rail schemes, we urged that much more emphasis was needed on reducing the need to travel and encouraging modal shift. Later in the year we were invited to take part in the three day discussion on transport issues.

The Planning Inspector's report on the Plan was published in June and agreed with much of our argument. The Inspector has suggested that all the transport policies be re-written to provide the emphasis towards more sustainable transport. The Inspector says in his report "the conclusion is inescapable that a large part of the answer to worsening congestion and to the challenge of climate change must be that people will have to use cars less in future."

With regard to the railways, the Inspector highlighted the need to match new housing with local jobs to reduce demand for London commuting. The need for extra capacity and gauge enhancements to enable rail to increase its share of freight from the main ports was seen as a high priority. There was also support for developing rail services between the main regional centres such as Cambridge, Ipswich, Norwich and Peterborough. The only disappointment with the report was the lack of support for the East-West Rail Link between Bedford and Cambridge, even though the scheme meets all of the transport strategy objectives unlike most of the road schemes.

The report will now go to the Secretary of State for review and acceptance of the recommendations. If the Government agrees with the new transport policies it will mark a step change in transport strategy and the recognition that things can not continue as they are. Just what emerged when the Branch met the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) in mid-August you can read towards the back of the Newsletter along with a relevant map!

PARKING CHARGES

The Branch has issued a press release expressing concern at recent increases to parking charges at stations. For example, Peterborough Station is now £10 per day. The press release noted that parking at the station too often cost more than the train fare and that this would deter people from using rail. We also called on local bus operators to improve their service to railway stations especially in the evening. Although many bus routes run every 10 or 20 minutes during the day, the evening service either is non-existent or hourly only making it inconvenient for the rail passenger.

IN BRIEF – A roundup of rail news

*One Railway has reported a significant increase of passengers on the Cambridge to Ipswich route since the service went hourly. Numbers are growing by 12-15% each month.

*One Railway has introduced a new season ticket for football supporters of the region's clubs. The ticket which is only valid on home match days, represents a useful saving on buying tickets each time.

*Freightliner has started a new freight flow of scrap metal from Hitchin to Cardiff and Sheerness. The siding, located behind the station, is also used for stone traffic.

*Central trains has reported that passengers on its Citylink routes are up 17% on the same time last year.

*FCC has appointed 24 new Police Community Support Officers and 5 Police Officers to operate across their network. This additional presence on trains and stations was a franchise commitment.

JUNE BRANCH MEETING IN BURY ST EDMUNDS

The Branch meeting in Bury St Edmunds Library at the end of June covered a wide range of topics. We heard from Ken Drake and Jenny Ahern of the Friends of Brandon Station. The group was formed in January 2006 when it appeared that the station building, dating from 1846, was under threat of being demolished. The group is aiming to get the buildings listed as they are some of the few remaining examples constructed with flint. They have joined the One Railway station adoption scheme and carry out regular checks at the station to ensure that it is kept clean and tidy. Improvements to the station signage and new plant pots have been provided. The group is trying to raise local awareness of the railway by distributing leaflets and there are signs that this is helping to increase the number of passengers.

The Branch is also to produce a "station user kit" for distribution to homes around some of the lightly used stations. Again, raising awareness of the railway station and the wide range of destinations it serves is the objective. The first station to be covered will be Whittlesea, where the Branch also wants to carry out a passenger-use survey as we suspect that the number of travellers officially using it are a significant underestimate. But this is labour-intensive work;...*could you help?* If so, give Peter Wakefield a ring on **01223 352364**. Other issues raised were development of Branch Web-Site, improving RailEast, and ideas on how to select new campaigns.

YOUR VIEWS ON THE BRANCH

The Branch Committee is planning a number of additional local meetings around East Anglia this Autumn to listen to members' views as to which should be the Branch's campaigning priorities for the next three years. We will write to members in selected areas to invite them to their local meeting. For each group we will invite around twenty members, and we need six to twelve people to make each meeting viable. If you receive an invitation, we would very much appreciate your coming to the meeting in your area.

Feedback from the meetings will reported at the December Branch meeting in Cambridge, and there will be a piece in a future Rail East summarising member's views.

FCC NEW TICKET RESTRICTIONS AND CAPACITY ISSUES

Following the protests by the Branch and many others over the new evening peak ticket restrictions introduced on FCC services, the company has reduced the number of stations to which the restrictions apply. They have also announced the introduction of a carnet type ticket for regular users that offers a discount on peak return tickets. These tickets will be introduced from stations on the Peterborough and Cambridge routes over the next 18 months once new ticket gates have been introduced.

The Branch has written to FCC with feedback on the new arrangements. We have commented on the lack of platform and train announcements on services where the tickets apply and some misleading information at stations where there are no restrictions. On a more positive note, we have commented on the helpfulness of station staff in explaining the new arrangements to passengers. In responding to the letter, FCC Managing Director Elaine Holt has accepted our comments and admitted that there is no formal agreement with drivers about making announcements, something they hope to correct in the near future.

The Branch has also attended a stakeholder workshop run by FCC looking into ways of improving seating capacity on peak services in the short term. The limited stop trains to Cambridge and the Peterborough stopping services are the busiest with loadings up to 140% of capacity. Constraints on train paths and limited electrical power mean that extra electric trains may not be possible. The study is due to be complete by the end of the year and a further workshop will be held before the results are announced.

LOWESTOFT STATION

Branch Chairman Peter Wakefield has attended a stakeholder meeting on the future regeneration of Lowestoft. Part of the proposal being put forward by 1stEast, a consortium of developers and local authorities is to move the station around 400m away from the town centre towards Norwich. The estimated cost of the relocation is £15m. The consortium say this will free up more land for development. The Branch, along with many other local groups is deeply opposed to the move.

The existing location of the station is very close to the shops and to the beach making it attractive and convenient for visitors. One Railway, who also oppose the move, say the station is in precisely the right place. The concern is that a relocated station will deter visitors to the town, nor have facilities to deal with special charter trains or freight. This would be counter to the aims of the redevelopment. The importance of having charter trains to the town was demonstrated a few days after the meeting when One Railway provided extra trains for people visiting the Lowestoft Air Show. The Branch believes that there is sufficient land in the area for new development without moving the station. We also consider that the money for a new station could be better spent on enhancing the existing train service, for example a new passing loop on the east Suffolk Line to allow an hourly service.

IN THE NEWS

Railfuture was given front page coverage on the Eastern Daily Press on July 4th. The article covered our response to the Network Rail 'initial strategic business plan'. Our comments concentrated on three regional issues: The Beccles Loop (Lowestoft-Ipswich line); Capacity between Colchester and Shenfield and the East-West rail link. Further coverage was given inside the paper, including the views of local MPs, councillors and One Railway.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TRAIN

Branch Chairman Peter Wakefield, like many members is a frequent user of the Region's rail network. Here are some of his observations based on recent travels.

What a waste.

I was reading about Railtrack moaning about spending lots of money to clear-up fly-tipping on the right-of-way. I notice however that all over the rail network there is hundreds of tons of high quality steel rail discarded in the 'cess, the four foot, six foot.. Some has been there years, what can its value be? Why can't payment to the contractors be delayed until it is all cleared up and recycled? In the meantime, should Network Rail send a specially equipped train and squad remove the 'rubbish?'

Crumbs!

Classes 170,156,153 are the very hard working traction backbone of our local services.. and a very good job they do too. But wouldn't I just love to get the 'Dyson' out and have go down the inside panels and the point where the seat and backrest meet; even under some of them. Perhaps "one" could leave the 'vacuum' out for do- it- yourself passengers to have go!!*(The enthusiasm to use the cleaner has been noted by Mrs Wakefield!)*

Spare a thought...

On the 11th of July I travelled to Norwich. At Eccles Road the train slowly came to a halt and we were informed that the previous service just ahead of us had collided with a very large stag deer. Suffice to say the incident involving both trains was well handled with delay for my train of only just over 80 minutes. It brought home to me how special our drivers are, doing a fantastic job, day after day, in all sorts of conditions. Many thanks to them all! I wish a speedy recovery to the driver of the train involved in this traumatic incident.

What a useful ticket.

The best value ticket and certainly most useful, in the region must be 'ONE's' Anglia Plus Day-Ranger. I wonder why the National Rail website and the other sites that give out fares, steadfastly ignore it, quoting only the usual range of singles, returns etc. that are more expensive. I often wonder if this ticket could be rolled out across all the region. Maybe it could be based on a zonal system with the present area as its core to prevent it becoming London-centric. For example the core could be £11 as now, zone 2 say to Peterborough, Bishops Stortford, Colchester and branches £12, zone 3 to Shenfield/Southend, Broxbourne/Hertford East £15. I wonder if a special arrangement could be made to include Kings Lynn, say, in zone 2? After all, if it's all 'one', it should be 'one' for all!

Engineering work...

It has got to be done but is it really done in a passenger friendly manner? We travelled to London recently in the evening from Cambridge. As you know there are 2 routes and, believe it or not, **both** were closed; after 21.58 from Liverpool Street and over an hour earlier from Kings Cross. Buses ran Stevenage to Royston on one route and from Bishops Stortford to Cambridge on the other. I bet it wasn't necessary to close the whole route from Stortford but who cares? Why close them both at the same time? No doubt run by two different but non communicating departments of Network Rail.

Your thoughts on these will be most welcome... plus any of your observations from the train too... Write to my address on the back of this newsletter.

NETWORK RAIL ROUTE STRATEGY

The Branch has attended two stakeholder workshops on the Greater Anglia Route Utilisation Strategy being carried out by Network Rail. The first workshop in Ipswich was to describe the processes involved, the second workshop in London contained details of the existing rail data that Network Rail will use to conduct the study.

The objective of the Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), according to Network Rail's licence, is to "make effective and efficient use and development of the route capacity available, consistent with the funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become available". The Greater Anglia RUS covers the routes out of London Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street and associated branch lines. The study starts by establishing the use and performance of the existing railway network and the likely changes in demand over the next 15-20 years including the impact of the Regional Plan (see page 1). Once the future requirements are known, the gap between existing and future capacity is identified and ways to tackle the issues identified.

The Branch has submitted comments on the data produced so far. We are especially concerned at the accuracy of some of the station user data, which has underestimated the demand at some stations. This is important as the proposals may suggest stops at lightly used stations be cut as a way of increasing track capacity. The Branch will be attending further workshops once the draft strategy is produced at the end of the year.

BEDFORD CC BACKS ROWING LAKE

The Planning Committee at Bedfordshire County Council has backed plans to build a rowing lake to the east of the Bedford that cuts across the trackbed of the former Bedford – Sandy route. The vote was 7-4 in favour. The Branch, the East –West Rail Consortium (Bedfordshire CC is a member!) and around 100 other groups and individuals opposed the rowing lake on the grounds that it would affect the future rail re-opening. It was also noted that although the rowing lake supporters has claimed it could be used for training, in the run up to the London 2012 Olympics, the site was not being built to full Olympic standards and lacked basic facilities such as changing rooms and boat storage.

The approval of the rowing lake does not rule out a future rail re-opening but it could make it more expensive or require an alternative route to be found.

NATIONAL TIMETABLE BOOK TO BE AXED

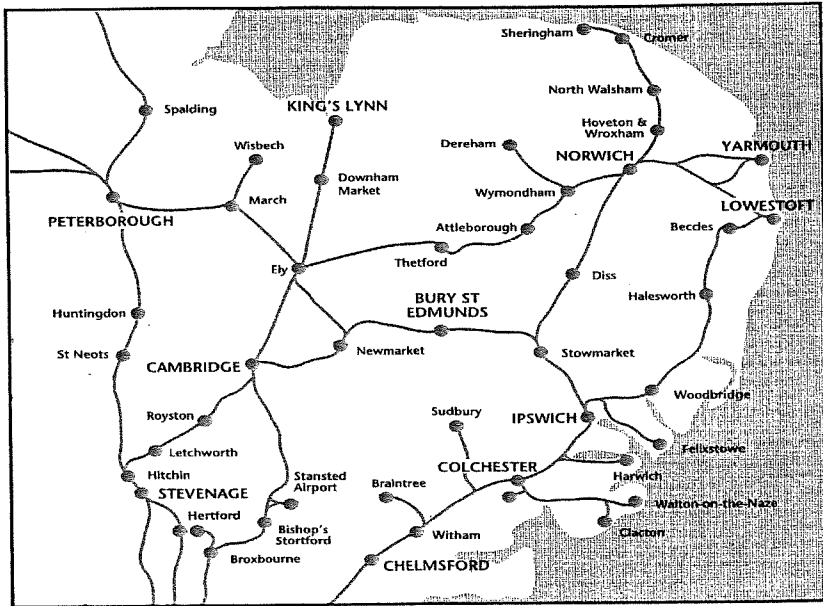
Network Rail have announced that they are to cease production of the national timetable book. Network rail say that sales of the £12 timetable have dropped to the extent that it can no longer be justified. Clearly access on the internet to train times and improvements to the telephone enquiry system mean that fewer people need access to a national timetable but this does not suit everybody. Not everyone has access to the internet, and those with hearing problems may not be comfortable in using the telephone to obtain detailed information. What are the possible alternatives to a national timetable, here are some options – what do you think?

- Produce regional timetables that would be cheaper and more convenient to carry
- Ensure train operators include more connecting services in their pocket timetables
- Ensure train operators have other operator's timetables on display at stations

So, if you have a view on this, or indeed, any other *Rail East* related topic, drop a line to our Chairman, Peter Wakefield at the address on the last page. Remember: it's your organisation as well as your railway!

Back to the EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY(EERA)

First a map: and if your station does not appear, don't panic, this is an edited presentation and omission does not imply oblivion!



A meeting with the East of England Regional Assembly

The Branch has met with the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) at their offices near Bury St Edmunds to discuss future rail development in the region.

The role of EERA is to set the policy framework for future development as set out in the regional spatial strategy (see above) and are keen to see expansion of the rail network to match future development in the region. They support East-West rail and increasing capacity on the London routes and for freight from new port development. Much of the discussion with EERA was about how to make these schemes happen.

At present, EERA do not have any money of their own to spend on infrastructure projects. They can only recommend schemes to Government or support local authority plans with Government making the final decision. The Government is however carrying out a consultation exercise for future funding arrangements. One option would be to devolve the decision making process to the various regional assemblies. The money would still come from Government, but EERA would establish the priorities for spending. If the regional assemblies followed the actions of the Welsh and Scottish assemblies this could lead to an increase in rail funding, although ERA noted that rail schemes were expensive when compared with buses. We responded to this but noting the unattractive journey times on

many longer distance bus and coach routes that were unlikely to tempt people out of their cars.

EERA share our concerns over the impact that the Crossrail project would have on freight paths across London. EERA and the South East Regional Assembly are trying to get a place on the Transport for London Board to ensure that regional rail aspirations are not compromised by plans to develop the local passenger services around London.

As for the North-South high speed rail line EERA do not have a view as no outline scheme has been presented to them. They recognise that such a scheme may free up capacity on regional roads and rail routes but are also concerned about the loss of rail connections.

EERA oppose the construction of a second runway at Stansted Airport, although they doubt if they can stop the scheme. If the project happens they will be pressing BAA to ensure that a high modal share of passengers and staff use public transport to reach the airport. They have not ruled out a rail link between Stansted and Braintree. And that's it, that's really how matters stand as go to press.

If you have news, views, or text on any other relevant eastern rail matter, get them to Editor Nick Dibben, details below, no later than 31 October 2006

Dates for your diary

Sat 9 September – Branch meeting in Norwich at the Greenhouse, Bethel Street starting at 14.00. Denise Carlo, local transport campaigner will be talking about sustainable transport.

Sat 7 October – ESTA meeting in St Mary's Church Hall, Woodbridge at 14.30

Sat 4 November – Railfuture Rail Users Conference in Reading

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

12 May 2007 – Railfuture National AGM in Preston

Railfuture – the national independent voice for rail users
www.railfuture.org

BRANCH OFFICERS

Chairman: Peter Wakefield
7 Hollymount, St Matthews Street, Cambridge CB1 1QD
01223 352364

Vice Chairman: Peter Lawrence
3 Hellesdon Road, Norwich NR6 5EB

Secretary: Nick Dibben
24 Bure Close, St Ives PE27 3FE
Tel: 01480 495101, E-mail: nick.dibben@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Lewis Buckingham
25 Drury Road, Colchester CO2 7UY

Membership Secretary: Clara Zilahi
31 Wimsbotsham Road, Downham Market PE38 9PE

And so to the back page, a largely blank back page. It's waiting for you to update us on what is happening in your area....and what you are trying to do about it. It's also space for your views, however wacky, wonderful and, hopefully, wise they may be. Just send them to Nick Dibben, whose contact details are on the previous page. We will always try to include them, even in edited form. But available space and the Editor's 'Red Pencil' are final, of course. Get writing!