



THE NEWSLETTER OF RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH

Number 133

November 2006

“Hidden” passengers: A Survey Revelation!

A passenger survey at Whittlesea Station has indicated that far more people use the station than official figures suggest. At the start of October, a group of Branch members spent the day at Whittlesea Station counting the number of passengers getting on and off each train. The total passenger figure for the day was 89. This is rather more than the 50 users a day contained in the Office of the Rail Regulator official figures.

And the difference is important as the official figures are increasingly used by Government not just to establish the level of train service, but also the amount of Government grant offered for station improvements, such as improving disabled access.

In the sizeable gap between trains, the survey team had a good look at the station itself and surrounding area noting that vegetation needed to be cut back and the lighting improved. Also overdue is an urgent need to change the station name from Whittlesea to Whittlesey to reflect the official spelling. The results and observations have been passed to One Railway and local authorities.

Getting Involved

There are many things that Railfuture members can do to help promote the railway. Branch Committee member, Ben Walsh is an active example: Ben is the Station Adopter for Newmarket, on the Cambridge to Ipswich line. On a regular basis, he checks on the station's general appearance plus the condition of its furniture. A brief report is then sent to One Railway at Ipswich to flag-up any repair work or special cleaning that is required. Ben has also successfully pressed One Railway to install a new shelter and a help-point there. Well done ,Ben!

Manea needs more trains

A survey of local residents has indicated that up to 49 people would use the station each day if a 'decent' train service was provided. At present, there are just two trains in each direction, each day. These allow commuters to travel to Peterborough and Cambridge but not to work late or return early; so, unsurprisingly, the existing station is little used. The bus service to March is also limited, but unlike the train, runs in the middle of the day and so not especially commuter-friendly.

MANEA..cont.

Branch member Clara Zilahi has been in contact with the local Parish Council to discuss ways of improving the service. A village meeting is planned for January with the intent of setting up a formal campaign group. Branch Chairman, Peter Wakefield, presents more observations from his rail trips around the region.

Wakefields Words: our Chairman's personal spin on the railway, locally.

Help?

Is it always at hand for rail passengers when required? I've had several experiences recently when the timetable falls apart. You'd think the subsequent events would be fairly standard. For instance, at Cambridge, the "Central" Stansted Airport service sometimes fails to turn up. The announcements both from the staff platform and public address system are usually clear as to what to do, how to proceed with the journey, though there is a tendency to state "listen for further announcements", which never come. Really irritating.

At Ely station, the staff have two "Central" routes to contend with so "double the trouble". The announcements are always detailed and clear as to the route, connectional points for the onward journeys on other services to keep passengers "going". All very reassuring. W

However when the same "Central" trains fail to turn up at Peterborough the announcement is usually a few minutes before departure when "somebody" must have known for at least an hour that a cancellation is on the cards. After the bland announcement of cancellation... nothing. There is not any suggestion of how to move forward. The assumption is wait an hour. When asked specifically, the staff can politely give useful advice but on more than one occasion I have been told that it's "Central's problem, ask them."

As far as I know, "GNER" run Peterborough station, so there is no "Central" presence there. I know "One" run both Ely and Cambridge and there is no "Central" presence. So why the different ethos at the latter stations where the railway is treated as a seamless system and a very unhelpful system at Peterborough?

As the region's rail services are becoming busier there must be some people new to the railway, on every service. Reassurance is essential, as is time on many an occasion, when gawping at the wrong screen results in you missing that vital onward service. At the arrival of a train there is little systematic announcement of where the next onward connection goes from and its time... it's hit and miss at Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge, again non-existent at Peterborough. Send all the managers to Ely, where it's well nigh perfect!

Just as important is the conductor/driver, who tells the passenger on board, the time of the connection and from which platform. But again, hit and miss in implementation.

Wet, wet and wetter...

It's good to see the high quality refurbishment of the canopies and platforms at Norwich. The platforms form a pleasant and elegant foretaste of the beautiful city

beyond the station. Equally at Ipswich the passenger is treated with respect in that most of the train is under shelter from the elements as a passenger alights/boards. Arrive at Cambridge, however, and often you have to run the gauntlet through the rain to shelter. Those wishing to board a train, wait under the existing canopy and have to dash into the wet against the throng going in the opposite direction. This is unpleasant and now the station is dealing with up to 1000 people on some trains making this movement, on/off a train, in a few moments, downright dangerous.

Only platform 3 has a canopy that covers a 4car train. Of the rest, 1 and 4 cover 1.5 coaches, 2 and 5 none and 6 half a coach! This for a station that handles around 6million journeys a year, not counting the thousands who interchange trains! I would very much hope that when Network Rail's redevelopment of the station takes place, this serious shortcoming will be addressed. Cambridge station, like that at Norwich, should be a foretaste of delights to come!

Other stations that come to mind that need better platform cover are Lowestoft and Colchester. Remember, we all need shelter from the sun in summer, when standing around, as much as from the rain. Your observations and comments on other stations needing attention are most welcome.

Feet on seats....

I recently travelled home from Kings Cross on a mid-evening Kings Lynn train. Opposite were a couple of young ladies, en route, it transpired, to Downham Market from the Reading festival. As a result their shoe/boots were muddy and you can guess where they languished for most of the journey! They were a restless pair and their footwear was pretty clean by the time we reached Cambridge! Well brought up? Just thoughtless or didn't care?

Should I say something and risk a mouthful or just sit irritated all the journey? Annoyingly the ticket inspector said nothing as he passed through. But again does he/she need another altercation at the end of the day? It is good to see more stickers on windows telling people to desist from using the seats as door mats. Maybe the train operators could produce a credit card-sized leaflet with the "feet-off- seat" logo with a message along the lines "do you know where your shoes have been today?" with a picture of something nasty. These could be passed without comment to the offending person by the inspector or even other passengers if we felt like it.

Olympic Freight

A recent local television news item mentioned locally made bricks would be used in the building of some of the venues. I hope the fact the Bow goods terminal is to be rolled over by the Olympian juggernaut, does not mean there will not be a freight depot available at the very Olympic site for such products eminently suited to rail, as bricks, blocks, sand, gravel, cement, steel. Bricks at Whittlesea, blocks at Brandon, cement at Barrington, are all products made in plants in this region with high quality railways running right by them straight to Stratford.

If you have any observation from your journey around the region, please let us hear about them. Contact details are on the final page

Denise Carlo at our September Meeting

Our Guest Speaker in Norwich was Denise Carlo, active in many environmental groups including STEER, the regional transport forum. She has professional expertise in land-use planning especially in relation to roads. Denise noted that the Regional Transport Strategy(RTS) had 112 items on its wish-list of which half were road related. RTS did, however, want Climate Change to top the list of considerations for transport policy. STEER had said at the public inquisition that the RTS did not address current transport difficulties and was in any case both unaffordable and unsustainable!

STEER also proposed an alternative policy for traffic and demand management which was largely accepted by the independent Inspector. Indeed, he advocated a rewrite of current transport policy criteria . Denise emphasised the need to lobby local politicians to sway the Treasury and Department of Transport who, otherwise, are heavily swayed by a rather blinkered view of costs, and the fact that roads offer up loads of tax revenue!! Always sexy to big-spending, vote-hungry politicians. Nevertheless, Cambridge-Kings Lynn electrification always stands as a reminder of the power of local votes!

Thameslink 2000

The Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government have jointly announced that they are to grant legal powers and planning consents for this scheme. This follows a second planning inquiry to resolve the Inspector's concerns raised at the original inquiry.

This is fantastic news and very welcome after so long in planning. However, there is no decision on funding and the Government is aiming to make a decision on this by Summer 2007 at the latest. The Thameslink 2000 Consortium, a group of local authorities and user groups is lobbying the Secretary of State to ensure this funding is allocated as soon as possible. A letter has been sent from the Branch and Branch members are also urged to write to their local MP on the matter. Key points to raise in letters are:

- Excellent news on the granting of powers
- We wish to ensure that the whole scheme goes through in one project avoiding gaps between implementation phases
- Essential to get funding in place for this project to go forward as soon as possible

In brief – a round-up of rail news

One Railway with the various Community Rail Partnerships in the region were the overall winners in this years community rail awards. The award is in recognition of the work carried out to increase community involvement in the rural lines that has resulted in major increases in passenger numbers.

One Railway has opened a new European travel centre at Cambridge Station selling rail tickets and arranging hotel bookings for many European destinations.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is suggesting Sunday stops at Lakenheath as they are developing a new reserve adjacent to the station.

First Capital Connect is investigating using high speed diesel units, not merely to provide much needed extra seating in the peak hours between Peterborough and London, but also at extending these services to Spalding! Now that would be innovation. Of course, in turn, Class 365 electric trains would be released to bolster the Kings Cross to Cambridge service at those same peak periods. At time of writing no decision had been taken but we live in hope.

Colchester-Chelmsford Because of intensive track and catenary use between these places over many, many years, there is a strong possibility, as yet unconfirmed, of another route closure during summer holiday 2007 or 8 to renew this worn-out infrastructure. To this end avoiding routes, such as Haughley Junction through Newmarket to Cambridge, and westward through Ely to Peterborough are likely to be 'toned' up for improved capacity and performance. So benefits all round if the renewal project gets approval and happens. Keep eyes and ears peeled for further news. It might affect your summer holiday plans.

Beccles:Station Revamp

Much discussion is evident both locally and on Internet about the future for the station generally and the footbridge specifically. Should the station be moved to a new site? Network Rail and others think so, and therefore are non too keen on big money being spent on the current site. Others are passionately opposed. One thing is for sure, however; the town need a much better facility, plus double track here and elsewhere so that the service might be increased. Get on to the local MP's and local government officers now. Make a difference.

The Branch: Future Strategy

Committee member, Anthony Stanton, reports that a group of members living in and around Cambridge met on 8th November to debate which campaigns the Branch should actively promote between next year and 2010.

Broadly it was felt that priority should go to schemes which are either on the 'cusp' or tip of getting Dept. of Transport funding approval, and / or, certain to catch the imagination of present and potential members of the Branch and the wider public. It is only through active prosecution of such campaigns that the Branch has any hope of effective public profile and increased membership.

The outcome was to concentrate for the next three years on increasing capacity from Cambridge, Stansted and Peterborough into Liverpool Street and Kings Cross not to mention south of Ipswich into Liverpool Street. Whilst, from 2011 to 2015 the emphasis should move to re-instatement of the East-West Route segment from Cambridge to Oxford. This requires particular pressure on authorities to protect the trackbed over the intervening three years.

In terms of delivering successful campaigns, the meeting certainly felt that RailFuture in East Anglia needs to build strong relationships with key players in Network Rail, the Department of Transport and in the media. It was also suggested that it might prove useful to run a conference for local MP's, Councillors, et al, for an exchange of views and mutual 'enlightenment' about the Branch's campaigns.

Members certainly valued the communication (RailEast,Snippets etc) from the Committee, and wondered how they might become more involved in campaigning. One idea emerged that the Branch produce its own recruitment pamphlet highlighting its campaigning priorities. This would be picked up at stations in the same way CASTIRON distributed their membership leaflets. Many thanks to those members who gave up their evening to attend.

9 year Branch project completed

Nine years ago, the Branch agreed to arrange a memorial for Ron Callaby who, with help from others, was the chief driving force in the re-opening of Watlington Station in 1975. The concept of a new cycle shed was agreed and fund raising began. And so things moved forward and gathered pace. Discussions with the then train operators WAGN were started and they agreed to match any funds we raised. However, frequent changes in WAGN Management meant that progress was slow. A few years ago, Angela Palmer, the new WAGN station manager took a keen interest and in 2005 was able to allocate some money for station improvements, including the provision of a new cycle shed. The Branch contributed around £700 towards the overall cost of nearly £5000.

The final piece of the jigsaw was put into place during the summer when on August 19th, Mrs Dorothy Callaby and other members of the family unveiled a plaque on the cycle shed. Many Branch members were also able to attend the event and hear Railfuture Board Member, Trevor Garrod and former Fen Line Users Chairman Robert Stripe made speeches recalling the reopening and the pivotal part played by Ron Callaby. A splendid end to a worthy campaign.

The North-South High Speed Line

So what has this to do with East Anglia, I hear you say? Well, certainly not a lot at the moment, as Rod Eddington's report to the Government is yet to be published. But what effect *might* it have on our region? Perhaps we should think about it now? Here's a few passing thoughts from your Editors to kick-start discussion.

For Anglians, much will depend on which side of London the route terminates. If in the north-east then, like the Channel Tunnel Link, it might become the favoured option for those in the south and west of Anglia. But it will have to be profitable: one way to this end might be to syphon present routes to Scotland might by slowing the current services to 100-110mph(or less). Not good news if you join a train within 100 miles of London, although for those joining further north, the time loss might be surprisingly little; maybe only fifteen minutes And it might be a cheaper ticket as a result, with more paths for freight and trans-Pennine services too! So not all bad news.

But what route will this wonder-line take? Given the vast construction cost true longevity will be mandatory. So, hopefully, it will be a central route avoiding areas which might disappear underwater should 'global warming's' alleged coastal effects actually happen, and which would trigger a mass migration to higher ground in any case. It would certainly bump-up building costs. But enough of melodrama. Is such a line warranted? Would such largesse be better spent upgrading existing routes, especially cross-country? What do you think? Out with your crystal ball, marshall your prejudices, and drop the Editors a line!

And that is exactly where we have to leave it for this edition. Look forward to seeing you at the Cambridge meeting.

And here's where to write with comment, adverse or otherwise: Nick Dibben; see details below. *Chris Burton, 79 Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2DG | ceebee1@tenison79.fsnet.co.uk 01223 352327. Nick's details are below. We'd love to hear from you.*

Dates for your diary

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

Sat 24 February 2007 - Annual General Meeting at the Library, Bury St Edmunds. Beginning 14.00hrs

ALSO – special meetings for local members in the various towns and city's around the region over the coming year. These will be flagged up through notification to you, personally!

The logo for 'railfuture' features the word 'rail' in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by 'future' in a lighter, italicized, sans-serif font. A horizontal line with a green-to-blue gradient runs beneath the text.

the national independent voice for rail users

www.railfuture.org.uk

BRANCH OFFICERS

Chairman: Peter Wakefield

7 Hollymount, St Matthews Street, Cambridge CB1 1QD

petawake@yahoo.com Tel. 01223 352364

Vice Chairman: Peter Lawrence

3 Hellesdon Road, Norwich NR6 5EB
01603 627217

peter.lawrence@paston.co.uk

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