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THE NEWSLETTER OF RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH

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Norwich to Liverpool Street – Political heads above the parapet!

In early March Norfolk MPs', Richard Bacon, Ian Gibson and Norman Lamb went public with a report on the "lamentable" state of the rail service from Norwich to London. Inevitably the publicity was immense, largely justified and did at least compel 'One' and especially Network Rail to come absolutely clean for once about the problems. But as many of us already realised, some of these problems stem not just from the rail companies themselves, but from Department of Transport/Treasury policy. Sad that the MPs' did not acknowledge this (or chose not to!). Pity too to make carping reference to "secondhand Mark3 trains", referring in fact to rather splendidly refurbished coaches which ride beautifully and are provenly robust in a crash.

Happily, one outcome has been that Network Rail has advanced major expenditure on the Great Eastern main line to this year. Indeed, as the Editor writes at this May Bank Holiday weekend, the route south of Colchester is blocked for engineering. So customers lose out again but this time to good effect. May remedial work and improvements continue apace. And may it also induce particularly Network Rail to be far more active in meeting the public and explaining its position with candour. That it took the intervention of politicians to get an effective response does not reflect too well on the industry, however.

Network Rail issues Regional Strategy

With both the High Level Output Statement (HLOS) and the Statement of Funds Available (SoFA) due out in the near future, and each very significant, it was especially informative to see in April, Network Rail issue its Greater Anglia Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS). And with a certain level of candour, too!

As Nick Dibben reports: "This important document sets out the requirements and constraints facing the rail network and suggests possible schemes to achieve them. The report covers the railway lines out of London Liverpool Street and associated branch lines in a time scale up to 2021.

The RUS starts with a comprehensive overview of current passenger and freight flows within the region. Sections of the main lines from Liverpool Street to both Cambridge and Colchester are running at over 90% capacity. Although many peak hour trains to and from London are overcrowded, the report also highlights some overcrowding on some rural routes such as Norwich to Cambridge. Some of the most

overcrowded trains in the region are between Cambridge and Ely. The report then adds in predicted growth over the next 15 years due to new housing and expansion at Stansted Airport and various ports. Not surprisingly, it concludes that more capacity will be needed on nearly every route within the area. A total of 23 options were considered for tackling the problem. The key schemes within the Branch area are as follows:

New Rolling stock for London Norwich services - New 5 coach electric multiple unit trains are proposed to replace the existing locomotive hauled trains. By eliminating the locomotive and driving trailer coach more seats can be provided for the same train length.

Additional peak trains on Great Eastern route – Two additional services can be added during the peak period, one from Colchester and one from Chelmsford.

12 coach trains to Cambridge – Peak hour services would be increased from 8 to 12 coaches.

Extra capacity on the West Anglia Route – Options for adding an extra track(s) on the West Anglia Route south of Broxbourne have been studied to enable additional services to be operated.

Hourly Ipswich to Peterborough services – Increasing the present two hourly service to hourly. At present this option has a weak business case, but projected regional growth suggests it will become viable in the future.

Hourly Ipswich to Lowestoft service - Increasing the present two hourly service to hourly. Currently this option also has a weak business case but, with projected regional growth, should become viable too. A reduced option to run the additional trains to Saxmundham only was also considered.

Other rural route capacity – Looking to add extra coaches to some services to relieve overcrowding.

Extra Capacity for freight – Increasing the gauge and capacity to allow larger containers to be carried on extra and longer trains.

Other options included extra inner suburban trains around London, changes to the way maintenance work is carried out and looking at reliability issues regarding signalling and power supplies. Network Rail certainly want to have a much greater influence on new traction and rolling stock design. And why not: their infrastructure has to withstand the pounding from sometimes excessively specified trains?

The Branch has provided some input to this study through attending a number of stakeholder meeting and exhibitions. Our response to this report will be the key focus of our Ipswich meeting on June 16 to allow us to submit our comments to Network Rail. Please do come along to the meeting to have your say."

Bird watching by train

Lakenheath Station on the Ely to Norwich line and Buckingham on the Norwich to Lowestoft route are adjacent to Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Reserves. One Railway has altered the timetables at these stations to provide a Sunday only service with the aim of encouraging visitors to these reserves to travel by train. The May timetable change coincided with the opening of a new visitors centre at Lakenheath Fen Reserve and the announcement that cranes (the feathered variety of course) were nesting on the site. Amazingly, this was first time this had happened in the fens for 300 years. We applaud 'One' on their initiative.

FCC consults on timetables changes

Following a study into improving capacity on peak hour services last year, FCC have developed the proposed timetable in more detail and are consulting passengers about the changes. FCC hope to obtain an extra 4x4 coach trains to provide more seats. They are also revising the Kings Cross to Cambridge peak timetable to provide non-stop trains to Cambridge and new services starting from Royston. Although the number of standing passengers is greatly reduced, many commuters from Royston and Letchworth are upset about extended journey times of around 8 minutes in the evening peak, largely due to taking in more station stops.

FCC are looking to see if stops can be provided at Royston on the Cambridge fast services, but say this could result in overcrowding on those trains. They also have confirmed that extra units are not available and that the growth on the route is such that trains will be full again within 3-4 years. Of course, the arrival of Thameslink and new twelve coach trains may well herald *truly* radical timetable changes in the fullness of time.

Leaflets detailing the proposed service and how it affects each station are now available. The Branch has attended a number of meetings with FCC and will be attending further meetings in the near future to discuss changes on the Peterborough route.

One Railway targets improved performance

'One' Railway and Network Rail have agreed a 20 point action plan to improve the reliability of the train service. The plan follows a series of major disruptions to the service late last year caused by power supply, signalling and train defects.

Network Rail will increase the monitoring on the overhead line, signalling and track and will implement a replacement programme for older equipment during 2007. The public address system and train indicator board at London Liverpool Street will also be upgraded.

'One' Railway will carry out various improvements to their rolling stock including train doors and introduce measures to ensure trains leave the maintenance depots and stations on time. This is a key issue as a slight delay on one train can cause delays to many other services.

The first few months of this programme have seen encouraging results achieving punctuality over 90% on nearly all routes during April and May 2007.

Have you noticed an improvement? – Do contact us and let us know.

GNER Franchise Renewal

GNER has joined forces with Stagecoach/Virgin Trains to bid for the new East Coast Mainline franchise. This 10% stake is good news, one would like to think, as the pressure on the DofTransport to maintain current passenger service standards is known to be very strong. This is important to our area given so many East Anglians, especially from the Cambridge district, join GNER services at Peterborough. We shall learn the new Franchise outcome probably before our September Meeting.

One thing will have to change, though: during the last quarter, GNER punctuality fell to the bottom of the long distance table. And apparently Network Rail was the main offender! But at least your Editor enjoyed a flawless trip to and from Edinburgh in mid May with early or on-time arrivals respectively. And given the intensive daily mileage of the rolling stock, external cleanliness was sparkingly high on all the many trains seen. So well done GNER, you appear to still be getting a great deal absolutely right. Just make your website vastly more customer friendly and we'll all be even happier.

Stansted Airport Access Strategy

British Airports Authority have issued a draft Surface Access Strategy to complement desirable future expansion at Stansted Airport. The document covers possible improvements to the road network, plus rail and bus services, up to 2030.

The rail component of the strategy includes using 12 coach trains on the Stansted Express, and extra coaches on some trains to Birmingham(*already happening. Ed.*). Infrastructure proposals include extending the double track through a new rail tunnel to the airport and options for capacity increases on the West Anglia Main Line, such as three or four track bi-directional running south of Broxbourne.

Responding to the strategy, the Branch has urged extra services towards Cambridge and beyond, more services to Stratford for connections to London Docklands, and consideration to a new rail link eastwards to join with the Great Eastern route. This link would increase rail access to the airport and also provide a useful diversionary route when either main line out of Liverpool Street is blocked.

Manea Rail Services

Clara Zilahi writes to tell us that "Manea Rail Services Action Group (MRSAG) are working hard to towards their aim of having more trains stop at their station." Although 'One' railways' Clive Morris seems sympathetic progress still hinges on Dep. Of Transport cooperation. MRSAG will take full advantage of the Village Gala on the 14 July to publicise its existence, aims and "formal launch of membership."

Rail Users Conference 2007

The Branch will be hosting the 2007 Rail Users Conference at Ely Maltings on Saturday 3 November. The Conference will have a number of speakers from the rail industry plus short presentations from user groups on successful campaigns to improve their local services.

As we go to press confirmed Speakers include ace rail operator, Bob Breakwell, Shadow Rail minister, Stephen Hammond updating Conservative Party policy, a guiding light from that most professional of user groups, The Cotswold RUG, and a presentation from France! So please, please, do support this Meeting at a superb modern venue. Indeed, you could well make a rather splendid weekend of it, and not just to see the imposing cathedral: as a rail jumping-off point for all East Anglia Ely cannot be beaten. Happily therefore, we are reliably informed that, emergencies excepted, Network Rail will not be significantly impeding access to this fine place over that weekend. How can you resist?

Details and a booking form will be included in the next Railwatch.

Because of the conference there will be no Branch meeting in Cambridge this December.

Wakefield's Words: our Chairman speaks as he finds.

Places to Visit

For **COMMUNITY RAIL WEEK**, just passed, 'One' introduced a 'One' Day Explorer (yes, it *is* a daft company name) ticket, at a very reasonable £18.00. Unaccompanied children travel for £9.00 and up to 4 accompanied at £2.00 each, with standard discounts for all Railcards, excepting the Network Card. It could in fact be used on all the 'one' network *except for journeys from Liverpool Street to Harold Wood/Chingford/Enfield Town/Waltham Cross/Theobalds Grove and other exotica!!*

The good news is that 'one' is re-introducing this ticket from 4 July to 9 September . 2007 *only*. So seek out your rucksack, maps and packed lunches (and your money) and prepare to go and explore the delights of the region along the Bittern, Sunshine, Crouch Valley, Mayflower, Gainsborough, Wherry, and East Suffolk Lines. Not least because a series of attractive walks emanate from many of these stations. Also there are the gorgeous bird/nature reserves at Lakenheath and Buckenham. And when you've tired of bucolic Anglia, there are still the urbanities of Colchester, Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Norwich, Peterborough, Ely, Felixstowe to sap your resources. Go to it: use it or lose it, as they say!!

On Saturdays/Sundays/Public Holidays there are no time restrictions. Monday to Friday the ticket cannot be used before 08.45.

Remember that although a more restricted area, the 'one' Day Ranger at £11.00 might actually prove a better deal. The choice is yours.

Your Chairman, Peter Wakefield, along with two other Branch members, recently joined a party from Railfuture on a group visit by train to Leipzig, Germany, organised by Railway Development Society Group Travel. This was an excellent and enjoyable visit, with varied activities organized in such a way that participants could dip into or out of, as they pleased. We were even shown the new underground tunnel works that will link the centre of Leipzig with its northern and southern suburban rail systems... a very big hole! Lots of social, cultural, and political themes too. Many thanks to Trevor Garrod and Peter Cannon for all their hard work in making it such a success.

I recommend that all members look out for next year's visit when published in "Railwatch".

Another good place to visit by rail is GLASGOW. Beautiful buildings and a city surrounded by magnificent countryside, all easily accessible by a superb rail network. What better time to visit than Saturday June 23rd and attend the Railfuture Reopenings Conference. There you will be pleased to hear of the reopenings to Larkhall, Alloa/ Kincardine, Bathgate to Airdrie and the Waverley route through the borders. You can book on-line at www.railfuturescotland.org.uk/conference
Book now .. it will never be too late! There are several differing rail routes to explore on your way to this conference.

Visits by train are not always easy though. Two recent journeys illustrate this. The first was to *the races at Newmarket* on a Saturday and Sunday. Hundreds of others had the same idea and converged on Cambridge station by long distance train services, foot and local bus. Unfortunately, in spite of assurances by 'one' of being more reactive to local events , the same mix of class 153/156 stock put in an appearance. The Class 156 trains coped just about but you can imagine the sorry scenes on the single car 153. As ever, the platform staff at Cambridge were brilliant. They were understandably upset on the Sunday, when in spite of their pleas for at least Class 156 on all trains, the '153 turned up once more! We hope 'one' is busy checking the racing calendar for the next event at Newmarket. This is an event they can 'show-case' their/our railway.

A week or so later, we made a family visit to Audley End House *via Audley End station*. Several others were making the same visit from Cambridge. The map on the station was of little help as to the route to take for the onward walk, nor were there any direction signs. Eventually we found the way, courtesy of the assistant in the coffee shop. Once found, the walking route is easy and takes 20/25 minutes. Audley End House is well worth the effort of getting there AND has an excellent, lengthy, miniature steam railway to ride on!! (steam, what's that? Ed.)

Please let us have any other examples of visitor attractions that ought to be easy to get to by rail, but need further signposting and general promotion.

BRANCH MEETING, IPSWICH

And talking of "attractions", Ipswich Institute Reading Room and Library is the venue for our next Branch meeting on Saturday 16 June. 15 Tavern Street is the address which is in the town centre, turning right at the Town Hall into Tavern Street. The Meeting begins at 14.15hrs after lunch which is available on the premises. As the speaker we had approached is unable to attend on this occasion (but is game for a future date) the Meeting will be turned over to a general discussion of the several recent consultation reports. This really is a golden opportunity to get your opinion over to the Branch Committee. If you haven't got Internet access, worry not; you will have noticed already that Nick Dibben has offered quite a bit of information in this very newsletter. Greatly look forward to seeing you there.

Branch AGM

A well attended Branch AGM in Bury St Edmunds heard Clive Morris, One Railway's Rural Lines Manager, give an upbeat presentation on the status of these important

routes. Passenger traffic is increasing on all lines and the vital ratio of costs to fare income has improved over recent years; eg. Ipswich-Lowestoft 14%, Ipswich-Cambridge/Peterborough 16%. Clive did state, however, that Anglian farebox income was still too low! Nevertheless there was an ongoing policy of line-speed improvements, more rural stations had temporary staff, and further improvements to station facilities, such as larger car parks at Wymondham and Woodbridge, were being planned. A Mobility Buggy is to be brought into use at Norwich. In the questions following the talk, members suggested that there was still scope for improvement in train cleaning, inside and out, plus better connections and more effective revenue protection.

At the AGM itself, the existing committee was re-elected and Officer details are given on the back page. Following the focus groups held in Norwich and Cambridge a motion was passed setting out the Branch's campaign priorities for the next few years. These are:

- Great Eastern Main Line – improvement to reliability, timekeeping and extra track capacity.
- Extra services and capacity on the East Suffolk Line
- West Anglia route (Liverpool Street to Stansted and Cambridge) increased capacity
- Extra capacity on the Great Northern (Kings Cross to Peterborough and Cambridge)
- Progress on East-West Rail link

Following the Motion, the Branch is in the process of establishing campaign teams to develop and progress these campaigns.

NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2007

Preston was the venue for the Railfuture AGM on 12 May with several members from this Branch making the journey and helping the attendance to a total of sixty.

Sadly the intended speaker, Richard Watts, had to withdraw due to a family bereavement. Fortunately Railfuture has a series of presentations prepared for such eventualities which resulted in Jerry Alderson discoursing for 40 minutes on "New Technology as it relates to Passengers". Which was literally 'just the ticket'.

Oyster Cards were explained in depth, highlighting the many benefits to passengers. It is highly likely that Smart-Card ticketing will become widespread in the next few years reducing the use of 'bits of dead tree'(paper!) which have been the 'passport' to travel on the railways since the 1820s. Print@Home tickets, as used by 'one' were briefly mentioned as was the huge potential of mobile phones to transform the travel experience, particularly when used to pay for car parking. At First Great Western stations up to 30% of cars are parked with paperless tickets (*a contradiction in terms?-Ed.*) Could sister-company First Capital Connect follow suit? Jerry plus David Sidebottom from Passenger Focus then energetically fielded the many questions.

The AGM itself was productive, with the members approving a Board motion to restructure the Board of Directors to increase stability, reduce risk and hopefully improve gender and ethnic diversity. Around nine motions on rail issues were

discussed and all were approved. Because the new National Treasurer is still 'finding his feet', final accounts were not available.

Therefore the Rail Reopenings Conference in Glasgow on Saturday 23rd June will include an Extraordinary GM to approve them. One attendee was so impressed by the AGM as to give a substantial donation to the Society just a few days later. How generous, and, if you are reading this, thank you so much.

Speedy First Capital Connect

Clara Zilahi tells us that literally within days of vandalism to the Ron Callaby Bicycle Shed at Downham Market Station, FCC had replace the badly damaged 'unbreakable' perspex, holed in two places! Well done them. And while we are in the area, Railwatch is now on sale at the Post Office at Downham Market Station.

And here's where to write with news and comment, adverse or otherwise: Editor, Chris Burton, 79 Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2DG / cfb79ten@googlemail.com 01223 352327. or Nick Dibben, see details below. We'd both love to hear from you. Deadline for next issue is 1 September 2007

Dates for your Diary

16 June, IPSWICH. Branch Meeting
See main text for details

29 September, NORWICH: Branch Meeting

3 November, ELY: Rail Users 2007 Conference. (There will be no December Branch Meeting)

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. We very much want your feedback!!

railfuture

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