raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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50 Years of Railfuture East Anglia – 1972 - 2022

Soham station reopens

Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

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- Station footfall during COVID-19
- Railfuture's Strategic Review
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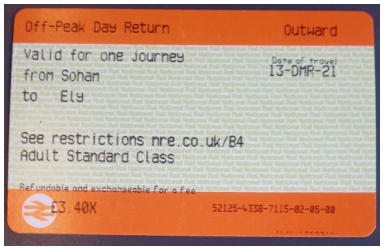
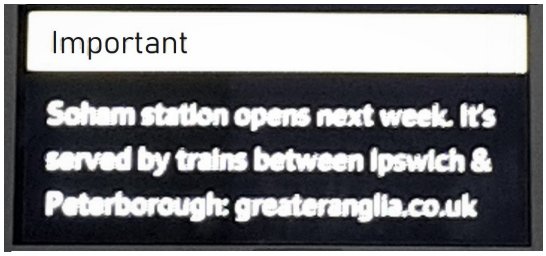
Photos taken by author of an article unless specified. Cover photos: Jerry Alderson.

Work on the 100-space Manea car park is underway (left), but sadly there will be no cut-through to the platform. A 10-second walk becomes a two-minute one. On a positive note, well done to Greater Anglia for promoting Soham station on trains.





CHAIR'S THOUGHTS—INTO 2022 (AND 51ST YEAR)

BY NICK DIBBEN, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

More than 25 years ago, I recall the then Transport Secretary Sir Brian Mawhinney making a series of speeches and writing introductions to a number of reports that appeared to signal a major change in transport thinking. There were phrases like "we can't build our way out of traffic congestion", questioning the link between road building and economic development, reducing our dependency on the car. Like many government transport secretaries, Sir Brian only stayed in post for around a year. In 2022 such ideas don't appear to figure in our transport policies, although with the added threat of climate change they are more relevant than ever. There are lots of sound bites coming from government but few details on how these ideas might be delivered. The much-discussed announcement on the Integrated Rail Plan for the north is a case in point. Several months after its issue, people are still trying to work out what it actually means and if it is practical. The consultant's report to back the proposals is very London focused, so our areas of interest, connections at Peterborough from East Anglia, or people wanting to make shorter trips from say Peterborough to Retford, are ignored. So much for the levelling up agenda.

Work is progressing on the East Anglia Rail Strategy that Railfuture has commissioned, and you can read more about it on pages 14-15. Our study asks an important question – what would a successful and relevant railway system look like in 2050? Meanwhile, the East-West Rail Link report issued in 2021 challenged the existing train service between Bedford and Bletchley. Currently one train per hour serves 10 often lightly used stations. Would two trains per hour serving five new stations be better? The idea was not universally supported (Railfuture's response is at www.railfuture.org.uk/display2717), but it does show some fresh thinking. Would a similar approach work in our region? Come to the AGM in Bury St Edmunds (see page 23) and join the discussion. The ideas are still being worked out and are certainly not fixed, so we would like to hear your thoughts before the draft report is circulated to a wider audience. I look forward to seeing you there.

And in connection with thinking about the future, Railfuture has responded in detail to the consultation on a thirty-year regional strategy produced towards the end of 2021 by Transport East (see pages 19-20). It's worth stressing that this body covers the eastern most slice of our patch – Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk – so part of our submission to the consultation stresses the need for plans developed by Transport East to synchronise with the strategic activity of the equivalent bodies to the west and the south. Doubtless we will hear much more about regional transport priorities in the coming months – and through RAIL EAST we'll work to keep readers abreast of developments.

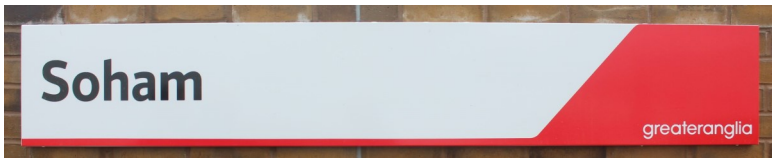
Several of us visited Soham station on the Saturday after it opened, and it was great to see a steady stream of people walking down the road towards the station. You can read our initial thoughts on page 5, but what struck me was the colour contrast tactile paving from the car park to the ticket machines and then the platform. Great for partially sighted people. Is this a first for stations in our region and when will other stations get the same treatment?

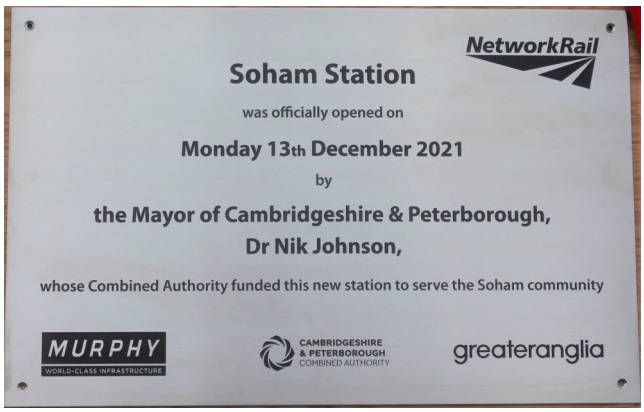
Rail Campaigning Anniversary Booklet

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the East Anglian Branch of Railfuture, one of the original members, Trevor Garrod, who is now chair of ESTA, has privately produced his own free booklet called "East Anglia Rail Campaigning 1972-2022" independently of Railfuture. Copies should be available at the branch AGM. You can also request a copy from Trevor by e-mail to tgarrod21@gmail.com or by post to 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

CHRISTMAS GOOD NEWS: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT RETURNS TO SOHAM!

BY PETER WAKEFIELD





The Cambridgeshire town of Soham re-joined the national passenger train network on Monday 13 December 2021. In doing so, it became station no. 2570 on the national network. Yes, 11,000 more people now have direct access to a passenger rail service once again. Funded by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), it is on the same site as the original that closed in 1965 and is within cycling and walking distance of the town in spite of significant growth since the sixties.

On the great day itself it was heart-warming to see the massive support and interest the station generated, with large numbers of people attending the opening ceremony and throughout the day. The ceremony at 11.00 was performed by the Combined Authority Mayor, Dr Nik Johnson (pictured right). He acknowledged the warmth of the welcome from the town's people as fantastic and symbolic of what the station means to the community. "Soham is", he said, "a classic Cambridgeshire market town and the opening of the station is a first step of what the CPCA is trying achieve … more railway stations, a better bus network and more active travel. Public transport really matters and here it delivers affordable frequent links to opportunities in education, employment and…. fun! We are making sure our communities can move freely between our areas and thrive."

Ellie Burrows, Network Rail Anglia's Route Director, paid tribute to all those who delivered the station, particularly the contractors, J. Murphy & Sons, who built it and handed it over so it could open several weeks early. The Mayor announced the winners of a primary school poster competition (Jasmine in year 6 of the Shade Primary School was adjudged to be the winner and was presented with a framed copy of her artwork) before he unveiled a plaque and cut the ceremonial cake, declaring the station open.

Longer-term Vision

Soham is now served by one of the best train fleets in the country, calling there every two hours from early until late on the run from Ipswich and Bury through to Ely and Peterborough. It must be seen as the first part of a longer-term vision of a train every hour that will become possible when the eagerly awaited capacity enhancements are carried out at Ely. The final pieces of the jigsaw will be the doubling of the line into Ely from Soham and the restoration of the West Curve at Newmarket that will allow the operation of a second train every hour from Soham onto Newmarket and Cambridge direct. Local MP Lucy Frazer alluded to this in her message on the opening day: "I believe it can act as a springboard for enhancing rail services in our area by helping us make the case for reinstating the loop near Newmarket which could provide a direct rail service between Ely, Soham, Newmarket and Cambridge…".

I visited the station, again, on the following Saturday. It was really humming with activity. The platform was crowded for each departure. The Mayor's comment about fun was borne out on the platform. Groups of young people were making the journey to Cambridge to take advantage of the night economy there. A group-save fare of only £4.35 each is available to them, with a journey time of 45/50 minutes and 40 minutes on the return – even with the mediocre connectional time at Ely. The train operators, GTR and GA, must study how to make this better.

Photo from footbridge by Nick Dibben on Saturday 18 December

Critique of the Station layout

The major part of the work of creating the station has been the new road connecting it to the town streets, the park and ride carpark, turning circle/drop off. Disappointingly there is no proper waiting room. This really must be added quickly. Although near the town centre, the platform is edge-on to Soham Fen! Breezy it certainly can be.

Railfuture East Anglia chair Nick Dibben also visited the station on the following Saturday and makes the following observations:

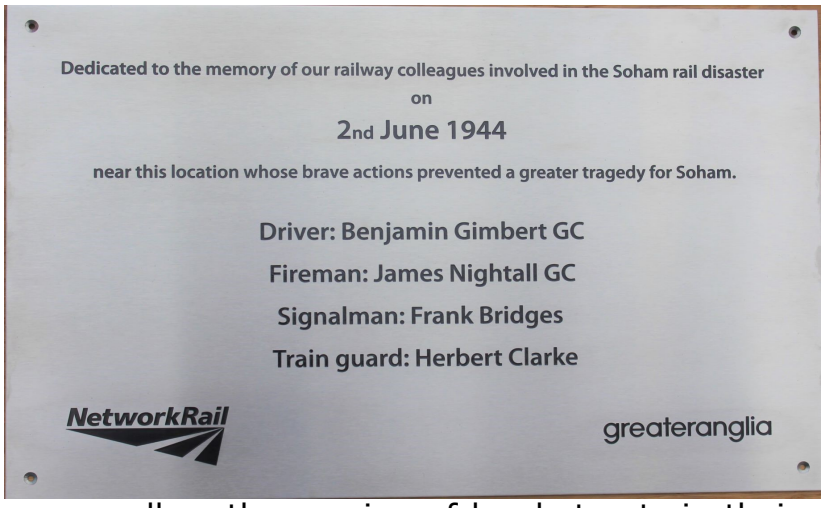
- Lots of people are using the train towards Ely (10.39 and 12.39 departures)
- Car park had only five cars and bike racks unused, suggesting people are walking to the station
- Tickets to Cambridge are cheaper than the bus, with quicker journeys, even allowing for the change at Ely
- Tickets to Bury St Edmunds and towards Peterborough are more expensive (noted that it cheaper to buy a return to Newmarket than Bury, even though you have to change at Bury! Just saying if you want to save around £1.50)
- I counted 26 CCTV cameras at the station!
- Some signs to the town centre but nothing on the main road to the station
- The pavement has been improved on the first section of road towards the town centre and dropped kerbs added to first road crossing
- There is no lighting on the footbridge, however some emergency lighting has been added to the street lights on the approach road (not sure why)
- I noticed an emergency exit from the platform at the Ely end and path behind the brick wall towards the entrance (a bit over the top, but I guess this is the new standard).

All in all, the lesson to all other local authorities in East Anglia is… this is what people want… so come on Norfolk, come on Suffolk, what about Haverhill, Leiston, Long Stratton? Cambridgeshire has obviously got the message. The Mayor and other councillors were asked "What about Wisbech? The county's largest town without a station." The reply was it must be next… *and* with a through "heavy rail" train service to Cambridge.

PUTTING SOHAM BACK ON THE RAIL MAP
A HISTORY IN FOUR EPISODES
BY PHIL SMART

Soham's railway history can be told in four events that are about both misfortune and eventual triumph.

The first misfortune came in 1847 when the Newmarket and Chesterford Railway, having obtained authorisation to continue its line north westward to Ely, abandoned the project upon reaching Newmarket. No further extension was made until 1854 when the line to Bury St. Edmunds was opened instead. The people of Soham were left frustrated until the Great Eastern Railway eventually completed the line on 1 September 1879. Soham could at last celebrate its place on the railway map after a wait of 32 years!



The second date that put Soham on the map came nearly 70 years later on 2 June 1944, when the leading wagon of a wartime ammunition train caught fire. The courage of the train crew and the signalman in detaching the burning vehicle from the rest of the train saved the town from a much greater explosion than the one that killed the driver. The bravery of the men was recognised by awarding the George Cross to the locomotive crew as well as the naming of local streets in their memory. Opportunity was taken at the opening ceremony to recall and commemorate the events of June 1944 and the heroism of the rail workers involved.

The third date was the one that took Soham *off* the railway map when local services between Newmarket and Ely ceased on 13 September 1965 under the infamous Beeching cuts, a bitter blow to the town after 86 years with a rail service.

History is full of beautiful ironies, however, and another event that happened in the mid-1960s ensured the eventual return of the railway. British Railways was not the only nationalised industry to undergo a modernisation plan, the Post Office was about to embark on the mechanised sorting of mail and with it the introduction of the postcode. Although its significance was not realised at the time, the fact that Soham was given a Cambridge postcode meant that the 21st century would see it visited by housing developers and its population grow beyond recognition. The motor car, which had contributed to the station's closure in the first place, was also becoming obsolete as a convenient method of commuting into the city. The campaign by Railfuture and others for the station to be re-opened was taken up by local councils and championed by the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, which helped to fund the project to establish a new station.

And so, we come to the fourth and final date, 13 December 2021 when, after an absence of 56 years, trains are calling at Soham again. It is a sobering thought that in its 174-year relationship with the railway, Soham has spent over half that time, 88 years in total, waiting for a rail service – but its patience won out in the end!

Greater Anglia's PR team announced five weeks later that "Soham station is proving popular. Already over 5,000 passengers have used it, during a period that includes some traditionally quieter days and with COVID-19 'Plan B' measures in place. It all augurs well for the station being a great success and a real asset to the local community, enabling people to switch from car to train for a number of journeys."

By population, Soham is now the largest rail served settlement on the Anglia network to have a less than hourly service. The campaigning goes on.

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH — EAST ANGLIA'S NEXT NEW STATION

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Just two new stations have opened this century in the Railfuture East Anglia branch area: Cambridge North in 2017 and Soham in 2021. Both were built on almost entirely railway-owned land and whilst local authority planning permission was required, consent by the Secretary of State for Transport was not. Cambridge South is different, as Network Rail (NR) needs strips of land for both the station and additional track, along with construction compounds on both sides of the railway.

The Public Inquiry for the "Network Rail – Cambridge South Infrastructure and Enhancements (Order)" opened on 1 February 2022. For those not taking part, the most interesting days are the opening and closing days, as you get a high-level summary of almost every aspect of the scheme. The public can attend in person at the Hilton Cambridge City Centre Hotel or join virtually for a live stream. See https://gateleyhamer-pi.com/en-gb/csie for details and all inquiry documents.

Public Notices

The Transport and Works Act 1992
The Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
The Transport and Works (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2004 (Rule 13(6))
THE NETWORK RAIL (CAMBRIDGE SOUTH INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENTS) ORDER 202X
NOTICE OF PUBLIC INQUIRY

The Public Inquiry is scheduled to be held from 1 February 2022 at the Hilton, Cambridge City Centre, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3DT. The Public Inquiry will be opened on 1 February 2022 at 10am.

The inquiry sits on Tuesday-Friday from 10.00 to 17.00 (at the latest) and is expected to last for five, possibly six, weeks (8 to 11 March is a non-sitting week). At the start the inspector, Lesley Coffey, explained that she would not be considering aspects such as government policy or government methodologies. The latter was an implied reference to objectors' criticism that the predicted patronage calculation uses a 'flawed' modelling tool.

There had been 25 objections. An impending inquiry can focus minds, and some had withdrawn their objections just before it opened, including AstraZenica, Cambridge University Hospitals and Cambridgeshire County Council. Some reached agreement after modifications were made to the scheme by NR. There were 19 remaining, and it is believed that most can be satisfied by adding a condition to the TWA Order. NR said "not a single objector opposes the station", "no party has proposed a station in a different location or a non-rail solution" and that "15 out of the 25 expressly support Cambridge South in principle." Indeed, "one of the objectors (Smarter Cambridge Transport) believed that NR should be doing more" because it (like Railfuture) believes there will be many more passengers that the official estimate (NR stated "2.3m per annum by 2043").

There were two legal representatives present for the remaining main objectors: Mr Parker for both Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, which are concerned with environmental issues, and Mr Lyness for Cambridge University, which is a key landowner and was also worried about how noise and vibration could affect the vital research work that is performed on its sites as a result of both construction and the operational railway running closer to it (e.g. electromagnetic interference).

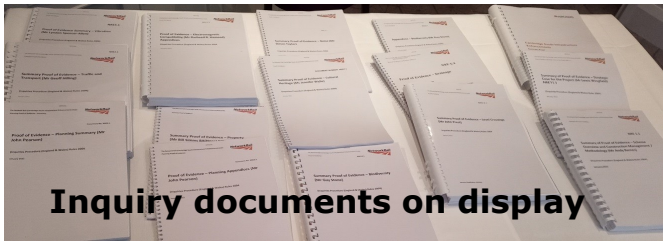
NR said it was a "carefully considered and much needed scheme". It had taken a "stakeholder approach" ensuring that "no train is delayed by the presence of the station" when designing the scheme and although it "had no obligation to provide biodiversity net gain" it was doing so.

The Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC), which includes Addenbrooke's Hospital, Royal Papworth Hospital, Heart & Lung Research Institute (HLRI) and Cancer Centre, had a large number of "highly-skilled globally-mobile staff", with the new station providing "transport connectivity that is vital for the economic viability of the

'golden triangle' [of Cambridge, London and Oxford]." NR said that "in Cambridge only 2.5% of working-age people currently commute by train" as part of its case to provide more opportunities to use rail.

NR also said the "DfT has classed Cambridge South as a category 'C' station, which defines the level of facilities provided." Some elements of the scheme include:

- Four tracks, on loops, for both stopping and non-stopping trains with widening of embankments in places
- Loop will start from just to the north of Nine Wells Bridge and will return to two tracks just south of Long Road bridge
- Shepreth Branch Junction is currently 30mph, which constrains services, and will be raised to 50mph "so that the new station does not become a bottleneck"; it will become an "extended double junction" with a new section of 'down Royston' track running parallel to the mainline
- At Hills Road the work will install a new crossover from the shunt spur, which will be extended — currently "there is only one path for a south to north train to get into the station" so "lots of time is wasted outside Cambridge station"
- Stopping up (closing) two level crossings with provision of a new accommodation bridge – "no objector has challenged the safety case for this"
- 4 x 250-metre platforms
- Length for 12-car (or equivalent) trains, with a couple of metres at each end for public safety and two metres to enable trains to be split
- Outer platforms would each be 3.5 metres wide and the island platform 8.9 metres wide
- Evacuation estimates are eight minutes to clear the platforms and 12 minutes for everyone to be completely clear of the station
- 1,000 cycle spaces
- Spaces for five blue badge cars, with three drop-off points for taxis and three "kiss and drop" for private cars; objectors had asked for electric vehicle charging points for the disabled and staff spaces, which NR has now agreed to provide
- A 'Changing Places' toilet accessed from the concourse beyond the gate-line.


Inquiry documents on display

The timeline NR is hoping to achieve is:

- Autumn 2022 — start of pre-construction
- Spring 2023 — start of construction
- 2025 — opening to public.

An additional power supply would be required for the extra sets of points around the loops (the current supply cannot be used). If NR's Cambridgeshire Resignalling project (known as C3R) went ahead then it would result in a cost reduction to the Cambridge South scheme as the resignalling would provide the new power supplies.

Construction requires compounds on both sides of the railway, in use concurrently.

The first NR witness called was Andy Barnes, who talked about trackwork, land area used (temporary and permanent), construction (including drainage facilities and utilities – a gas main at the southern end of the station site was a "major headache" – along with lorry movements [NR doesn't own any of the roads needed]) and integration with the proposed Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) scheme. This took three hours, so Lewis Wingfield, the Senior Development Manager at Network Rail, who had been scheduled to give evidence in the afternoon, was postponed until Wednesday morning. See RAIL EAST issue 188 (Dec 2020) for an article by him.

DfT rules prevent NR from spending any unnecessary money on this scheme to support East West Rail (EWR), even though both are intrinsically related. EWR got only one mention during the entire day – a reference to it using the Royston branch, and that was it!

EAST ANGLIA'S RAILWAYS AND OUR FIVE MAJOR REGIONAL TOWNS – SOME WIDER THOUGHTS

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Over the last five issues of RAIL EAST we have taken a high-level look at how well the railway serves the needs of our major five population centres of Peterborough, Colchester, Norwich, Cambridge and Ipswich. We noted that most have by and large reasonable services on the main lines to and from London, even though inevitably the calling times are often sub-optimal serving the town.

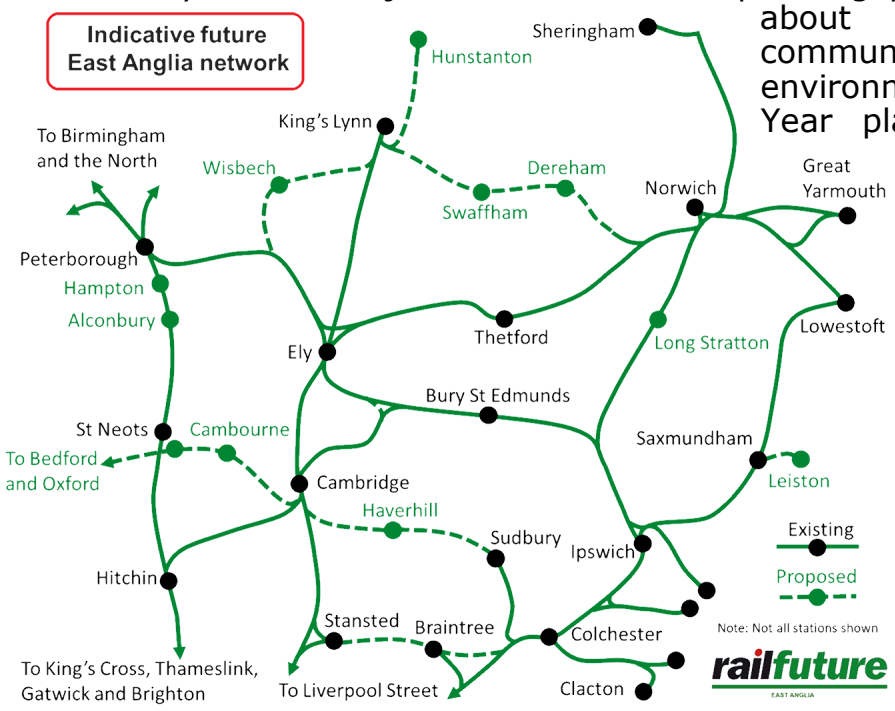
The articles were written against the backdrop of a pandemic that has seen the way the railway operates change, possibly for some time into the future. We know, for example, that many more affluent families have moved from London to and around places such as Colchester or Cambridge. From that can it be surmised that there will still be peak-hour traffic to be dealt with. At the same time other even longer-term trending indicates the peaks may be sharpest midweek.

London will still be an important destination but Railfuture thinks it is time for railway planners to initiate a gradual shift from being totally London orientated to more "big five." All these urban centres have their own severe traffic problems with radial roads congested, producing poor and often dangerous public health outcomes. Good examples are the A140 leading into Norwich and the A15/16 into Peterborough. All need new stations to intercept heavy car flows. And of course, there is the ever-looming climate change crisis.

Leisure travel and good health

Planners are now realising that health should be plumbed into every plan. The COVID-19 pandemic with its lockdowns has taught everyone how important outdoor visits are. Trips to the park, the countryside and to the seaside. Yet so many people have no means of making such trips and those that have cause so much congestion and pollution when they do so. Peterborough and Cambridge have the poorest access to the seaside. Both once had easy access to the coast at Hunstanton by public transport. It is essential that a rail link is re-established from King's Lynn to Hunstanton. By contrast the other three towns have good links to the coast.

Conversely, many of our seaside towns have become economically problem areas. Their inhabitants need health to be a priority as well. Is the railway being used to regenerate the health and wealth of those communities to the greatest effect? This needs some serious thought too. Clacton and Yarmouth are good places to start. The railway must not just be about best operating practices. It must always be about what is best for the community, including its physical environment. The Transport East 30 Year plan, recently out for wider consultation, perhaps offers some hope that regional priorities will be reformulated, with a far sharper stress on rail as an efficient and practical contributor to a greener future. See the article on pages 19-20.



And what should our railway look like as part of that future?

Come to the Branch AGM on 26 February to hear some fresh thinking on that crucial topic.

GREATER ANGLIA'S SECOND NEW FLEET: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE CLASS 720 AVENTRA TRAINS

BY CHRIS BURTON

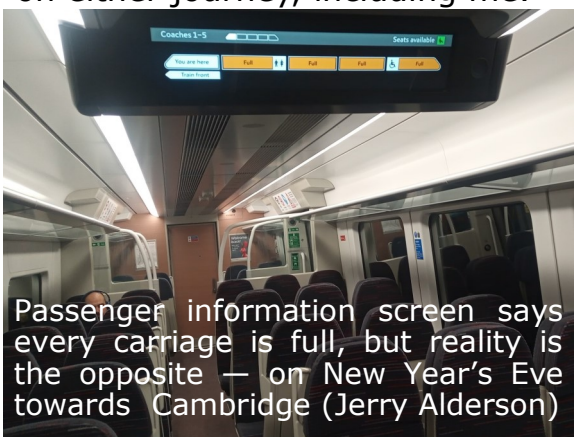
Innovation has been getting a slightly cynical deal in the railway press lately. It ought not to in Greater Anglia (GA) Land. Just think of the Stadler class 755 bi-mode trains, now well established in our area. These are innovation in abundance, as I pointed out in 2019 (see RAIL EAST issue 183). And everything I wrote then still stands as terrific testimony to Swiss engineering flair. But that was then – now it's new train No. 2, the class 720 Aventra from Alstom (formerly Bombardier), British built in Derby, and on two of which I've recently sampled journeys. Innovative? Possibly. But if so, awfully subtle by comparison with the Stadler class 755 regional and 745 intercity/Stansted trains. So, was I impressed?

Generally, yes. My two Class 720 journeys were in early January 2022, on a return Cambridge to Bishops Stortford journey in crisp, blue-sky sunshine. Outward-bound the service stopped at every station while the return paused only at Audley End and Whittlesford. But no stretches to sample maximum speed riding. That said, occasional spasms of commendably smooth riding at 80mph+ suggest similar qualities at or near the 100mph maximum speed, in any case to be found only on the Great Eastern Main Line. Mind you, how much this admirably smooth, quiet and steady ride owes to equally admirably smooth track condition is impossible to say for sure. Rather a lot, I suspect.

Sadly, there has been no attempt to emulate the innovative low-floor, step-free access, or articulation of the Stadler trains – see the "compare & contrast" (720 left, 755 below). To be fair, this would inevitably have demanded a complete coach body redesign and thus a much pricier product.

As expected, there is no First-Class provision, so what is found in one coach is replicated throughout the basic five-car standard formation. As for seat comfort I would say, 'adequate', as it reflects the relatively short journey times most users would experience in these units. Railfuture members were rightly critical of the 3+2 seat layout (with very narrow aisles, requiring some people to walk sideways) when the specification was announced. Unfortunately, on my two journeys (whilst COVID-19 work from home guidance was in place) never more than five people were in the carriage, so what the reaction might be in dense peak-hour loading

(when elbow room will be non-existent) only speculation can answer for the time being. Getting a seat more easily, however, surely trumps extricating oneself from a window position three-seat block. Overall the interior is bright and well-lit and my mobile phone always worked in any mode. So good wi-fi and further stars for this design. Luggage racks seemed utilitarian and ordinary but were not used by anyone on either journey, including me.



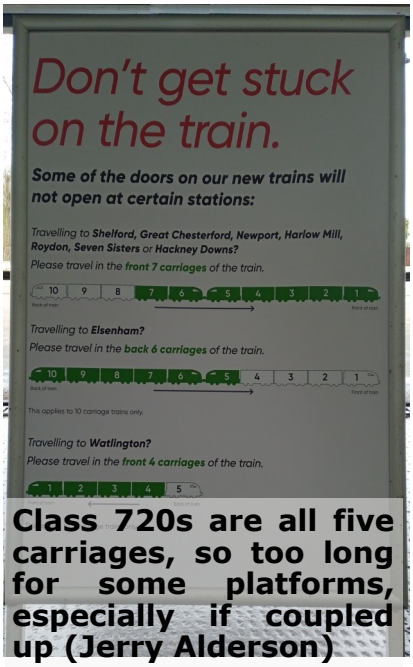
Passenger information screen says every carriage is full, but reality is the opposite — on New Year's Eve towards Cambridge (Jerry Alderson)

Clear and crisp public address is a must, whether live or recorded. Clear and crisp it certainly is. The passenger information screens display the same information (albeit an earlier software version without real-time arrival info) as those on the Stadlers, which definitely gets my vote. So, yet more stars added to the tally. But why oh why is this interior design, along with most trains these days, so completely colourless and sight-sappingly bland? A gentle pastel toned design at each end of the coach is all that is needed. Alternatively, much more colourful seating fabric. In this respect the Aventra and the Stadler seem once again similar. Certainly, on a dank chilly day at Ely I find it a true delight to get on a Class 158 service bound for Liverpool or Norwich and sink into the warm cosy embrace of their bright red seats. Incidentally, the diesel units gradually replacing these 158s carry a far less 'cosy' interior decor, alas.

The 720s visually benefit greatly from the decision to drop the front-end connection, whether wise or not. But that design style has been common on the Anglia network since the late 'forties. The driving cab has an appearance not dissimilar to the Stadler units, but unlike the Swiss train it doesn't resemble a Bullhead shark. Overall, a 720 offers its highly presentable qualities in a nicely understated way. And why not? The passenger experience is decidedly quieter and smoother running compared with a Class 317. And so it should be, forty years on. But is the 720 a better experience overall than a class 379, which dates only from 2011? Not so sure there: the 720-seat arrangement I find slightly inferior, but the ride is probably a bit better.

Class 720s had no litter bins. They are being retro-fitted, replacing a tip-up seat in the vestibule (Jerry Alderson)

The introduction of the new Alstom fleet emphasises the need to introduce a faster snappier timetable with speed limits raised where possible, which GA management is eager to do, if their political masters will permit. The same opportunity to exploit the enhanced performance of the new rolling stock applies equally to the Stadler fleet. However, the curse that is Defensive Driving Technique intervenes, always mitigating against rapid acceleration to line speed, then demonstrably safe but later braking for stations and speed restrictions. But again, these are very new trains and thus still a tad unfamiliar to drivers. Performance might indeed get slicker as confidence increases. I do hope so.



Class 720s are all five carriages, so too long for some platforms, especially if coupled up (Jerry Alderson)

In my view only the autumn leaf-fall season offers any justification for such reticent driving technique. Instead, we seem to get this entrenched lethargy daily, regardless. It doesn't happen on the London underground whether in tunnel or not, so why on our surface lines? (Fully automated trains?) This is not, of course, a specific criticism of these splendid new trains, which are quietly impressive and a true inducement to travel! And I can say for sure our Railfuture East Anglia branch wishes GA great success with this bright, big-windowed design. But only if the next timetable is a match for their potential.

STATION FOOTFALL DURING COVID-19

BY JERRY ALDERSON

ORR OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD — Estimates of station usage 2020-21

Station name [code]	Year ended 31 March 2016	2020	2021	% change 2020 2016	2020
Norwich [NRW]	4,048,984	4,041,818	967,650	-76	-76
Salhouse [SAH]	12,998	9,856	11,566	-11	17
Hoveton & Wroxham [HXM]	133,314	125,260	38,880	-71	-69
Worstead [WRT]	23,956	25,404	6,730	-72	-74
North Walsham [NWA]	246,660	226,116	54,894	-78	-76
Gunton [GNT]	14,422	18,560	3,334	-77	-82
Roughton Road [RNR]	12,814	21,552	3,304	-74	-85
Cromer [CMR]	192,100	213,936	60,352	-69	-72
West Runton [WRN]	27,804	26,076	9,144	-67	-65
Sheringham [SHM]	195,104	182,288	53,214	-73	-71
Brundall Gardens [BGA]	12,176	9,408	9,318	-23	-1
Brundall [BDA]	104,734	89,742	33,282	-68	-63
Lingwood [LGD]	45,502	43,536	12,622	-72	-71
Acle [ACL]	48,660	41,618	8,478	-83	-80
Great Yarmouth [GYM]	409,432	344,276	117,164	-71	-66
Cantley [CNY]	21,530	17,048	7,004	-67	-59
Reedham (Norfolk) [REE]	43,080	41,074	10,770	-75	-74
Berney Arms [BYA]	1,016	42	348	-66	729
Haddiscoe [HAD]	12,754	12,650	2,870	-77	-77
Buckenham [BUC]	134	212	98	-27	-54
Somerleyton [SYT]	10,092	10,898	2,194	-78	-80
Oulton Broad North [OUN]	118,852	106,438	21,768	-82	-80
Lowestoft [LWT]	455,434	406,440	103,144	-77	-75
Oulton Broad South [OUS]	50,918	43,518	7,212	-86	-83
Beccles [BCC]	108,800	110,152	17,682	-84	-84
Brampton (Suffolk) [BRP]	8,630	9,858	1,342	-84	-86
Halesworth [HAS]	95,968	99,838	15,854	-83	-84
Darsham [DSM]	56,262	61,534	13,092	-77	-79
Saxmundham [SAX]	147,346	165,274	35,022	-76	-79
Wickham Market [WCM]	44,332	55,266	11,570	-74	-79
Melton [MES]	63,510	82,562	14,742	-77	-82
Woodbridge [WDB]	202,554	209,172	50,570	-75	-76
Westerfield [WFI]	8,538	11,284	10,188	19	-10
Derby Road [DBR]	42,972	46,808	18,040	-58	-61
Trimley [TRM]	32,102	31,122	7,366	-77	-76
Felixstowe [FLX]	193,776	170,412	58,704	-70	-66
Ipswich [IPS]	3,284,934	3,292,182	726,756	-78	-78
Mistley [MIS]	77,110	71,784	14,418	-81	-80
Wrabness [WRB]	24,338	29,056	5,458	-78	-81
Harwich International [HPQ]	91,024	109,876	33,030	-64	-70
Dovercourt [DVC]	173,004	163,728	46,460	-73	-72
Harwich Town [HWC]	135,396	128,454	27,818	-79	-78
Diss [DIS]	675,036	671,300	124,442	-82	-81
Manningtree [MNG]	1,124,876	1,068,816	200,350	-82	-81
Colchester [COL]	4,460,848	4,249,444	1,029,176	-77	-76
Colchester Town [CET]	772,418	735,814	178,206	-77	-76
Hythe [HYH]	158,564	279,464	59,242	-63	-79
Wivenhoe [WIV]	383,030	403,306	70,786	-82	-82
Alresford [ALR]	68,436	65,602	15,816	-77	-76
Great Bentley [GRB]	74,710	78,634	18,728	-75	-76
Weeley [WEE]	32,104	37,652	11,506	-64	-69
Thorpe-le-Soken [TLS]	137,476	135,486	32,264	-77	-76
Clacton-on-Sea [CLT]	804,508	763,016	276,656	-66	-64
Kirby Cross [KBX]	41,618	47,842	13,726	-67	-71
Frinton-on-Sea [FRI]	203,396	184,550	51,010	-75	-72
Walton-on-the-Naze [WON]	121,466	130,090	40,024	-67	-69

Railfuture presents, on these two pages, its annual analysis of the official station usage figures for the 111 stations in its East Anglia branch area. This covers the 12 months from 1 April 2020 (a week or so after the first, and most severe, lockdown began) through to 31 March 2021 (when the third lockdown was in operation with travel only for essential purposes). The overall reduction compared to 2019/20 (which was down by 4.2% mainly for reduced travel that March) for the branch's area of 79% is very close to the national average.

The ORR released its figures on 25 November 2021, resulting in media coverage. The image below is from the Cambridge News.

City's station drops to 40th busiest in Britain

By ANNIE GOUK

CAMBRIDGE remains one of the busiest train stations outside of London, despite a huge drop in passenger numbers due to the pandemic.

People used the station 2.3 million times in 2020/21 – the equivalent of more than 6,300 passengers a day.

It means Cambridge ranked as the 40th busiest rail station in Britain, outside of London.

It continues to rank highly despite

Cambridge train station

exits to the station fell by 80%, from 86.9 million to 12.2m.

Stratford station, in Newham, replaced it as the busiest station in Britain, despite the number of passengers falling from 41.9m to 14m.

Outside of London, the busiest train station was Birmingham New Street, with 7.4m passengers passing through its doors – although that was down from 46.5 million.

Meanwhile, there were six stations in 2020/21 with no recorded entries

The figures show, as Railfuture's observations during summer 2020 had identified, that travel to seaside resorts was strong: Cromer, Great Yarmouth and Felixstowe did proportionally better than many stations, although Lowestoft did not.

The towns with direct services to London, such as Diss, Manningtree, Stowmarket, Audley End, St Neots and Huntingdon, along with villages such as Whittlesford, unsurprisingly saw footfall drop by more than the regional average.

For smaller stations the variance differs greatly, with some of the lowest and highest drops. Berney Arms had made national news in 2019/20 for having the lowest footfall, but that coincided with the station's closure for almost the entre year during resignalling of the Wherry Lines. So, no surprise that its patronage was *up* 729%, despite COVID-19.

At the time of writing there are only two remaining months of 2021/22. Patronage has grown, as restrictions ended in July 2021 albeit with further advice to work from home when the Omicron variant appeared to be getting out of control. The year also saw the new flexi-season to attract part-time commuters, although this is widely seen as a poor product that has failed.

Some efforts have been made by operators to attract former and new passengers to rail, but there are far too many 'own goals'. One of the basics is to tell people that a station exists and then direct them to it.

Great Chesterford station is at the bottom of an industrial estate. One wouldn't know it was there. The road sign ought to be easy to see on its side of the road but is hidden behind trees on the wrong side of the road as a recent photo shows:

One of the problems the railway faces is that no-one focuses on how to grow patronage across the region. Local authorities could do more by adding the station on a road junction sign (it is where the red line is):

	Year ended 31 March			% change 2020	
Station name [code]	**2016**	**2020**	**2021**	**2016**	**2020**
Marks Tey [MKT]	523,218	606,914	112,616	-78	-81
Chappel & Wakes Colne [CWC]	41,420	46,258	4,090	-90	-91
Bures [BUE]	61,586	58,024	8,626	-86	-85
Sudbury [SUY]	320,994	334,694	61,846	-81	-82
Kelvedon [KEL]	878,096	797,650	119,948	-86	-85
Needham Market [NMT]	88,242	100,754	33,484	-62	-67
Stowmarket [SMK]	956,202	916,094	185,762	-81	-80
Elmswell [ESW]	71,498	71,050	13,570	-81	-81
Thurston [TRS]	71,930	71,562	15,688	-78	-78
Bury St.Edmunds [BSE]	603,518	657,942	151,514	-75	-77
Kennett [KNE]	35,692	42,516	9,408	-74	-78
Newmarket [NMK]	324,592	335,652	77,602	-76	-77
Dullingham [DUL]	45,812	35,086	10,842	-76	-69
Shelford [SED]	174,954	216,194	57,942	-67	-73
Whittlesford Parkway [WLF]	493,004	552,024	93,042	-81	-83
Great Chesterford [GRC]	109,846	110,198	24,252	-78	-78
Audley End [AUD]	928,532	1,006,730	172,636	-81	-83
Newport (Essex) [NWE]	180,136	195,984	64,436	-64	-67
Elsenham [ESM]	200,088	245,240	63,386	-68	-74
Stansted Airport [SSD]	6,012,526	8,474,784	794,992	-87	-91
Stansted Mountfitchet [SST]	540,510	578,766	150,136	-72	-74
Foxton [FXN]	88,236	105,404	30,564	-65	-71
Shepreth [STH]	105,852	117,102	23,676	-78	-80
Meldreth [MEL]	278,044	305,888	82,016	-71	-73
Royston [RYS]	1,434,684	1,435,616	289,662	-80	-80
Ashwell & Morden [AWM]	144,158	159,254	34,748	-76	-78
Baldock [BDK]	658,208	654,320	154,004	-77	-76
Letchworth [LET]	1,861,902	1,834,720	457,590	-75	-75
Hitchin [HIT]	3,199,352	3,233,772	750,478	-77	-77
Arlesey [ARL]	667,602	696,708	152,836	-77	-78
Biggleswade [BIW]	992,082	1,033,622	227,702	-77	-78
Sandy [SDY]	527,172	495,528	143,316	-73	-71
St.Neots [SNO]	1,340,514	1,261,664	246,330	-82	-80
Huntingdon [HUN]	1,805,532	1,723,088	337,704	-81	-80
Peterborough [PBO]	4,697,874	4,934,692	1,089,232	-77	-78
Whittlesea [WLE]	28,456	35,230	8,026	-72	-77
March [MCH]	386,610	385,956	87,832	-77	-77
Manea [MNE]	12,020	18,834	3,910	-67	-79
Ely [ELY]	2,131,818	2,363,818	577,460	-73	-76
Shippea Hill [SPP]	12	164	36	200	-78
Lakenheath [LAK]	416	416	246	-41	-41
Brandon [BND]	106,302	111,572	26,804	-75	-76
Thetford [TTF]	300,286	286,700	73,700	-75	-74
Harling Road [HRD]	1,872	3,794	646	-65	-83
Eccles Road [ECS]	824	2,390	296	-64	-88
Attleborough [ATL]	153,804	158,464	41,592	-73	-74
Spooner Row [SPN]	664	276	74	-89	-73
Wymondham [WMD]	180,246	196,036	56,424	-69	-71
King's Lynn [KLN]	973,660	931,394	240,162	-75	-74
Watlington [WTG]	148,928	138,366	39,078	-74	-72
Downham Market [DOW]	500,442	512,772	129,058	-74	-75
Littleport [LTP]	229,628	238,488	60,976	-73	-74
Waterbeach [WBC]	420,730	377,660	100,176	-76	-73
Cambridge [CBG]	10,954,212	11,599,814	2,300,528	-79	-77
Cambridge North (21/05/2017) [CMB]	N/A	949,550	220,958	N/A	-80
Total across Railfuture East Anglia	67,086,090	71,514,332	14,989,042	-78	-79

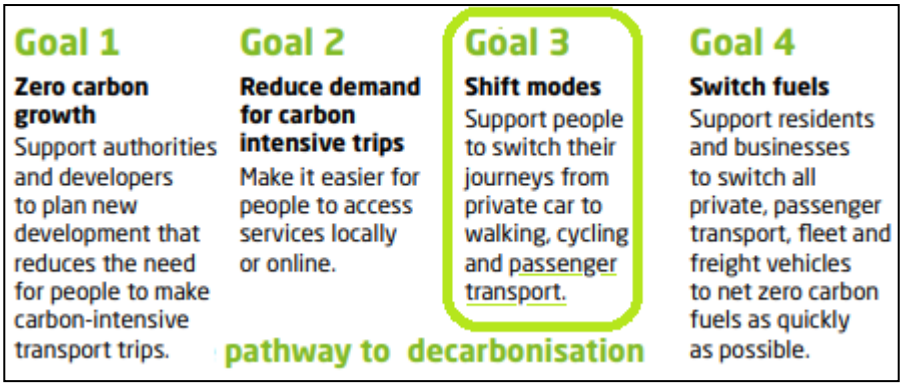
RAILFUTURE STRATEGIC REVIEW – TAKING RAIL FROM THE MARGIN TO THE MAINSTREAM IN THE POST-OIL ECONOMY

BY MARTIN COOPER

The Railfuture Board has agreed to fund a strategic review of the region's rail network (our "East Anglia Rail Study"). This is being undertaken as a practical and forward-looking way of commemorating the 50th anniversary of the setting up of the East Anglian branch (of what is now Railfuture) back in 1972. After a competitive tender, Jonathan Roberts Consulting (JRC) [https://www.jrc.org.uk] was appointed to undertake the review supported by a steering group of branch members.

Jonathan is undertaking a 30-year look ahead to identify how the railway needs to change to keep up with the changing pattern of housing development and employment across the region. It is a happy (and hopefully productive) coincidence that the review is occurring just as Transport East has launched its consultation on a 30-year strategy for transport priorities in the region (image right, also see pages 19-20). Railfuture sees the strategic review we have commissioned as feeding into the bigger picture being drawn by Transport East.

The Challenge



The real challenge is to decarbonise transport as quickly as possible. That means reducing the reliance on cars and attracting more people to use rail (goal 3 of 4 on Transport East's list). Sadly, the current rail offer is, in too many places, poor or simply 'Missing in Action'. Ridership is less than 3% of the population in many places, a very low level of travel market penetration: only a few places, notably Cambridge, do better. Many people, local authority planners and politicians do not see rail as relevant to their future. The post-Covid uncertainty also makes this a bad time to press for more spend on capacity enhancing schemes.

After decades of spending to transform the region's road network, further major road schemes are still being promoted, in part because the rail industry has been too slow to respond and has a bad track record for exorbitant costing of schemes.

As Peter Wakefield's article argues (see page 9) our London-centric network no longer serves the region well. In particular, the poor east-west connectivity between the main regional hubs is holding back regional and national productivity. Other regional transport bodies beyond East Anglia are pointing out that the limited capacity for moving freight by rail from Felixstowe to the Midlands and the North is damaging their economic prospects too.

The Opportunity

The region's human geography has changed significantly over the past 60 years. We are a rapidly urbanising region which will continue to change with the growth of new knowledge-based industries reliant on good access to universities. Large numbers of new houses are due to be built over the next 20-30 years to accommodate the new skilled, professional workforce. Achieving net zero, whilst meeting the increased demand for travel, will require the railway to improve its offer and make itself much more relevant as the key to decarbonised transport. Crucially, government now

understands that it needs rail to carry more freight and attract people out of their cars if it is going to decarbonise transport and improve air quality in urban centres. Rail can improve if it focuses on what it does best – notwithstanding the constraints on the existing network. Used in the right way and with some key interventions at critical points on the network, rail can offer even more to the communities along the existing rail corridors. There will need to be substantial investment in new stations, filling in the missing links and resolving some capacity pinch points if rail is to fully play its part by offering people better travel choices and improved journeys. And as Phil Smart argues in his article (see pages 16-17), rail will have to play its own part in addressing infrastructure improvements and operations in a more intelligent and adventurous fashion.

The role of the review

We know that rail is the most efficient and sustainable means of mass transit for inter-urban journeys and for accessing our growing agglomerations. By *mapping* how rail is serving the communities it passes through or close by, the review is looking to identify ways in which it can adapt and do more. It will encourage active planning for a regional economy well served by light and heavy rail, encouraging land use planners and transport to engage in a dialogue about how to optimise rail's contribution to improving connectivity.

It will model the volume of future rail journeys across the region to assess the demand for investment in better services. The review will provide evidence to boost our campaigning for significant investment in rail if it is to support the continued sustainable growth of the region's economy.

We recognise that it will take time to build the political consensus in support of specific schemes and to update and adapt the proposals to maintain their salience whilst strengthening them with a mature business case so that all key partners can say "it would be madness not to do it."

Key elements of the Review

There are four key elements to the review:

- Assessing the potential for developing Devon-style metro services around regional hubs such as Norwich, Ipswich and Colchester as well as the main Cambridge corridor
- Reviewing the adequacy of the current plans to deal with critical pinch points such as Ely, which are frustrating the ability to run more passenger and freight trains
- Reviewing the two key missing East West links in the Railfuture East Anglia area – the A47 corridor between Norwich and Peterborough and further south the A120 corridor across our southern border between Colchester and Stansted which needs to be reviewed as part of looking at connecting Mid and North East Essex to the Greater Cambridge economy
- The review will also be looking at the opportunities for growth in aggregates, fast parcels and Domestic Intermodal Railfreight, in particular identifying any rail connected sites where future development of rail interchange freight terminals would make sense

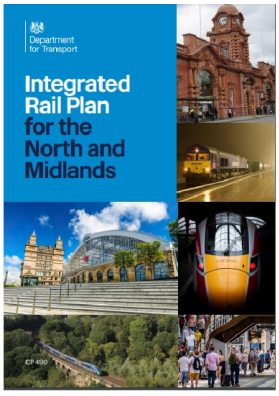
Presentation of interim findings to the Branch AGM

The review aims to identify the key strategic issues, the opportunities and a set of initial proposals for investing in the Anglian rail network over the coming 5-30 years to allow rail to deliver at scale the switch from road for passengers and freight.

The consultant that Railfuture has commissioned, Jonathan Roberts, will be presenting his interim findings to the Railfuture East Anglia Branch AGM on Saturday, 26 February 2022 in Bury St Edmunds (further details on page 23). This will enable a wider audience to hear more about the review and to challenge the thinking and the proposals. The discussion will be an important part of refining the review before undertaking more detailed analysis of the case for investing in a specific pipeline of projects.

WILL THE DEAD HAND CLOUD THE GUIDING MIND?

BY PHIL SMART



New Year is a time to look forward but also to reflect on the year passed. The excitement and hope of 2021 that came with government announcements on rail reform and transport decarbonisation was tempered with the reality of the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn. In the year of COP26 we could have been forgiven for anticipating a big announcement on electrification or capacity enhancements, but instead came the thwarted ambition of Northern Powerhouse Rail under the Integrated Rail Package. Much needs doing on our railway but the message is clear. There is no money available. So how then do we build a better railway and how can we fulfil the Williams-Shapps pledge to promote freight growth?

In the past we (the rail industry and stakeholders) have looked to the periodic review for signs of progress on key schemes, but since 2018 enhancements are now the domain of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) process. The separation of day-to-day, or operational, expenditure ("opex") from major capital projects ("capex") will be familiar to some, but if the new railway is to fulfil its promise, this seems a good time to challenge the "dead hand" of accountancy. The periodic review (PR23) process is underway to determine the maintenance and renewals budget for Control Period 7 (2024-29), the first five years of Great British Railways as a legal entity. Will the new joined up railway with its "guiding mind" inherit the restrictions of the old? Let's take some examples of how a more adventurous approach to everyday renewals – particularly looking to freight traffic – presents opportunities to build back better, rather than just the same.

Suppose a section of route crosses two bridges, one overdue for renewal, the other that could last a bit longer with a speed restriction. Do we just renew the first bridge? Or do we use the possession to renew both, with structural improvements capable of bearing greater loads? The latter approach might open up a route previously unavailable for freight and perhaps release capacity elsewhere.

If a section of line due for renewal includes a refuge loop for freight, do we replace the points with the same 15mph ones or do we upgrade to 40mph? And while on site, is there scope to lengthen the loop? How about a case of two speed restrictions, one at the foot of an incline, the other at the summit, but the budget will only stretch to removing one. If a station is at the foot of the incline, a stopping passenger service doesn't notice the restriction, so the summit restriction is tackled first. However, it takes longer for a freight train to regain line speed while climbing an incline than descending one, therefore taking capacity out of the network. Removing the restriction at the foot of the hill helps everyone. Locally, Railfuture has argued for the reinstatement of the through "freight" lines at Bury St Edmunds. Although this would require alteration to the layout, it would allow freight trains to pass at speed rather than slow through the reverse curves there.

Taken together these small gains might not amount to very much but they can

make all the difference. Suppose we save ten minutes. This could be the difference between presenting at a junction on time or waiting in a loop for 50 minutes for a vacant path the following hour. Saving an hour might be the difference between completing a journey in a single shift or requiring two. If an hour saved means the train can unload and return to the quarry or port that same day, then we save a whole train. Marginal gains make all the difference in our quest to strip out cost, not just for the railway but for the whole UK PLC.

But taking a different approach to the periodic review will require not one guiding mind but many, in each region and route where they are close to the end users who know their businesses best. People who are encouraged, motivated even, to question the existing way of doing things and to use their eyes and ears to seize opportunities whenever they arise. It is often said that its culture is the hardest thing to change in any organisation, but there are many people in the industry whose instincts and ambitions are frustrated by the rules they are obliged to follow. The success of the new railway will be measured in its ability not just to find capacity on the network but to release the capacity of the people working for it, and that costs nothing.

A version of this article first appeared in the December 2021 issue of 'Modern Railways' as the opinion column of the Rail Freight Group, for whom the author is the Assistant Policy Manager

ESSEX SET TO BECOME SAFER, GREENER AND HEALTHIER – THE ROLE OF ACTIVE TRAVEL

BY TRACEY VICKERS (ESSEX CC)

Essex is a large and varied county with a strong rural character. It has areas of beautiful countryside, remote coastal villages and island communities as well as vibrant, fast -growing towns and cities. Its eastern border consists of 350 miles of coastline – the second longest of any English county. To the north are the counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire; to the west, Hertfordshire; and to the southwest, London. Add in two airports, 58 stations, eight tube stations, major ports and 5,147 miles of road and it's clear that plans to introduce new sustainable transport infrastructure are going to be anything but straightforward.

But transformation — to make Essex the walking and cycling county — is happening and happening now. And it has to. To achieve carbon zero by 2050, we need to incentivise active travel, build back bus and train services and discourage unnecessary car use, especially those journeys of under three miles which could easily be done by the majority of people on foot or by bike. We need to be bold.

The population of Essex is expected to increase to over two million by 2041. Around 27% of residents are currently failing to meet the minimum recommended amount of healthy physical activity (around 2.5 hours per week). More cycling and walking can also help achieve public health benefits as well as environmental ones.

The plans made by Essex County Council moved a step closer following its 2021 Active Travel Fund consultation in which over three quarters (86%) of Essex residents told us they were concerned about traffic congestion, with over 80% saying they were concerned about air pollution and road safety.

As a result, new, transformational walking and cycling routes are set to be implemented this year across five major towns and cities in the county: Braintree,

Brentwood, Chelmsford, Colchester and Wickford. The aim is to make it as easy and safe as possible for people to travel more sustainably – walking, cycling, e-scooting (Essex is currently taking part in a Department for Transport trial until November 2022) or taking the bus or train – especially for shorter journeys. If more people in our towns use a mix of walking and cycling with public transport, valuable road-space will be freed up for those with no alternative but to drive.

Take Colchester for example. Following the successful collaboration between Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and Abellio Greater Anglia, a walking route between the railway station and the town centre was improved, using a theory devised by Abellio (Greater Anglia's parent company) in the Netherlands called Fixing the Link. We intend to take this further. Our active travel proposals for Colchester will see the creation of two routes helping safer, greener and healthier walking and cycling between key points in the town. Travelling from north to south and east to west, the two routes cross in the town centre, enabling a safe and easy access from Lexden Road, Butt Road, East Hill and the Mile End area into the town centre or on to key destinations such as the station and hospital.

We're confident that these new routes will transform travel – and life – in Colchester. By listening to residents and local businesses as well as political and community representatives including local interest groups, we have a clearer picture of how we can deliver sustainable transport solutions in the town, reduce traffic congestion, cut air pollution and improve road safety.

These changes will ultimately benefit everybody not just now but for future generations, as well as the environment. Underpinning all our work will be a behaviour change programme which makes low carbon solutions easy, normal, affordable and eventually, the default.

The Essex Climate Action Commission recently published ten initial transport recommendations, from increasing the use of electric vehicles to designing school streets. All ten are vitally important but three – increasing active travel, rebuilding public transport and designing a dedicated behaviour change programme – will ensure Essex is at the forefront of decarbonised transport and meets its ambition to become the walking and cycling county.

The author is Head of Sustainable Transport at Essex County Council.

FIT FOR PURPOSE? RAILFUTURE'S TAKE ON TRANSPORT EAST'S 30-YEAR PLAN

BY PETER FEENEY

Railfuture member Phil Smart wrote in RAIL EAST issue 191 about Transport East, the sub-national transport body (SNTB) covering Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. As his article pointed out, the role of these bodies is to function as the top-level grouping of relevant local authorities and agencies such as Network Rail and National Highways (formerly Highways England) to co-ordinate and prioritise significant infrastructure proposals related to transport within each region. It is clear that buy-in from the relevant SNTB will be a necessary condition for major projects to go ahead, since as a statutory body its route through to the Treasury and the Department for Transport ought to be a very direct one. So, anyone with an interest in the development of regional transport policy should take note when Transport East produces a draft 30-year policy for public consultation.

The draft policy documentation is lengthy and comprehensive, with key aspects helpfully condensed down into a 40-page Public Consultation document – all accessible via www.transporteast.org.uk/public-consultation. That consultation, running throughout December 2021 and January 2022, has just ended. Railfuture's detailed response, ably co-ordinated by member Martin Cooper, is now available on the website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display2934.

So, what's in the Transport East draft 30-year plan, and what has Railfuture made of it? In summary, the plan develops a total of 15 specific goals (with underpinning sub-goals beneath them) based on four headline strategic priorities:

- *Decarbonisation to net zero*
- *Connecting growing towns and cities*
- *Energising coastal and rural communities*
- *Unlocking international gateways – Ports & Airports*

Linked to the priorities and goals is the focus on six "core corridors" where Transport East considers the most significant economic activity is generated across the region, as shown in the diagram below.

Midlands - King's Lynn - Norwich - Great Yarmouth

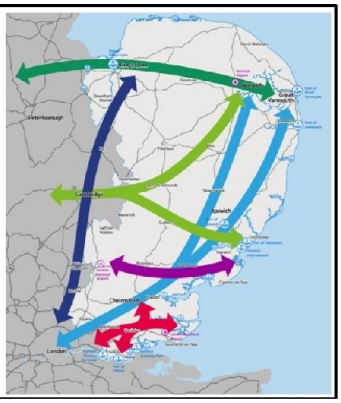
London - Chelmsford - Colchester - Ipswich - Norwich and Suffolk Coast

Norfolk and Suffolk to Cambridge - Midlands - South-West

Stansted - Braintree - Colchester - Harwich and Clacton

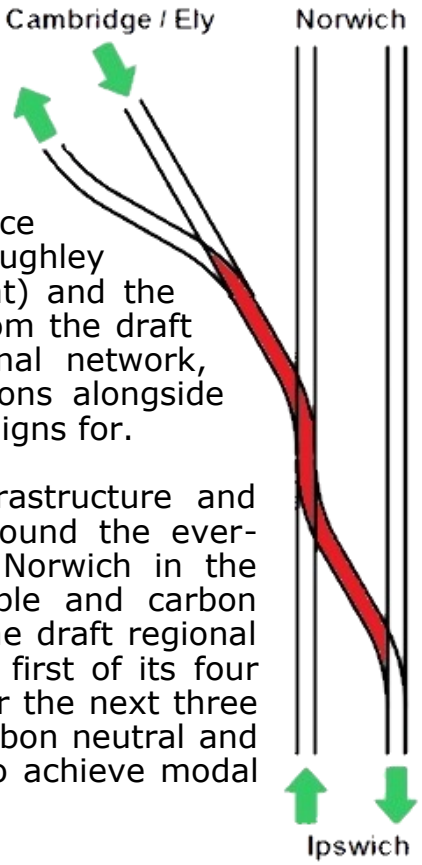
King's Lynn - Cambridge - Harlow - London

South Essex - London - Thurrock - Basildon - Southend



These corridors range from *east-west routes* involving (a) Great Yarmouth, Norwich and King's Lynn and (b) Felixstowe and Ipswich to Cambridge and the Midlands – though the draft document could make more of the crucial axis from Peterborough northwards – to *north-south routes* involving what a rail shorthand would designate WAML and GEML. In each case, the traffic and economic activity

is between London and the region. Additionally, two further corridors are identified involving (a) Stansted – Colchester – Harwich & Clacton and (b) South Essex – London – Thurrock – Basildon – Southend. It seems reasonable to assume that in terms of funding future transport investment Transport East will inevitably prioritise schemes that add value to the operation of these six corridors.



Approximately two thirds of the 15 specific goals have significant implications for rail, ranging from switching from diesel to carbon neutral fuels to significantly increasing the volume of freight carried by rail. No one who regularly reads RAIL EAST will find anything new in the "rail" dimension of the draft strategy; in the detailed pages of the Investment & Delivery Programme for instance you will find reference to schemes focussed on Ely, Haughley Junction (track diagram with single lead highlighted, right) and the Trowse swing bridge, which we welcome. But missing from the draft plan is anything substantive about an expanded regional network, involving re-opening lines and reviving long-closed stations alongside building wholly new ones, which Railfuture tirelessly campaigns for.

Also missing is any detailed thinking about urban infrastructure and transportation, and in particular how people will get around the ever-expanding regional centres of Colchester, Ipswich and Norwich in the coming decades. Trams and light rail, efficient, reliable and carbon neutral, are not included in the draft document. But if the draft regional strategy wishes to make decarbonisation to net zero the first of its four strategic priorities to shape transport policy in the East for the next three decades and beyond, then investment should focus on carbon neutral and attractive public transport systems that are more likely to achieve modal shift from private vehicles.

Transport East's consultation document mentions the infrequent rail services. In fact, all of the Greater Anglia rural routes are one per hour (Ipswich to Peterborough is still two hourly).

If more people are to be encouraged to use public transport then one significant challenge remains accessibility – the Railfuture response to the draft strategy suggests that Transport East makes more explicit its support for step-free stations as a key measure in ensuring the whole community can use trains with confidence and minimum inconvenience.

Transport East's strapline, and the "vision" it sees informing its draft strategy, is *A thriving economy for the East, with fast, safe, reliable and resilient transport infrastructure driving forward a future of inclusive and sustainable growth for decades to come*.

Whilst there are any number of very sensible and judicious proposals in the draft strategy, the thinking it contains on rail is cautious and conservative; there is much reference to projects that have been on the agenda for a decade or longer, little evidence of much blue skies thinking on the shape of a truly decarbonised future transportation network. So Railfuture's overall judgement is that the strategy makes a start in recognising the contribution rail can make both to the regional economy and to the quality of life in communities across the region – but more boldness is essential if rail (including light rail and tram) is to be a significant regional player for the rest of the twenty first century. It would be good if Transport East in further developing its strategy after the consultation period were to involve Railfuture in its thinking – the response submitted certainly makes the offer.

ELY AREA CAPACITY ENHANCEMENTS — UPDATE

BY JERRY ALDERSON

At the Railfuture East Anglia meeting in Cambridge on 4 December 2021 we welcomed two speakers from Network Rail (NR), Matt Brennan (Project Sponsor) and Stephen Deaville (Senior Communications Manager) to talk about the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements (EACE) scheme, which includes Ely North Junction—East Anglia's biggest rail bottleneck. The latest consultation (2B) had ended the previous week. They began with a presentation, addressing Railfuture's concern that the scheme was not ambitious enough, and then answered questions from the floor.

Matt Brennan (left) and Stephen Deaville (centre) were presented with a brand new book about the railway around Histon by Peter Wakefield (right).

The most encouraging news was that the publicised increase from 6.5 to 10 train paths per hour (tph) was not a firm limit — crucial as 10tph is insufficient to meet current stakeholder aspirations — as further paths through Ely could be achieved with other 'interventions', such as doubling Soham to Ely. If the constraints elsewhere on the network were resolved then 13tph, perhaps 14, is possible. The EACE proposals would allow an extra 'class 4' (i.e. fast) freight train per hour with the possibility for a 'class 6' (slow) freight train as well. However, it would see only another six freight trains per day in each direction (an increase from 21 to 27 trains per day). Other upgrades could raise that total to 33 a day in each direction.

Perhaps most disappointing was how Network Rail operated in silos: the Cambridgeshire Resignalling Project (C3R) covers this vital freight corridor but doesn't include any works to increase capacity (e.g. reinstating centre roads at Bury St Edmunds, or doubling a short stretch of track from Chippenham Junction towards Newmarket) to reduce train congestion. It seems that implementing EACE will then highlight secondary rail bottlenecks elsewhere in the region.

There are 123 level crossings (of all types) in the wider Ely area, and Network Rail has had to assess all of them, primarily on the basis of risk of an accident. Most will be left unchanged. Kiln Lane crossing just south of Ely North Junction needs to be addressed for capacity reasons, not just risk, as it currently requires trains to be 'double blocked', which restricts the number of trains that can be pathed.

The project is being managed using the new Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP), and it is currently at the "option selection stage", which is the equivalent of the old GRIP stage 3. Matt confirmed that he is currently focusing on the business case and would be submitting it to the Department for Transport (DfT) on Friday 8 March 2022. In the EACE proposals there is an unspecified "new service" to use the 10th train per hour. He said that this is nominally allocated to a Cambridge-Peterborough service. Many of those present inferred that this could become a direct Cambridge-Wisbech service if the March-Wisbech line had been reopened by then. Disturbingly a shuttle is still being considered for the latter.

It would be possible for NR to complete some minor improvements without a Transport & Works Act Order (TWAO) but it would need TWAO powers to close a level crossing, build a new bridge and acquire any land for some of the things that it is proposing. NR is exploring whether it can start some improvements before receiving the order, subject to receiving funding, although nothing would be done until the full scheme had been fully designed and submitted. NR said that if the work was staggered, it would like to prioritise renewing the two underbridges north of Ely station (Cutter and Common Muckhill) as they have significant speed restrictions. An audience member was concerned if anything happened to them, like the June 2007 bridge failure just east of Ely that was closed for six months before a new bridge was in place.

RAILWAY NEWS AROUND EAST ANGLIA

Huntingdon — work has started on the upper deck of the car park to replace spaces lost by the creation of the new link road from the A1307 (former A14) into the town centre.

King's Lynn — a mural linked to the Campbell's Soup Factory has been created at the station. The work is one of a number being rolled out at stations by train operator GTR. The soup factory closed in 2007 and used to send some of its products out by rail.

Peterborough — the new rail underpass on the East Coast Main Line was officially opened on 9 December 2021 by then transport minister Chris Heaton-Harris. The work, at Werrington just north of Peterborough, allows freight trains from East Anglia to access the Lincoln line without having to cross the busy East Coast Main Line tracks, increasing capacity of the line and reducing delays.

Oulton Broad South — the East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership has paid for signs to promote the Carlton Marshes nature reserve (run by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust), which is a short walk away. A map and interpretation panel are also planned for 2022.

Cambridge South — on 23 December 2021 the first phase of the long-awaited Chisholm Trail opened. It provides a high-quality walking and cycling route from the Cambridge North side of the river into Cambridge, cutting several minutes off journey times via roads. Moreover, it means that Cambridge North becomes more attractive to many people living nearby but previously cut-off by the river Cam (photo from Cam Cycle on Twitter).

On several weekends in January, when the East Coast Main Line was closed between Hitchin and Peterborough, services for LNER and Hull Trains were diverted via Cambridge. Some of the LNER trains stopped, but didn't call, at Cambridge North as they waited to proceed southwards. Would it be too much to hope that the future GBR, which will have freedom to direct operators, might have the business acumen to use the opportunity a diversion provides to schedule stops and promote long-distance leisure services to and from such stations?

Following Peter Wakefield's article about station buildings in RAIL EAST issue 192, Railfuture East Anglia has been informed of a group hoping to renovate the two derelict station buildings at Middleton Towers for future community use, if they can reach agreement with Network Rail. They have been featured in newspapers and on BBC Radio Norfolk.

See https://www.middletontowers.org.uk/.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA AGM 2022

The Railfuture East Anglia Branch AGM 2022 will take place on Saturday 26 February 2022 at The Friends Meeting House, St Johns Street, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1SJ, starting at 14.00

Agenda
1. Welcome from the Chair
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the 2021 AGM and matters arising
4. Branch annual report from the Chair
5. Branch financial report
6. Railfuture national update
7. Election of officers and committee
8. Other items of business notified to the Secretary
9. Date and venue for the 2023 AGM

After refreshments and a comfort break, the meeting will have an update from Jonathan Roberts and the Railfuture working group on the East Anglia Rail Strategy with a discussion of initial findings and ideas.

Please note that the branch no longer directly accesses a company bank account and financial matters are handled nationally, although are budgeted by the branch.

Any other items to be discussed at the AGM should be notified to the Branch Secretary (paul.hollinghirst@railfuture.org.uk) by Saturday 19 February 2022.

The venue has requested that everyone present wears a **face covering** (unless exempt) within the communal areas of the building. The garden will be open.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

Please send articles for possible inclusion in RAIL EAST to Peter Feeney, who collates all submissions and prepares them for the newsletter. Good quality photos are appreciated, and essential, in order to make RAIL EAST visually attractive.

All submissions by **21 May 2022**, please, but articles covering late news will be considered just before sending to the printer two weeks later.

RAIL EAST is formatted by Jerry Alderson.

RECEIVING RAIL EAST BY POST OR ELECTRONICALLY?

Thank you to Railfuture members who have agreed to receive RAIL EAST by email. This helps to keep Railfuture's costs down and so spend funds on rail campaigning.

You can be emailed a copy of RAIL EAST on the same day that it goes to the printer, so you will receive it more than a week before other people. To switch to receiving it by email, please contact Lloyd Butler, who manages our database, at renewals@railfuture.org.uk. Your co-operation will be appreciated.

The latest RAIL EAST is always at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/.

JOIN RAILFUTURE — FOR A BIGGER, BETTER RAILWAY

Railfuture is funded entirely by the public, who use the railway. This means that it can stand up for their interests; hopefully RAIL EAST proves this, with its justifiable criticism (plus much-deserved praise — Railfuture *promotes* rail travel, after all).

Railfuture works *constructively* with the rail industry, government (national and local), businesses and stakeholders to improve and expand the railway.

Annual membership fee is **£20** (£22 for joint membership); under 26 years can join for just £14. Join online at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/ using a credit/ debit card or PayPal.

railfuture East Anglia

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petlinbay@btinternet.com

Also see https://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia+Contacts

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 26 FEB 2022
Friends Meeting House
St John's Street
BURY ST EDMUNDS
IP33 1SJ

SATURDAY 25 JUNE 2022
St Mary's at Stoke
Stoke Street
IPSWICH
IP2 8BX

SATURDAY 24 SEPT 2022
Friends Meeting House,
5 Upper Goat Lane
NORWICH
NR2 1EW

A flyer for our meetings is always at: www.railfuture.org.uk/east/meetings.
This includes a map of the venue and directions from the station.

Follow Railfuture East Anglia on Twitter https://twitter.com/RailfutureEA

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