

raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

Issue 203 • Sept 2024

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“We’ll move fast and fix things” says Transport Secretary Louise Haigh

Today (3 September 2024) I am announcing that I will be instructing the CEO of Network Rail, the Director General for Rail Services in the Department for Transport, and the CEO of DfT OLR Holdings Ltd (DOHL) to establish a Shadow Great British Railways. As the main organisations responsible for the operational railway, they will be working in closer collaboration, bringing together track and train to deliver for passengers and freight users, ahead of legislation to create Great British Railways (GBR) as an arm’s length body.

“Ely, Wisbech and East West Rail are the priority schemes in East Anglia where the procrastination must end now”, says Railfuture.



Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

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- Stations need to be accessible
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A rail success story is likely to become even more successful with further workspace developments underway

NEW VENUE FOR NORWICH MEETING ON SATURDAY 28 SEPTEMBER

Our regular venue, which we booked a year ago, is unavailable because of building work. Instead it will be held in the **Octagon annex of St Peter Mancroft**, which is Norwich's largest mediaeval parish church and cannot be missed! It is a short walk from Market Place. The nicer route is via Gentlemans Walk, which becomes Haymarket, then turn into Hay Hill. Our meeting is in the octagon-shaped building (aerial view, right) on the corner of Weaver Lane and Hay Hill, close to a Starbuck's. The entrance is via Hay Hill. The post code is NR2 1QQ.



We have a good guest speaker and we would like a large audience to hear him, so please try to attend if you can. There are engineering works west and north of Ely but the rest of the railway in the East Anglia branch area seems to be open.

FROM THE CHAIR

BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH



Welcome to the September 2024 issue of RAIL EAST. Since my last column, the General Election has come and gone, and the new government has confirmed its intention to take the passenger railway back into public ownership. Despite the 'nationalisation' hype in the media, we know this really boils down to taking back the train operating companies (TOCs) in house as their contracts expire. In fact, by some reckoning just ten contracts, since the Department for Transport already controls four, and the Scottish, Welsh, TfL Overground and Merseyrail contracts will continue to have their own arrangements. The freight companies will, of course, maintain their status as private companies along with the rolling stock leasing companies and open-access operators.

The Greater Anglia contract ends on 20 September 2026, which is when we can expect GA services to be brought back in house. In theory, since the contract's core term expires in September 2024, it could be ended earlier with three months' notice. This doesn't seem very likely, however, in part because Great British Railways needs more time to get itself up and running, and because GA, left alone, is performing very well. The full Govia Thameslink contract meanwhile doesn't expire until 1 March 2028, still some three-and-a-half years away with a possible 1 April 2025 break point.

South Western: May 2025
Essex Thameside: July 2025
GA/East Anglia: September 2026
West Midlands: September 2026
Chiltern: December 2027
GTR/TS&GN: April 2028
Great Western: June 2028
East Midlands: October 2030
Cross Country: October 2031
West Coast: October 2032

Source: Wikipedia



Labour's plans were described in its *Get Britain Moving* document (cover, left) published in April 2024. Whether or not the government's anticipated cost savings can be achieved by reintegrating the railway (to some extent), and by bringing the TOCs in house, we know that the railway must continue to grow and generate more revenue to ease the pressure on finances. The signs are that where reliable and comfortable services are provided, as is now the case in East Anglia, then this is already happening. An early challenge will be to sustain revenue growth as the TOC contracts run down to expiry and then into their new roles as part of the National Operator. Handling more passengers will, of course, place increasing investment demands on the government while capital budgets remain tight, but no-one wants to see demand being choked off due to over severe rationing of investment for additional trains and infrastructure.

At any rate, after so much campaigning and lobbying from many quarters, I hope we can rely on Ely and Haughley junction improvements being given the go ahead before long, and that the East West Rail Bedford-to-Cambridge section will be seen through to conclusion — more positive news on this at the end of my column.

The scrapping of the Restoring Your Railways fund is concerning, but at this stage we have to trust that investment in new lines and stations will be financed from alternative sources. While it's possible the revamping of the finance arrangements could work against some reopening schemes, the potential for rail-based schemes in the Cambridge area at least can hardly be ignored. Although we see strong passenger flows along the north-south axis, soon to be even greater with the opening of Cambridge South station, will the government back the city being truly rail accessible from multiple directions — including Wisbech, Haverhill, Newmarket

and St Neots? Surely this has to be the case if the extraordinary growth of the city and its transport infrastructure is to be properly sustainable.

Regardless of the investment climate, local authorities need to push ahead with drawing up business cases for local rail schemes because the timeframe for delivering rail projects is so lengthy. It must be self-evident that deliverable schemes already in place will be best placed to attract finance when it is available, as Devon County Council has demonstrated.

A positive note on which to end. As chair of Railfuture East Anglia I am pleased to welcome the appointment of David Hughes as the new Chief Executive of East West Railway Company (EWRC) — photo, right, from their website. He joins the project from Arup, where he was Major Programmes Director. Previous rail roles include DfT Director General for Rail Infrastructure, Investment Planning Director at Transport for London and a director at Transport for the North. His appointment comes as EWRC prepares to launch the statutory consultation on the central section (Bedford-Cambridge) of the proposed new railway this summer. Before working in the transport sector, David held roles at Deloitte, the Ministry of Defence and NATO. At EWRC he succeeds Beth West, who announced her departure earlier in 2024. We at Railfuture are hopeful that the appointment of such an experienced rail infrastructure professional at such a crucial time for East West rail signals a determination from government to ensure a successful (and speedy) outcome to this vital project.



I am delighted that Guy Dangerfield of Transport Focus has accepted our invitation to speak at our meeting in Norwich, which is at a new venue this year owing to building works at our usual venue. He last spoke to Railfuture at our national conference in November 2007, and his colleague Linda McCord (who is retiring) spoke to the East Anglia branch in February 2014. Over the years, the government-funded watchdog has been given responsibility for buses and then roads.

As the new government intends to create a new Passenger Standards Authority, which will replace both Transport Focus and the Rail Ombudsman, it will be interesting to hear his thoughts on what the new body needs to do. Please join us.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA MEETING — SAT 28 SEPTEMBER
Octagon annex at St Peter Mancroft Church, NORWICH NR2 1QQ
The octagon-shaped building at corner of Hay Hill and Weaver Lane.



Guy Dangerfield, Head of Strategy and Intelligence (within the within the Transport User Team) at **Transport Focus** will be the guest speaker at our free-to-attend Norwich meeting, starting at 14:00. Free refreshments will be provided (donations are always gratefully received).

Transport Focus undertakes research work. On 1 August 2024 it published its findings on what happened when trains become stranded — in a 70-day period passengers had to be evacuated from 20 trains. It has also studied the use of cash to buy train tickets, finding that this was more common in deprived areas.

It issues a 'Transport User Voice' bulletin each month, with its latest work—see www.transportfocus.org.uk.

A speaker is sought for our meeting in Cambridge on 7 December, at the usual Signal Box Community Centre venue. Mark Walker of Cogitamus, which produces the Calling All Signals podcast, will be our speaker on 22 February 2025 in Bury St Edmunds. Mark will give his insight into some of the challenges that the railway will face as it tries to change.

STANDING UP FOR PASSENGERS — FARES AND SERVICES

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Railfuture East Anglia branch secretary Paul Hollinghurst wrote articles in issues 201 (February 2024) and 202 (June 2024), both concerning unhappiness with the railway industry's treatment of passengers. In the first he covered LNER's widely-criticised abolition of off-peak fares on some flows — it is about to get worse — and in the second he described the 'scenic route' from Cambridge to Stansted by rail replacement bus. Paul was disappointed by the lack of criticism from Transport Focus' new Chief Executive on the fares 'rip-off', but is grateful for their support to bang heads together on the buses — thanks to them Railfuture has succeeded!

LNER's 70-minute flex ticket was introduced at the same time as abolishing off-peak fares on journeys involving London, Newcastle and Edinburgh, on the pretext that the public cannot cope with a choice of four types of fare — their brains frazzle with more than three! It was a 'trial' and we expected nothing to happen until the trial was complete. However, it seems that LNER senior management were angered by the workarounds that were discovered, publicised and offered by staff, meaning that travellers could still buy an off-peak ticket — there is no limit on how many such tickets can be bought — for a fraction more, rather than being forced to pay the exorbitant Anytime ticket if the Advance fares had sold out.

Former BR fares expert Mark Smith, who runs the Man in Seat 61 website, advised people to book to/from Manors station rather than Newcastle, and also Haymarket instead of

The Man in Seat 61 @seatsixtyone · 21 Aug
We now have a universal workaround for LNER fares.
For travel London <> all stations Newcastle-Edinburgh inclusive,
DO NOT book to/from London:
1. Book to/from Finsbury Park
2. In the search results, click 'Filters' then 'Route options'. Under 'Go via' enter Kings Cross.



Waverley. On 20 August LNER rather quietly announced that from 30 September 2024 its trial area will be extended to all stations between Newcastle and those just beyond Edinburgh (the latter means Edinburgh Airport, Gateway, Park and Brunstane). Within an hour, Mark Smith revealed workarounds on X/Twitter. If the journey involves London then book to/from Finsbury Park via King's Cross, and beyond Edinburgh, book to/from Falkirk.

Currently people in East Anglia are unaffected, as off-peak fares are available if joining a train at Peterborough — but when will this 'cat and mouse game' end?

On X/Twitter, many blamed private companies for ripping off the passengers, not realising that a) LNER is state owned and b) no outsourced TOC has got any of the fare revenue since March 2020. The train operators do what the government tells them. The good news is that one woman can stop this nonsense right now. She's Louise Haigh, the new Secretary of State for Transport. Some Railfuture members have already written to their MP calling for the flexible fares to be reinstated.

Meanwhile, Paul had become frustrated trying to convince Greater Anglia and Cross Country to operate direct Cambridge to Stansted buses when the line south of Cambridge was closed (as is happening often for the construction of Cambridge South station). He eventually asked Transport Focus, who admittedly took some time to get anything resolved. They informed him on 12 July 2024 that: "there have been some further exchanges between ourselves and Greater Anglia, in support of your point that the longer journey time to Stansted (outside the hours of the direct service provided by CrossCountry) is far from ideal. I'm pleased to say that between them, Greater Anglia and CrossCountry have now agreed that from the next relevant engineering block they will provide an hourly bus between Cambridge and Stansted on affected weekends. This is inclusive of the hours when CrossCountry do not currently run a train. Staff will be provided on the ground at either end. This will apply through to the May 2025 timetable change, when CrossCountry will revert back to the hourly services previously provided."

STATION ACCESSIBILITY (1) — STEVENAGE

STATION LIFTS AND “ACCESS FOR ALL” — BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Jerry Alderson wrote about the unreliability of station lifts in the last issue of RAIL EAST (issue 202, June 2024), mentioning the lifts at Royston that are (still) fenced off, with constant breakdowns elsewhere. Since publication I've heard station announcements about broken lifts at Meridian Water, Harlow and Stevenage.

Why do railway station lifts break down so often? Why does Network Rail not have an on-call team to fix them immediately?

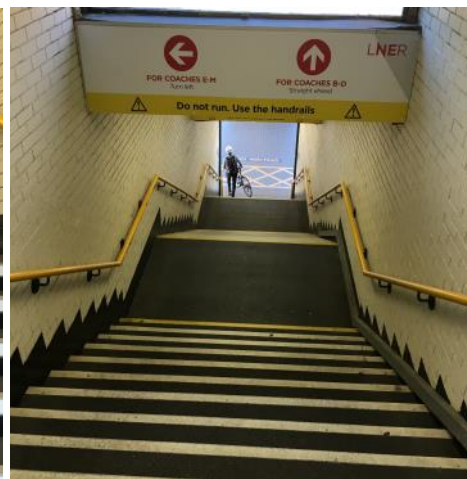
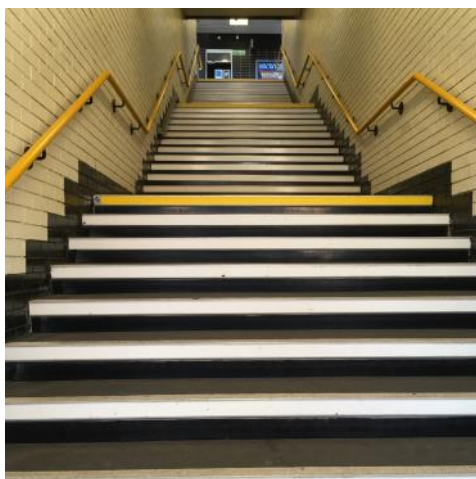


Stevenage station (technically just one station south of the Railfuture East Anglia branch areas, but widely used by branch members) serves a population of nearly 100,000, and as an interchange from regional trains to intercity long-distance trains, serves a wide area. But one or other of the Stevenage lifts has been out of use several times recently. Indeed, today as I write on 6 August 2024 there is a notice on the GN website: “The lifts are out of order between platforms 3, 4 and the footbridge at Stevenage station. Step free access is unavailable at the station between Platforms ...”

Apart from thousands of daily users from the town, many hundreds change trains there. The station can be described as not fit for purpose with a tiny concourse, lifts that are confusingly on the “wrong” side of its ticket barriers and seemingly often broken down. Not a good place to change trains stress-free. As you can appreciate from the photograph, the steps off its platforms seem particularly steep. A hostile place, and not just for our frailer users. Recently a Railfuture member changed trains there. She says: “Three times this year I’ve suffered from lifts being out of order, indeed only the other week, I ended up in tears on Stevenage station! For people like me it is very difficult especially with luggage. I can get up and down the steps (after all, I live in a first-floor flat though there are usually more than the 14 here) though very slowly, which is a thorough nuisance for other passengers but working lifts are essential for those with wheelchairs, prams and large heavy bags. Surely, especially at larger stations, the maintenance staff should include someone capable of repairing lifts? All too often there is too casual an approach as if it doesn’t really matter.”

We put the matter to station managers at Stevenage who were apologetic for the breakdowns there, explaining there were staff on duty to assist on the (intimidating) steps (shown below). But we know they clearly can’t be everywhere on such a busy station. We set off on our journeys in the expectation all will be as it should. The user cannot be blamed for not knowing the situation, even if the situation is explained on websites as many of the more elderly users do not access them.

As our member maintains, it really does matter if the lift situation is clearly not under control. If “Access for All” is meant to mean something, rather than simply be a corporate bit of feelgood, then more urgency in addressing the practical needs and expectations of the travelling public would be good to see!



ACCESSIBILITY (2) — MARKS TEY

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION — BY DEREK MONNERY

Marks Tey is a village situated on the Great Eastern main line about six miles south of Colchester. Until the 1960s, it was a junction station for trains to Cambridge and Bury St. Edmunds via Sudbury — now there's just a single-track branch to Sudbury.

The ticket office is situated on the 'up' platform (1) from where you can get frequent trains to London. This platform is fully accessible. The down platform (2) is reached by a reinforced concrete footbridge installed in 1961 when the main line was electrified as far as Colchester. This bridge is non-compliant with steep steps (photo, below) on both sides making it difficult for people carrying heavy luggage or



pushchairs. For wheelchairs or buggies, the bridge is impassable. The bridge needs replacement as it is deteriorating and approaching life expiry with spalled concrete visible in several places (photo, right — both by Ian Ellis).



Platform 3 faces onto the Sudbury branch line which curves away to travel north and adjoins platform 2 at the Colchester end at the same level.

There is an alternative access to the station via the Colchester end of platform 3 that accesses a car park. This route is potentially dangerous as it involves crossing a live railway using a foot crossing. In reality, it is only at the beginning and end of each day that trains cross the foot crossing, when they return to Colchester for refuelling. It is worth noting that prior to 1986 Sudbury branch trains ran between Colchester Town (then known as St. Botolphs) and Sudbury. This foot crossing is one of the principal reasons why the service remains truncated at Marks Tey.

Since the main line was electrified, there has been a massive increase in population in East Anglia. What was a rural backwater in the 1960s is now a busy commuting area. In the ORR passenger footfall statistics from 2023, the station registered over 400,000 individual users, an increase of a third over the previous year.

Access to platforms 2 and 3 was not a problem when the railway employed porters to assist with heavy luggage. In those days, people who had substantial disabilities simply did not travel, because travel was too difficult to contemplate. Today, it's different. People who need to use wheelchairs or buggies rightly expect to be able to travel. Whilst platform 1 has ramped access direct from the ticket office, the only accessible route to platforms 2 and 3 is via a narrow road overbridge (without pavements), and then through the down car park and the dangerous rail crossing to the platforms. The route is long (about 250m), difficult and hazardous.

How do these accessibility issues affect rail passengers? Those originating from Sudbury, Bures and Chapel & Wakes Colne and bound for Chelmsford or London must either use the existing footbridge or the convoluted route via the overbridge (by which time the connecting train would have left). Passengers in the reverse direction have a simple cross platform interchange at Marks Tey to the Sudbury branch train, but those leaving the station have the same accessibility issues.

Greater Anglia has repeatedly requested the government to fund a new accessible bridge to replace the existing 1960s footbridge, but each time has been turned down due to the projected cost. In the latest round of bidding under the Access for All programme, Marks Tey was one of a number of GA stations whose bid was unsuccessful. As a result, Marks Tey is currently the least accessible station in the whole of the Greater Anglia network. Meanwhile, the existing footbridge continues to deteriorate and Sudbury remains cut off for those with disabilities. Will the new government change policies for funding urgently needed improvements?

A NEW BROOM AND A PLAN FOR FREIGHT

BY PHIL SMART

The general election of 2024 probably produced two overriding emotions in most of us. Firstly, surprise at its timing. We had grown used to the idea that it would be held sometime in the second half of the year but were not exactly expecting the first available Thursday in July. The second emotion was probably one of relief when it was all over. The six-week campaign felt a lot longer somehow!

The new government has pledged to 'hit the ground running' and perhaps we should have expected the new Secretary of State for Transport to be Louise Haigh, who was the shadow transport minister. This should be welcomed, as knowledge accumulated in the shadow role gives her a head start in commanding her departmental brief. Early statements from her sound positive. She has set out five key priorities:

- Improving performance on the railways and driving forward rail reform
- Improving bus services and growing usage across the country
- Transforming infrastructure to work for the whole country
- Delivering greener transport
- Better integration of transport networks

Her call to action — as our cover image reminds us — is *to move fast and fix things*.

A surprise appointment

But it was the appointment of the Minister of State for Rail that came as a surprise to many. None other than Lord (and Sir) Peter Hendy of Richmond Hill, the (now former) Chair of Network Rail. Several Railfuture members will point to 1959 when Ernest Marples — part owner of a road construction firm — was appointed as the Transport Minister and, in turn, appointed Richard Beeching whose *Reshaping our Railways* report led to many station and line closures that Railfuture has spent much campaigning effort trying to reverse. Some among us retain a certain cynicism that transport policy ever since has all been about roads and that rail gets a raw deal.

Sixty-five years on and it feels very different, and this appointment sends out a different message. Previous ministerial appointments have often been people who were on the way up or down the government promotion ladder, but not this time. Lord Hendy is not going to find himself reshuffled into the education ministry or given a role in the Northern Ireland office. This is a minister who is going to know more about railways than the civil servants who are there to advise him! If we want someone in government who is going to speak up for rail and go in to bat against the Treasury, this is the guy you want in your team.

So, what are the new government's plans for rail?

In late April 2024 the Labour Party issued its document *Getting Britain Moving; Labour's plans to fix Britain's Railways* (see front cover image on page 3). Inevitably, there was intense media interest in what it means for passengers. What would replace franchising? Would everything be nationalised? And how? As widely predicted, the plan to renationalise will be gradual, bringing each passenger contract into public ownership as its term expires. This may raise some interesting issues around operator specific ticketing and will be one to watch. As will the role of open-access operators who, we are assured, will continue 'subject to capacity'.

A plan for freight too

Of particular interest to East Anglia, with the dominant flows of freight from the port of Felixstowe, are the plans for getting more freight on rail. While the passenger railway dominated much of the document, it was reassuring that the word freight appeared 35 times, and its authors had been



Phil Smart recently speaking at a conference

listening to what the rail freight community has been saying in recent years.

In particular, we see many references to the economic value of rail freight — its efficiency for moving large volumes, its contribution to economic growth, its environmental benefits both in terms of reduced carbon emissions and better air quality, as well as its role in reducing congestion on the road network.

The document makes clear that there is no intention to nationalise rail freight, and the delivery of freight operations on the network will remain in the private sector. With the risk on costs of staff, locomotives and wagons staying outside the public purse this seems a pragmatic approach. We are told that the unified railway will be tasked with reducing complexity for freight customers, which we are sure no-one will want to argue with. The *Williams Review* is a recurring theme throughout the paper and informs the approach to freight where Great British Railways will be responsible for the management of freight contracts together with a statutory duty to promote the use of rail freight. The growth target remains and will be set by the Secretary of State with no figure put on it, though is likely to be at least as challenging as the current '75% more by 2050', set by the previous administration.

The, already established, central freight team within Great British Railways is to remain as the single point of contact for promoting freight growth throughout the organisation and we are promised safeguards to ensure that freight operators continue to have fair access to the network with regulations and appeals remaining with the Office of Rail and Road.

You wait for ages and then.....

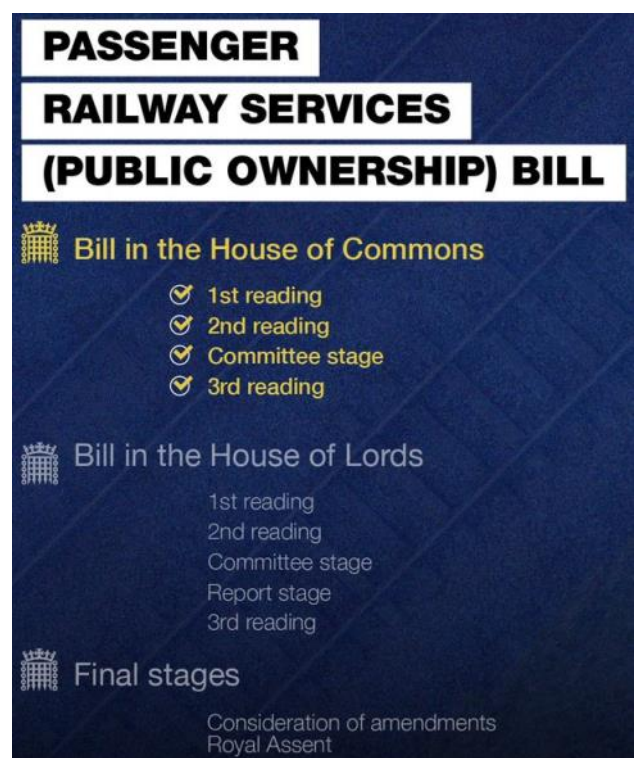
The King's Speech contains not one but **three** railway bills!

- The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill
- The Railways Bill — this will establish Great British Railways (GBR)
- High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill

There is also the *Planning and Infrastructure Bill*, with reforms aimed at helping to increase capacity and efficiency for the freight industry by aligning major project development with transport strategy.

On the evening of 3 September, the first bill was passed in the Commons (schedule, right) and needs to progress in advance of the remaining legislation in order to be able to begin the process of bringing the train contracts into public ownership. Current legislation, dating back to 1993, only allows 'failing' franchises to be taken over by the Operator of Last Resort. The main bill is expected to set up Great British Railways and associated regulatory matters. This is where we will find out how they intend to promote rail freight and safeguard its access rights.

The third bill is designed to deal with what was to have been a section of HS2 and how it might be repurposed for the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) project. Many industry commentators suggest that the NPR business case is unlikely to justify major engineering works and so the resurrection of HS2 in some form remains a possibility.



Further reading from Railfuture: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1913-Agenda-for-Growth>.

BRANDON STATION RESTORATION EDGES FORWARD

BY PETER WAKEFIELD (ALL PHOTOS BY AUTHOR)

In RAIL EAST issue 194, June 2022, we compared Brandon's station building with the lovely restoration of Wickham Market's station building, stating "there have been some disastrous losses too. British Rail demolished the main part of the lovely Newmarket station buildings and other parts were sold on. Brandon station's main buildings on the down line survive but were imminently in danger of being demolished by Greater Anglia (GA) to provide a better user environment. Local people cherish their historical (and often historic) buildings however dilapidated they have become (Brandon stationmaster's house, right), so at the last minute a group of them got the building listed. Obviously, the train operator is annoyed, frustrated. But something must be done to revive the building for future generations of the local community. Railfuture is encouraging all parties to forget past arguments and work together to obtain the necessary funding from as many places as possible."



Two years on from that statement, we are pleased that things are at last moving forward, parties have come together, as on the morning of Friday 14 June 2024 the Railway Heritage Trust (RHT) organised a public meeting at Brandon's St. Peter's Church Hall. I attended on behalf of Railfuture along with 100 townspeople plus about 15 others at the "top table" doing the presentation. These included Greater Anglia (GA), RHT, SAVE Britain's Heritage, Historic Suffolk, West Suffolk DC, Friends of Brandon Station, Breckland DC, Brandon Town Council. Representatives from each organisation spoke to the meeting.

The tone of the those representing us has certainly changed to the positive, with each organisation pledging to resolve the dilemma the building and GA found themselves in. Tim Hedley Wood from RHT revealed that the 1845 station building is indeed very significant architecturally as it was designed by John Thomas, an important sculptor who has many pieces of work scattered about the Houses of Parliament. He also produced the lions guarding the railway bridge over the Menai Straits and the very significant Somerleyton Hall in East Suffolk. Brandon station is thus an important piece of national architecture... who knew!



The Committee

The upshot of the meeting was that after an intensive Q&A session chaired very ably by the Chair of the Town Council, Cllr David Palmer, Piers Hart of Historic Suffolk agreed to chair a committee to produce a list of uses for any restored building and find funding sources for the restoration. Simone Bailey of GA put the likely cost at up to £4m. The committee will have representatives from Brandon Town Council, GA, RHT, SAVE, West Suffolk DC and Friends of Brandon station. To voice the interest of the users of Brandon station, we wish Railfuture East Anglia to be represented.



A model on display of how the restored station building could look

What purpose the finished restoration?

In issue 194 we said: “We have plenty of good examples of quality repurposing to get inspiration from — so any ideas for the repurposing of Brandon station building will be gratefully received. Is anybody out there with ideas of where funding may come from? And bearing in mind that any refurbished building would have to generate funding for future upkeep, suggestions include being a heritage centre for Breckland, a café, meeting rooms for local groups, cycle hire, offices for local companies.” Many of the ideas put forward by audience members during the Q&A session replicated those above. Brandon is located in the midst of the Breckland landscapes, the forests, the Neolithic flint mines at Grime’s Graves, the bird reserves — something to do with tourism would perhaps be the best use. A Youth Hostel would fit well with the above and of course, the excellent train service.

NORFOLK RAIL PROSPECTUS — BY IAN COUZENS

WARM WORDS BUT A COMMITMENT TO DO NOT VERY MUCH

In July 2024 the draft Norfolk Rail Prospectus was put to Norfolk County Council’s (NCC) Infrastructure Committee for consideration. It sets out NCC’s aspirations for rail services within the county over the next 10 years or so. Much is uncontroversial and aspires to many actions that we can all sign up to. Where the Prospectus is weak is in the kind of improvements that NCC may be expected to take a lead on, such as new stations. The prospectus does contain a useful summary however of priorities with projected timescales. The summary reaffirms support for Ely and Trowse junction improvements, regular “Norwich in 90” services throughout the day and extension of East West rail services to Norwich, all of which we would expect. It is also good to see strong reference to making all our stations fully accessible. There are some priorities listed however which deserve further comment.

Half Hourly Frequencies: The summary lists half-hourly services as a priority for Norwich to Cambridge and for the King’s Lynn to Cambridge routes. However, achieving this should be highlighted as key aims on *all* the county’s railways (which NCC does want to see) as more frequent services are fundamental to a growing railway. NCC also needs to consider how it can help to achieve these aims.

Feasibility of new stations: The Prospectus states “Investigate feasibility of new stations at selected proposed locations, including Broadland Business Park Norwich”. But in the main report NCC has reservations or caveats of some kind on every station proposal, even including its own preferred candidate of Broadland Business Park. The final draft should not prejudice individual stations within the report. For instance Salhouse station, which requires substantial work to make it fit for purpose for the North Rackheath Development, is not mentioned but certainly needs to be.

Dereham to Wymondham: Long term (10+ years) NCC wants to see Dereham to Wymondham as a mainstream passenger line. However, the main prospectus states “The County Council is happy to explore the feasibility of this line further if the opportunity arises and is supported by the current private operators.” Although support for the heritage railway is clearly needed, NCC’s wording is vague and commits the council to do nothing. It should commit to an outline feasibility at least.

NCC needs to be more proactive in supporting rail. Investing modest resources in infrastructure projects (initially just feasibility studies) could lever investment in from other sources. We’ve been lucky that Greater Anglia’s complete fleet renewal has delivered a high performing and superior service, but NCC needs to work harder to make the railway yet more accessible and attractive for its residents to use. Devon County Council and its working relationship with Great Western has shown that this can be done with new stations, reopened lines and more frequent services.

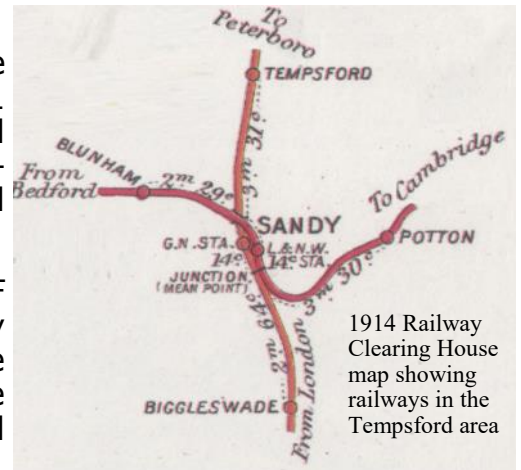
The next stage for the Prospectus will be to go to public consultation in September 2024 before coming back for further examination by the Infrastructure Committee and then approval by the cabinet early next year. Please look out for the consultation on the council website. Railfuture will continue its efforts to try and improve NCC’s own commitment and enthusiasm for rail and for this commitment to come across more strongly in its Rail Prospectus.

TEMPSFORD STATION – PAST & PRESENT & FUTURE

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Tempsford Bedfordshire is a station name we'll have to get used to ... again. "Again" because between 1 January 1863 and 5 November 1956 a station existed on what we now know as the East Coast Mainline – between St Neots and Sandy stations and located 76.4 km from London King's Cross.

The key to its future is probably the former RAF Tempsford, a large area of brownfield land owned by the Wellcome Trust. The former RAF Tempsford base is in the parish of Everton, but as its access came from the road from Tempsford Station, it was named after Tempsford.



Back to the Railfuture

Tempsford, a village 4 km north of Sandy, 29 km west of Cambridge, is recorded as being populated by 604 people in the 2021 census. The village is an ancient settlement, being mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (as "Temsford"). That is not however why a station is being proposed by East West Rail.

Future Tempsford is where the proposed new East West Rail line (EWR) between Bedford and Cambridge will cross above the East Coast Mainline (ECML) so obviously a logical site for EWR to propose an interchange station between these two nationally strategic routes. The old Tempsford station site can slumber on as EWR proposes a new site some 1.5 km to the north. For future train services from Tempsford, EWR is proposing four trains per hour to Cambridge and Bedford connecting with at least two trains per hour from Tempsford to Huntingdon, Peterborough, Biggleswade, Hitchin, Stevenage. There will be a lot of interchanging passengers each hour.



Location, Location, Location

Other factors now kick in. As we've written in every recent issue of RAIL EAST, Cambridge is a place of huge 'knowledge-based Life Sciences' industrial growth with housing development to match – but international competition is fierce. Much more growth is needed to truly compete with Boston Massachusetts and California.

Geographers and economists have noted Tempsford is at the intersection of two very important railways as well as that of the A1/A428 trunk roads nearby. For example, Kane Emerson, Head of Housing Research at YIMBY Alliance and Dr Samuel Hughes, research fellow at the University of Oxford, focussing on housing and planning, have just (July 2024) produced a challenging paper, "New Towns for a New Britain: Where Britain's next new town should be" for the think-tank UK Day One, noting:

"Nothing is more important for the success of new towns than their location. New towns need excellent rail links into existing cities that have suppressed demand. The Government could create such a new town at the intersection of the East Coast Main Line and the future East-West Rail, standing on the best greenfield site in England within a short rail journey of Oxford, Cambridge and London." (<https://ukdayone.org/briefings/new-towns-for-a-new-britain-where-britain-s-next-new-town-should-be>)

In their judgment the Tempsford New Town could in time become a major city with homes for 250,000-350,000 people, larger than Oxford or Cambridge and comparable to the largest postwar New Towns. It could also be a major employment centre, especially in life sciences, "helping to relieve the acute shortages of laboratory space in Oxford, Cambridge and London."

Others have noted that to fit in a compact area available, the settlement would probably have to be very high density, unlike anything tried in the UK. Only high quality, high-capacity railways running east - west and north - south can make it work and everywhere within it just a shortish walk to the station.

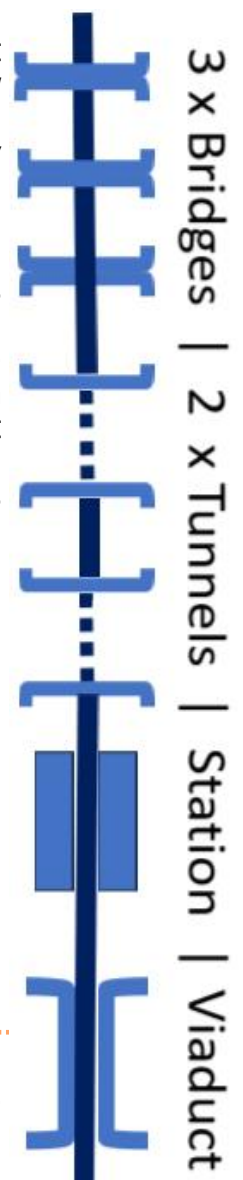
[As an aside, we must note that Railfuture of course does no such proposing – but if the government agrees with this and other think-tank proposals for this site, then we say it must be rail served to Cambridge and Bedford as well as to London and Peterborough and beyond. And any Tempsford station should not rule out a station in east St Neots, as articles in RAIL EAST have previously advocated.]

The Long and Winding Road to DCO shortened?

In RAIL EAST issue 202, page 15, we worried about "A Long Winding Road – East West Rail and its application for a development consent order". However, Dr Hughes and Mr Emerson note that "the new government is not bound by the same constraints as previous actors. Labour will have the strongest pro-building mandate of any government since Attlee. It can simply ask Parliament to pass a hybrid bill giving it the powers ... with focus, a hybrid bill could be passed in a year. Fixing the Bottleneck (Welwyn Viaduct / tunnels / bridges) and the EWR could be done within four years. The Tempsford area has surplus road capacity, so work on the New Town could be parallel-tracked in the meantime. The first new residents could be riding the first new trains by the end of this Parliament." They maintain that "a hybrid bill would completely bypass the convoluted Development Consent Order (DCO) process and is essentially immune to judicial review. It would be dealt with by an ad hoc committee, so it requires minimal Parliamentary time. Drafting can be accelerated by instructing one of the specialist firms retained by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to work on it, and an expedited passage through Parliament should then be enabled through an amendment to Standing Orders. With focus, the entire process could be completed in eighteen months, by comparison to the six years for a DCO, and with almost none of the risk of legal challenge attendant on the DCO process."

Their proposal to construct a New Town/City at the intersection of the EWR/ECML certainly adds additional substance to the long-standing case for the new railway based on its potential to promote significant economic growth. We will watch with interest where the idea goes as the new government starts tackling its manifesto commitments to economic expansion and bold new plans for housing.

The 'Welwyn Bottleneck' diagram, on the right above, shows the seven two-track constraints from top (north) to bottom (south). These are Heath Road overbridge, Mardley Hill overbridge, Robbery Bottom Lane underbridge, two tunnels, Welwyn North station and Digswell Viaduct.



MANNINGTREE LEVEL CROSSING – NO EASY SOLUTIONS

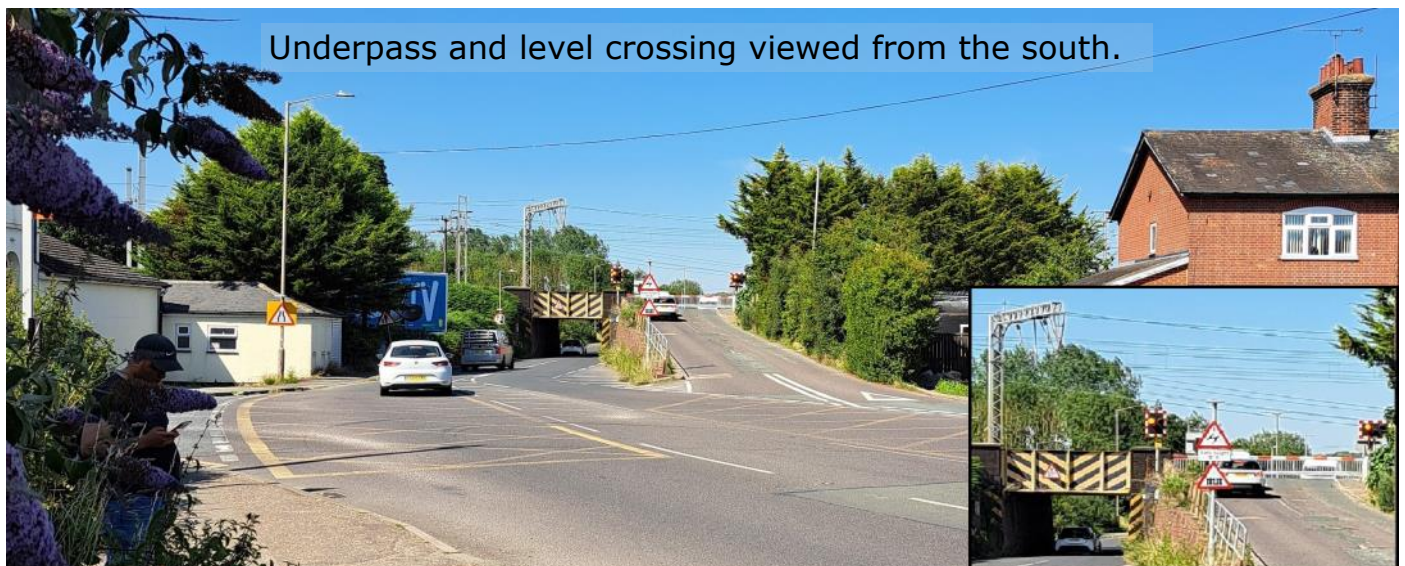
BY DEREK MONNERY

The author is chair of the Essex Rail Users Federation.

Many RAIL EAST readers will recall the notorious level crossing and very low underpass at Ely station that used to cause long tailbacks of traffic until a flyover bypassing the crossing was opened in 2018 (see front cover of issue 180). A similar crossing and bridge remains on the A137 at Manningtree station on the London to Norwich main line, which causes long traffic jams at peak periods. Despite numerous attempts over the years to get the crossing replaced or bypassed, nothing has been done. The crossing layout remains very similar to what it was like when the line was built over 150 years ago, without any firm plans to do anything about the problem.

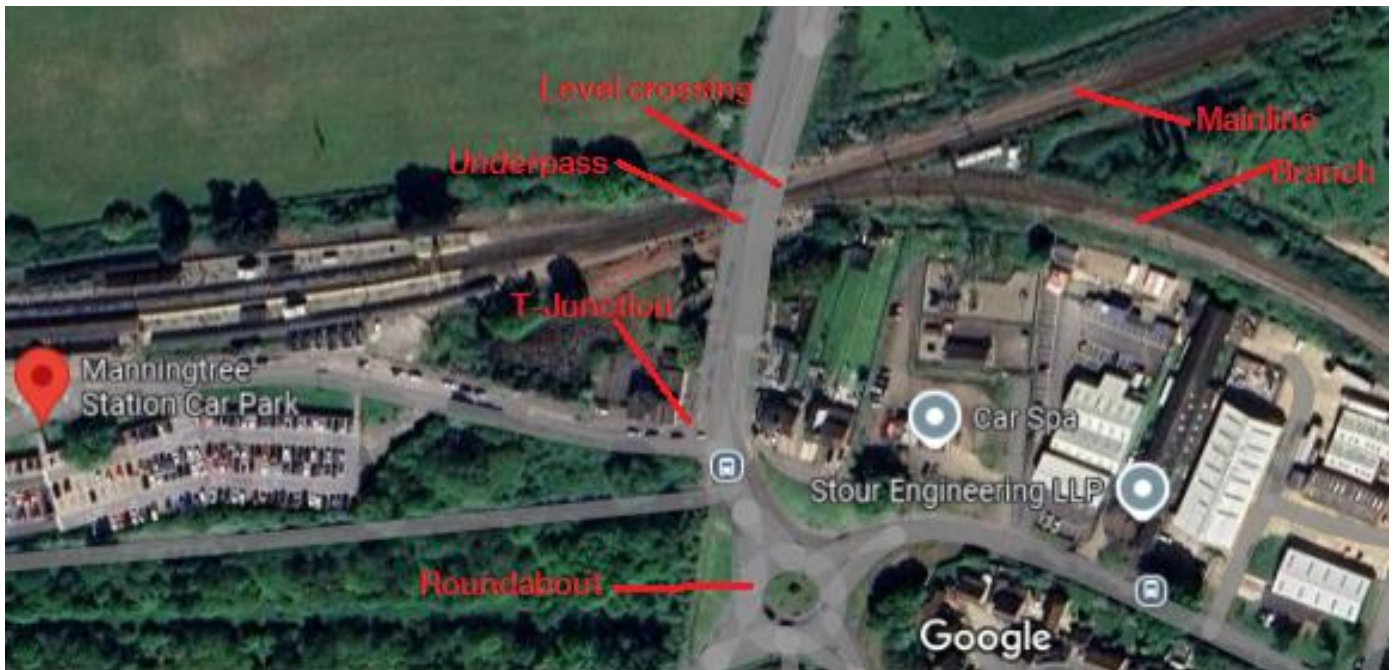
As in so many communities, the situation at Manningtree has been exacerbated by massive growth in rail and road traffic in the area. During the day there are three passenger trains each hour on the main line in both directions, plus the Harwich branch trains entering and leaving the bay platform, plus one hourly freight train both ways. Extra trains run in the morning and evening peak periods. The crossing barriers therefore need to be down for about 30 minutes of each hour. The underpass is narrow and has a low headroom, only suitable for cars or light vans, and is reduced to a single lane directly under the bridge with priority given to southbound traffic. On a normal day, queues of up to a mile can occur northbound during both the morning and evening rush hours.

The crossing has a strategic position, as the A137 is the only crossing of the River Stour east of the A12 at Dedham. So, if the crossing is blocked, the only alternative route is a 10-mile diversion via the A12. Conversely, if the A12 is blocked, the A137 Colchester to Ipswich road is the default diversionary route for through traffic. When that happens the whole area around the crossing becomes gridlocked with traffic, because the level crossing is closed for so much of the time. Politicians have decided that a traffic light solution on the underpass would work. However, the local consensus is that this would only make matters worse, because the fundamental issue is the constriction caused by the underpass itself.



Underpass and level crossing viewed from the south.

It is the complexity of the location that makes solving this problem so difficult. As the Google satellite image (next page) indicates, to the south is a traffic roundabout and a "T" junction that serves the only access route to the station. To the west is Manningtree station, which has about 1,500 daily users. To the north is an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), enforced by an active pressure group, the Dedham Vale Society. To the east, the branch line to Harwich curves away. At this point a major electrical feeder station is situated that provides power to all the overhead wires in the area.



What is needed is a new bypass route that takes traffic away from the existing road layout completely, similar in concept to the Ely flyover. If the crossing were reconstructed at the existing location, it would require closure of the A137 for several months with weekend closures of the railway, neither of which would be attractive. A flyover solution would be theoretically possible but unacceptable, as this would be visible for miles around and certainly not acceptable in an AONB. Therefore, the only possible solution is to go under the railway.

Having lived in the area for forty years, and as a construction industry professional, this challenging and intractable problem has been on my mind for many years. My suggestion would be to construct a new bypass road avoiding the existing route completely, with a thrust-bored tunnel under the station platforms that could be constructed from open ground on the north side. This plan would minimise closures of both the A137 road and the railway, with the road able to be constructed largely away from existing traffic routes.

Of course, such a major civil engineering scheme would cost serious money, maybe as much as £100 million in today's money. But the economic benefits to the area would also be huge, with a dangerous level crossing and constraint on road and rail traffic removed, and accessibility to the Tendring peninsula, especially the expanding port at Harwich International Port, much improved. The Tendring area has several pockets of deprivation that would benefit from the improved business opportunities that this upgrade would bring.

The political will to drive a permanent solution to the crossing is further complicated by the crossing being situated in Essex but only half a kilometre from the Suffolk border. About half of the users of Manningtree station live in Suffolk, some from as far away as Woodbridge or Aldeburgh. With so many interested parties, it has proved difficult to find a co-ordinator to drive a scheme forward and obtain the funding needed to build a bypass. With the availability of funding so limited, it is all too easy to push the problem into the long grass for future generations to address.

FARES WITH RAILCARDS RISE BY 1% IN SEPTEMBER

On 1 September the rail industry announced that from 15 September 2024 the rail card discount would be reduced from 34% to 33.4% — a 0.6 percentage points reduction. A £100 fare would change from £66 to £66.66 — a 1% increase. The BBC quoted Railfuture: "While this represents a very tiny increase in fares for some passengers, it's a step in the wrong direction. As the slogan goes, every little helps, so why risk irritating passengers for a few pence?"

NEW TICKETING OPTIONS CONTINUE TO BE ROLLED OUT

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Much of this issue has, unsurprisingly, covered the new government's plans. Labour's *Getting Britain Moving* document (referenced on pages 3 and 8) includes an aim to "simplify the ticketing system and drive innovation across the network, replacing the current multitude of platforms and myriad array of fares, discounts and ticket types and maximising passenger growth." It also promises to "ensure that ticketing innovations like automatic compensation, digital pay-as-you-go and digital season ticketing are rolled out across the whole network."

Whilst the simplification of rail fares has been mired in delays, because of system-wide issues, the modernisation of ticketing (and refunds) has not only been planned but introduced and improved over the last two decades with a series of innovations.

Plastic smartcards have been in use on transport systems in Britain for two decades, first in London with Oyster for season tickets, and then pay as you go (PAYG). Transport for London (TfL) developed the contactless system enabling bank cards to be used for PAYG as well. Passengers love this facility in cities, where they know that the cost per day is going to be limited. TfL offers both daily and weekly caps.

Automatic Delay Repay

People travelling on long-distance operators such as LNER may have clicked on its automatic Delay Repay option, although this only really works properly if the end-to-end journey is on LNER and the delay is at least 30 minutes. However, smartcards can be much more precise. London-to-Southend operator c2c has been a pioneer in automatic Delay Repay offering 3p per full minute delay, starting from two minutes. It means that a three-minute delay would be 6p, then 9p if four minutes and so on.

Digital season tickets

Greater Anglia has successfully promoted plastic smartcards for several years, calling them "the smarter way to travel". It says that season tickets on paper cards are now a minority. Passengers prefer them to paper season tickets which often get damaged during their life whilst being read by the automated ticket gates (ATGs). They can also be read more quickly.

Some people don't want to carry yet rather item in their wallet. They are happy to use a smartphone for nearly everything.

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) has just launched barcode 'sTickets' on smartphones for season tickets. It has taken a long time to deliver because of fears that one season ticket, which offers infinite travel within a period, could be used by several people who copy it. The solution has been to generate a unique bar code for each journey using a single smartphone (the app can be reinstalled on a new device).

Rail Business Daily @RailDaily · 5 Sep 2024

Commuters returning from the summer break can now for the first time on [@GNRailUK](#), [@SouthernRailUK](#), [@TLRailUK](#) and [@GatwickExpress](#) services buy and store weekly, monthly and annual season tickets as barcode sTickets on their smartphones.



news.railbusinessdaily.com

Digital season tickets can now be bought in a flash on new GTR apps | R...

Digital flexi-seasons — electronic carnet

RAIL EAST issue 191 (September 2021) covered the post-COVID digital flexi-season ticket in detail. It is just a 28-day carnet that works on a smartcard or smartphone.

Digital pay as you go

The challenge with PAYG has been use over a wider area. Will people have the funds to pay for a long-distance journey? What happens if they fail to touch in and out properly? So far, it has only been used for commuter-style journeys in Britain.

Govia Thameslink Railway, which operates Great Northern and Thameslink trains in East Anglia, uses a smartcard called 'The Key'. This dates back to 2007, initially being used by buses. Rollout of smartcard readers meant that by 2019 it could be used at 255 stations.



In 2014, GTR introduced its 'keyGo' product, which is stored on the 'The Key' smartcard. Initially it worked on a balance and the traveller had to top up the smartcard to have credit. However, since 2018 the card has been linked to a bank card, so it operates much more like contactless on TfL, where a payment is collected at the end of the day for the total cost of that day's travel, which may include connecting buses, depending on the area. Like Oyster (but not TfL contactless), railcards can be added to the smartcard. Because both season tickets and PAYG are stored on the same smartcard, the user will only be charged the excess if only part of travel that day is covered by the season.

In April 2024 GTR launched a form of Monday (04:30)-Monday (04:29) weekly price capping. Since TfL PAYG operates a zonal fare system, it is easy to aggregate the cost of journeys and cap them. But the national railway doesn't have zones — it works on point-to-point journeys, each of which has its own fare. GTR looks at the journeys undertaken that week to see if they could have been covered by a weekly season that is cheaper than the aggregated fares, and then use that price instead. This is simple if all of your journeys are between the same two points. Suppose you travel to King's Cross at peak time twice from Royston and twice from Letchworth Garden City (trains do not have to stop at a station when using a season ticket). The price difference is minimal, but would it charge a) the £150.10 Royston season, b) £151 for a £132.20 Letchworth season plus £18.80 for two Anytime Day Returns for Royston to Letchworth or c) four Anytime Day Returns for £152.60 (two at £44.10 and two at £32.20)? As Harry Hill would say: "there's only one way to find out!"

Multi-operator PAYG journeys

Smartcard readers are gradually being added across the network. However, use is limited not just by journey distance but also the train operator that manages a station. GTR has been innovating but it is annoying that its PAYG cannot be used in the great technology-innovation city of Cambridge. It is not that GTR's cards won't work on the smartcard readers at Greater Anglia stations, but that the back-office systems that calculate fares do not share the necessary data. It means that, for example, people living in Royston and working in Cambridge cannot use PAYG.

Great British Railways (GBR) should hopefully break down the fragmentation that causes passengers so much grief, not just for PAYG but also when trying to claim Delay Repay for a journey that involved more than one train operator and a passenger can end up being passed from pillar to post.

Paper tickets with QR codes

The magnetic stripe ticket needs to be got rid of as soon as possible, not just because they are non-recyclable (as they are made from more than one material). Their continued use is holding back the rail industry, badly. It has only 72 bits of data (nine bytes) to store any journey across the whole of the network in Britain and that has to include the origin, destination, ticket type, rail card use and validity date range, plus recording the last read time to prevent it being handed to someone else. This limit prevents the introduction of new offers — potentially bespoke to a person.

The rail industry is already using recyclable paper tickets with a QR code rather than a mag stripe (e.g. those issued at Cambridge North station). The image is actually a link to a website with potentially a long list of parameters (up to 31kB of data – for version 40 it is 177 squared – more than 3,000 times as much data for a large QR code). A plastic smart card uses a chip so it has almost limitless possibilities.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUTING: IT SHOULD BE THE NORM, NOT THE EXCEPTION

BY TRACEY VICKERS

How Essex County Council is working with employers to encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport

First, some good news when it comes to sustainable commuting. The recently published Consumer Census 2024 report by Mobilityways revealed that driving alone has seen a decrease from 43% to 38% over the last 12 months. The study, which surveyed 10,325 commuters over the last year, also revealed that the number of bus commuters rose from 8% to 10% in the same period – perhaps explained by the £2 flat fare introduced by the previous government in January 2022. With commuting currently accounting for 18 billion kg of CO² emissions per year – 25% of overall transport emissions in the UK – both insights have to be seen as a positive step towards us achieving carbon net zero.



So how did rail commuting fare? Although there appears to have been an increase in rail use for leisure, when it comes to commuting there was a slight decrease of 1% from 10% to 9% of all journeys. What's not clear is why, but surely the cost-of-living crisis must have something to do with it.

What is evident however is that the opportunity to cut emissions and encourage sustainable travel is huge. And it's all about giving people a choice in how they travel, both for work and for leisure.

At Essex County Council, we want to see sustainable commuting as the norm, not the exception. This is why our Safer, Greener, Healthier team are installing new infrastructure – for walking, cycling and wheeling, improved junctions, new crossings and much more – to ensure our streets are safe for those who choose to travel sustainably. Not only does this benefit those commuters who only walk or cycle, but also commuters who blend their journeys – cycling or walking for example to the station and then hopping onto the train to reach their place of work.



And for those commuters who have no choice but to drive, we're freeing up the road network. Again, the word *choice* here.

The same survey revealed that 50% of employees said that they would like more support from their employer to help them commute sustainably. And this is where our Smarter Travel for Essex Network (STEN) comes into play.

Working closely with Essex employers with 50 or more members of staff, the benefits of encouraging them to commute sustainably are wide-ranging: from attracting and retaining employees, having a happier and healthier (and ultimately more productive) workforce, to reducing on-site congestion, not only air but noise pollution too – all seem to be popular reasons for an employer to get involved with sustainable travel planning.

Why STEN?

- Increase travel choices to your site
- Reduce the cost of and demand for parking
- Attract and retain employees
- Reduce on-site congestion, air, and noise pollution
- Improve visitor/delivery access
- A healthier, happier, and more productive workforce
- Corporate Social Responsibility.

The STEN team work closely with employers, helping them to plan and run annual travel-to-work surveys which identify how staff are currently commuting and where there are opportunities to introduce incentives. Members of STEN also receive unlimited support, advice and guidance via phone and email. They can also apply for national travel plan accreditation facilitated by <https://modeshiftstars.org/business/> — an online travel

planning toolkit that creates, develops and supports travel plans — and the STEN team will guide them through the process one step at a time.

But don't just take our word for it. One of our STEN member organisations is Ford Motor Company located in Basildon, the European Headquarters for Commercial Vehicle business and a hub for engineering, marketing, sales and many other functions. Working as part of STEN has helped Ford identify employees' modes of travel to site and allowed them to develop plans for more sustainable travel and cement existing ideas to improve facilities on site. Embracing active travel or alternative modes of transport is an integral part of Ford's broader health, wellbeing and sustainability goals.

Mid & South Essex NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest employers in Essex with around 16,000 staff to manage healthcare services for over 1.2 million people. Working as part of STEN has helped them better understand travel movements to and from their hospitals so they can develop plans that help get staff safely to work on time and ensure that patients arrive stress free for their appointments.

"It's a huge task and an ongoing process. STEN is helping us make sense of the complexity and supporting us to develop more sustainable travel to our busy sites" says Chris Webb, sustainability coordinator.

With more and more of us returning to office-based working and new graduates demanding better, employers need to act now.

For more details about the Smarter Travel for Essex Network, email the travelplanteam@essex.gov.uk or find out more at:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/smarter-travel-for-essex>
- <https://letstalkessexsustainabletravel.co.uk>.

Tracey Vickers is Head of Sustainable Transport at Essex County Council

ANNIVERSARIES...

RAIL EAST has devoted space in recent issues to a number of significant railway milestones in East Anglia — we welcome contributions from readers. Most recently, we brought you Phil Smart's front-line account of the genesis of the Bacon Factory Chord in Ipswich on the occasion of its tenth anniversary.

In the current issue we are turning our attention to a much older milestone, the 175th anniversary of the opening of the Stour Valley, now Gainsborough, line from Marks Tey to Sudbury. Read a report on the celebrations on the next page.

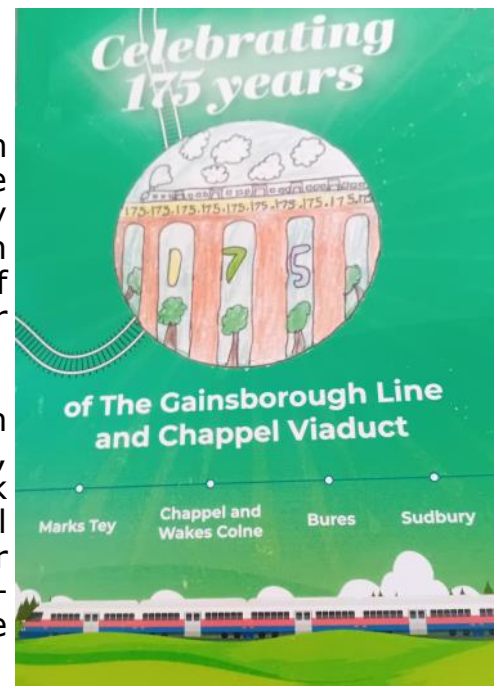


A BUSY ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND

BY JAYNE SUMNER (PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY AUTHOR)

What a weekend of celebrations for the 175th anniversary of the Gainsborough Line which took place on 29 and 30 June 2024. The opening ceremony involved speeches from the Mayor of Colchester, High Steward of Colchester, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Essex and Alan Neville, Partnerships & Stakeholder manager at Greater Anglia.

Saturday started with a walk from Marks Tey Station to Chappel and Wakes Colne. Led by Hugh Turner, over 40 people turned up for a very enjoyable walk and it ended up in the pub. In the afternoon Nathaniel Dodd presented a talk about the history of the Stour Valley and Gainsborough Lines. In the evening the Old-Time Music Hall Train took place with over 80 people booked on the train. It was good old singalong.



Banner on the railing at Bures station

South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership helped pull it together and funded many of the initiatives, including the wooden train planter which now proudly sits on the platform. The reproduced artwork is now displayed at Chappel and Wakes Colne Station and Bures Station. Pupils from local primary schools had a trip on the train, one to the museum at Wakes Colne and another to Gainsborough House in a run up to the celebrations, learning about how the railway and Chappel viaduct were built. Greater Anglia provided free travel and Essex and South Suffolk CRP funded a workshop at Gainsborough House.

The weather was kind to us and the atmosphere was buzzing — as the photo on the right shows!

The author is Partnerships Manager for the Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership.

On both Saturday and Sunday the East Anglian Railway Museum at Wakes Colne hosted a fun weekend with steam & diesel train rides from the museum, plus Wladyslaw Mirecki's art exhibition – his fine series of watercolour studies of the celebrated Chappel viaduct – and children's paintings, a picnic and family activities. There were two further line-related historical lectures on Sunday at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury.

The whole event was organised and led by Kath Beck, the station adopter from Chappel and Wakes Colne. Essex and

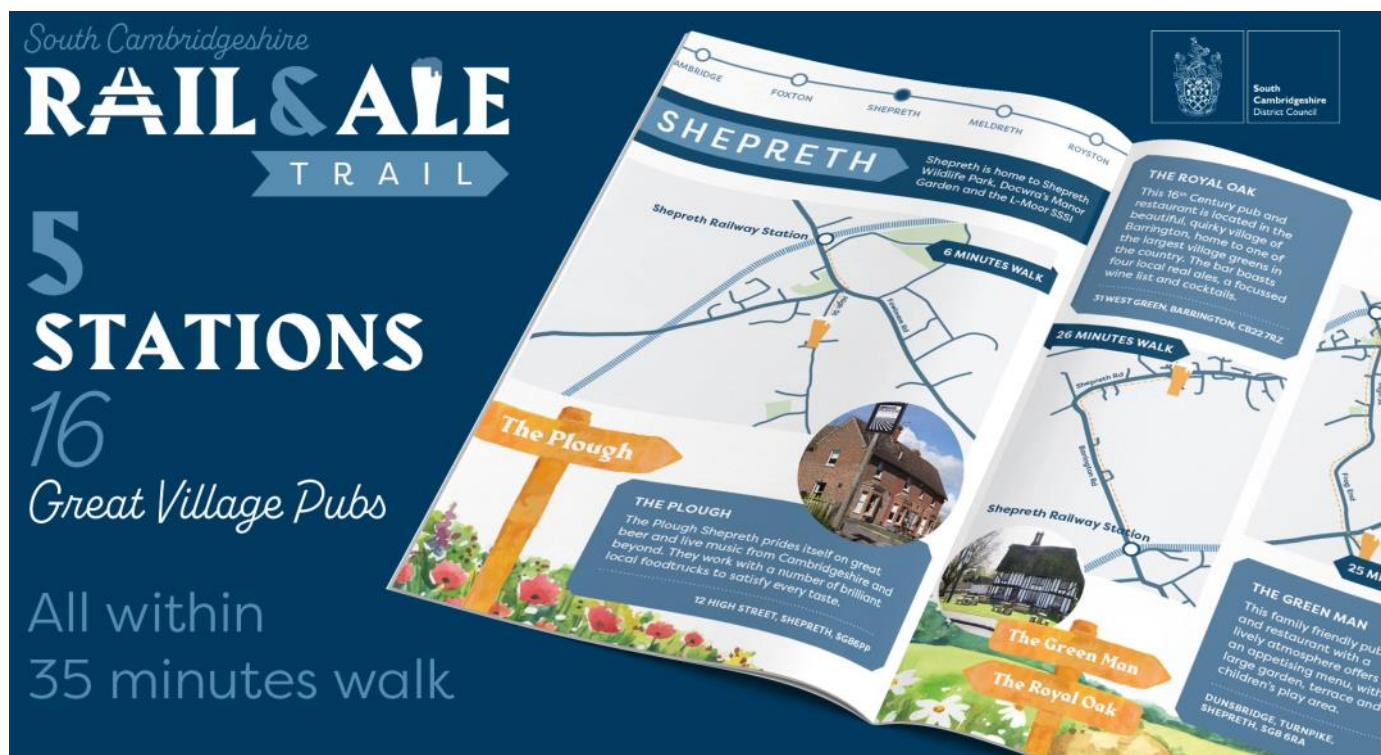


NEWS IN BRIEF...

Happy days – rail & ale in South Cambridgeshire...

Visiting a village pub by train can be part of a larger adventure, making the journey as enjoyable as the destination. Working with the Visit South Cambs website (<https://visitsouthcambs.co.uk/>), the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership has developed a **Rail and Ale Trail** for stations across South Cambridgeshire. The guide features 16 great village pubs – all accessible within 35 minutes' walk (often less) from the stations at Meldreth, Shepreth, Foxton, Shelford and Whittlesford Parkway. Most offer great food, and all have gardens or outdoor spaces to enjoy.

The professionally-produced booklet (pictured below) is available from all the pubs listed in the guide, and can be downloaded from the MSFCRP website, or viewed there as a flip book (<https://meldrethsheprethfoxtonrail.org.uk/rail-and-ale-trail/>).



Manea station continues its revival

In June, the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority authorised a new bus service between Chatteris, Manea rail station, Christchurch and Wisbech, co-ordinated with train times at Manea.

The momentum continued with a limited test service running on Saturday 10 August from Chatteris at 08.45 connecting with the 09.11 Peterborough-bound train service. A return journey from Manea station was provided connecting with the 18.17 arrival from Peterborough, arriving back in Chatteris at around 18.30.

The fare was £1.00 each way Chatteris - Manea.

The Greater Anglia train service on this route should be hourly, of course, as committed in its franchise agreement signed with the Department for Transport (DfT) back in 2016, and for which extra bi-mode trains were purchased. This has not been possible because of the capacity limitations in the Ely area — a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is not doing — the DfT signing a contract for a service with one hand and not ensuring that its own infrastructure body, Network Rail, would deliver the upgrade. Government funding is still awaited. We've waited too long — let's get Ely (and Haughley junction) approved.

Improved passenger information at Peterborough station

RAIL EAST issue 202 noted the audit carried out at Peterborough station and the need for better information to inform passengers which platform their connecting train will depart from. Passing through Peterborough earlier this summer our former chair Nick Dibben (who took the photo on the right) noticed that the customer information screens (CIS) closest to the ramped footbridge on platform 2/3 and 4/5 at the north end of the station were showing connecting train services. On these back-to-back screens the other screen still had the next train from that platform. Did someone at LNER read RAIL EAST?

LNER has installed perhaps the best CIS in Britain, providing clear information about how late the train is (you don't even have to do the maths) and where the train currently is. There is even an interpreter, to communicate more information (one service at a time) to people who are deaf.



Great American Railways?

On the day that Louise Haigh announced the launch of the shadow Great British Railways body, Greater Anglia's PR team sent out an email to passengers titled "Savor the Flavors at Norwich Foodies Festival." Let's hope this is a one-off mistake.

Network Rail forced to minimise length of canopies at its new stations

East Anglia's two big new stations, Cambridge South and Beaulieu Park (near Chelmsford), are under construction. The photo on the right shows the latter with canopies of at least 120 metres long. We still don't know the precise length of those at Cambridge South, but hope they will be at least as long. Railfuture had been promised that they would be for the full length of the platform but Network Rail reneged on this because the Treasury now forces it to take a Minimum Viable Product approach, and passengers deserve the minimum, it seems. Interestingly, in Belfast, where Network Rail (and the DfT) have no role, the brand new Grand Central station (first trains will run in late 2024) has canopies that stretch to the very end.



Cambridgeshire County Council learns hard lesson from 'cut-price' busway

Railfuture in various guises has existed since the 1950s, promoting rail-based transport in all of that time — not the rubber-tyred variety, although we all want the best possible integration between rail and bus, with connecting services and single tickets for the end-to-end journey. The two modes should complement not compete.

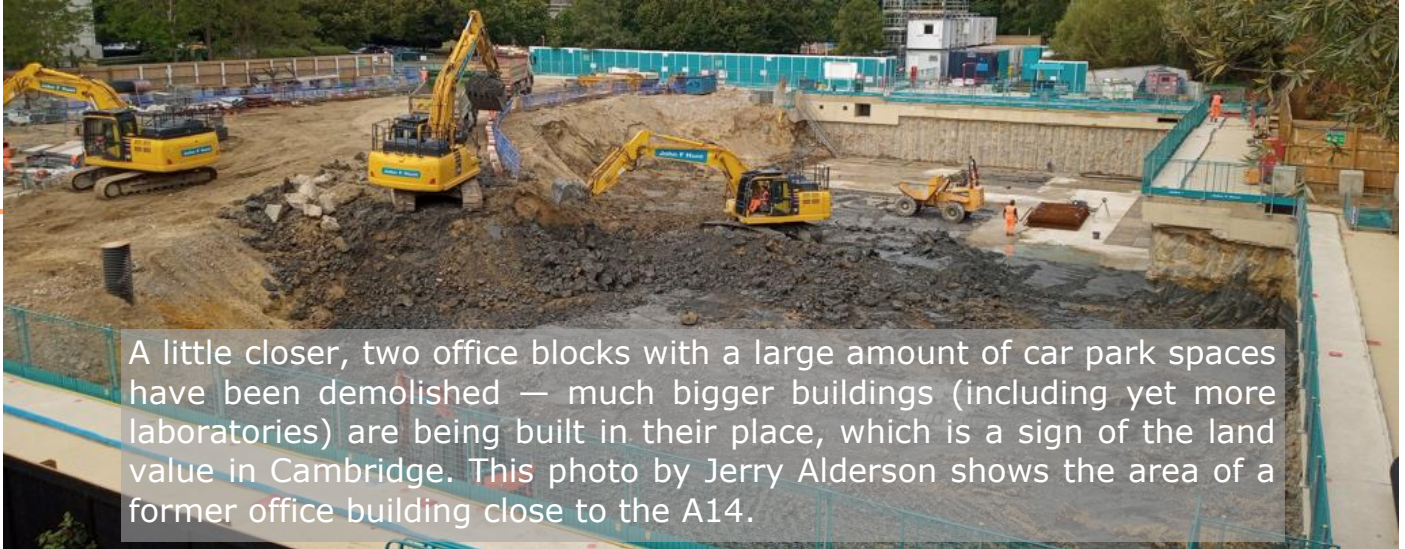
Many regret that the Cambridge to St Ives railway didn't reopen, especially with the huge growth in railway patronage in East Anglia and rail upgrades — including new stations — showing how rail provides value. Perhaps the timing was just wrong, but the busway was seen by government at the time as cheaper to operate and build.

At the public inquiry in 2004 many criticisms were levelled at the proposals, not least over safety, with no fence or lighting planned despite pedestrians and cyclists being less than a metre away from buses travelling at 56 mph. Following deaths on the southern section in 2018 and 2021, Cambridgeshire County finally erected metal fencing at the end closest to Cambridge station in 2024. Better late than never!

On 3 September 2024, the local news reported that at its prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive, the council had pleaded guilty with its Chief Executive admitting that it had fallen "far short" in meeting health and safety standards.

CAMBRIDGE NORTH SUCCESS SET TO CONTINUE

In issue 201 (February 2024) we mentioned how Cambridge North has taken off like a rocket (1,074,602 patronage in 2022/23 compared to a business case of just 800,000). This is set to continue after the last government gave approval in April 2024 for a mixed-use regeneration scheme on adjacent former railway land, and in August approval was given for a five-storey laboratory and office building at the nearby science park. Up to 10,000 'tech' workers will be within a 20-minute walk.



A little closer, two office blocks with a large amount of car park spaces have been demolished — much bigger buildings (including yet more laboratories) are being built in their place, which is a sign of the land value in Cambridge. This photo by Jerry Alderson shows the area of a former office building close to the A14.

Meanwhile, in May 2024, a two-metre high metal fence was erected around 730 existing cycle spaces at the station. An electronic smartcard is needed to enter. The cost of this secure cycle parking was a frightening £600,000. Why so much?

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 really are essential in order to make RAIL EAST visually attractive. Your feedback on the contents of this issue is also appreciated.

All submissions by **1 November 2024**, 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.

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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.

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railfuture East Anglia

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MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 28 SEPT 2024

St Peter Mancroft Octagon
Hay Hill / Weaver Lane



NORWICH

NR2 1QQ

SATURDAY 7 DEC 2024

Signal Box Comm. Centre
Glenalmond Avenue

CAMBRIDGE

CB2 8DB

SATURDAY 22 FEB 2025

Friends Meeting House
St John's Street

BURY ST EDMUNDS

IP33 1SJ

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.

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