

raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

Issue 208 • Dec 2025

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Photos by Jerry Alderson and Ian Couzens.



Does the vast Beaulieu Park set a new standard for designing stations?

We compare it to Cambridge's North and South stations.

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Another big anniversary – a local rail user group celebrating four decades of activity on behalf of the travelling public

In issue 207 we promised a feature on ticket vending machines (TVMs), having said that the Anglia Plus is sold on LNER TVMs but not on Greater Anglia (GA). This has been held back to issue 209 to review the changes that GA will be making.

Since the September 2025 issue, Greater Anglia (GA) has moved into the public sector, and is now owned by GA Trains Ltd, a formerly dormant company set up in 2020 (then under a generic name) in case negotiations with Abellio fell through. Staff have been TUPEd over from Transport UK East Anglia Ltd (a subsidiary of Transport UK Group) and the plethora of contracts with suppliers and partners novated. Former GA MD Jamie Burles, who left in 2024 to work for Network Rail, will be the MD of the unified GA/c2c/NR Anglia combined operation.

Companies House lists changes for GA Trains Ltd recorded on 13 October with all of the previous (government) directors having resigned on 12 October. New appointments were made including Jamie Burles, Martin Beable, soon-to-retire Robin Gisby and Richard Harrison. Gisby and Harrison are also directors of the parent company DFT Operator (aka DFTO) and all of the DFTO subsidiaries. Jamie Burles is also a director of c2c Railway Ltd. The two TOCs have the same company secretary. For good decision making, it clearly makes sense for some of the board members to be the same.

Alan Neville said at the FLUA AGM (page 23) that the ownership change had not affected him in any way and he has seen no changes, which is as it should be.

FROM THE CHAIR BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH



At the time of publishing this issue of RAIL EAST, our principal train operating company, Greater Anglia (GA), has been in public ownership for six weeks. On that date, 12 October 2025, it held the title of 'Train Operator of the Year' with extremely high levels of reliability and public satisfaction with the service it provides. Congratulations are due to all those employees past and present who've worked so hard to bring this excellent state of affairs about and long may this continue! See the article on page 14 for a potted history of the nearly three decades of the privatised passenger railway in East Anglia, the process of transition back and what the future may bring.

How will operators such as GA and, from 31 May 2026, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) fare under public ownership? Until Great British Railways (GBR) is up and running the publicly controlled train companies will continue to operate without much change under Department for Transport control. We still don't know the shape of GBR of course. Richard Brown's article 'A pathway to a better railway' in the November 2025 edition of Modern Railways makes for interesting reading. At one point he talks about the importance of devolved responsibility in the new structure and also about communities having 'a proprietorial sense for their local railway'. He goes on to say 'Anglian residents, for instance, look on Greater Anglia as their railway, as residents of Merseyside view Merseyrail, with each having distinct expectations on how the railway should serve them'. I'm sure we'll be commenting in more detail when a preferred structure does emerge but surely we must hope that Greater Anglia will retain a distinct local identity. Strong relationships with the three mayoral authorities which will pretty much cover the same geographic area will be essential in the future as the mayors begin to take on statutory powers which will help shape East Anglian rail policy.

Beaulieu Park station has opened but Cambridge South is delayed (again)

If rail campaigning sometimes seems like a long and tortuous road, the reward on achieving the end goal must be all the greater! I'm sure this was the experience of councillors and officials involved in planning and delivery of the new Beaulieu Park station (our cover photo) on the edge of Chelmsford. I was fortunate enough to attend the official opening ceremony on behalf of Railfuture, deputising for the chair of our London & Southeast branch. It was great to witness the huge sense of pride and achievement by all concerned, especially as the project was delivered within budget and finished early. It was a big ceremony! There were many invited guests, including the Leader of the Opposition, Kemi Badenoch, who is the MP for North West Essex (photo above).



Photo by Roger French from his excellent BusAndTrainUser blog

It was a big ceremony! There were many invited guests, including the Leader of the Opposition, Kemi Badenoch, who is the MP for North West Essex (photo above).

Beaulieu Park is a really big deal for Chelmsford since the city centre station is so constrained. The new station will serve over 10,000 new homes and is bound to act as a convenient railhead for the surrounding area, with 700 car parking spaces and as many cycle spaces. Strikingly however there is also a very large bus interchange, so we very much hope the station will develop into a major integrated travel hub over the coming years.



A housing developer's sign nearby

In his article in this issue, Jerry Alderson compares Beaulieu Park to the region's other two new large stations: Cambridge North, which opened in May 2017, and Cambridge South, which we are disappointed has been postponed a second time, to June 2026, because a key sub-contractor has sadly gone into administration.

I would like to welcome the six new Railfuture members in the East Anglia branch area (in Norwich, the Cambridge area and Hitchin) who have joined in the last six weeks. I look forward to chatting to them at our meeting in Cambridge – see below. East Anglia is one of the most active among Railfuture's 14 branches, and we need more members to help support our activities (see my report in issue 207).

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA MEETING — SAT 6 DECEMBER

Signal Box Community Centre, CAMBRIDGE CB2 8DB

We hope you will be able to attend our free-to-attend Cambridge meeting, starting at 14:00. The venue is in Glenalmond Avenue, which is about seven minutes' walk from Cambridge station beside the guided busway. Our two guest speakers (right) will talk about 'Joined-up thinking: the importance of integrated transport'.

Jim Chisholm will talk about how, if we integrated different transport modes more effectively, more money would be available for rail projects, and there would also be huge benefits to bus/tram networks and routes for walking, wheeling and cycling. In addition, our health and the planet would get a boost.



Jim worked at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory (TRRL) from 1969-85, much of that time in either the Public Transport or Freight Divisions. He then moved to Cambridge to work in other fields, taking with him a degree, and knowledge of computing and statistics, as well as experience of utility cycling. He has always had a passion for Sustainable Transport. And 'probably' in recent years has done more miles by train than by car AND bike. In 1998 Jim proposed a cycling and walking route through Cambridge which, now half completed, has become known as 'The Chisholm Trail'.

Sarah Hughes will introduce Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance, a group of organisations that believe the time has come to transform transport in Cambridgeshire — Railfuture East Anglia is a key member (it has 31, which includes both local and national groups, businesses as well as charitable organisations, and health and climate advocates alongside transport campaigns). The Alliance aims to unite and inspire people in Cambridgeshire working for a transport network that protects our future and offers us a genuine travel choice.

She is the Alliance's Campaign Officer and will describe the current campaigns and open up a discussion on what we would like to see on integrated transport in the new transport strategy for Greater Cambridge, which is currently being drawn up.

That 'last mile' of any rail trip, be it walk, cycle, bus or even car, is crucial. We are all too stuck in our respective 'Silos'. When services are not integrated, the perceived cost of interchange can be huge. Small investments in those links should bring multiple benefits for operators, users and non users. This group of local organisations is working on these (difficult) issues. Any station in the East with a large footfall is likely to have issues similar to Cambridge. Progress with this, and then our health, and the planet, would get a boost.

For our meeting in Bury St Edmunds on 28 February 2026, we are delighted that **Martin Beable, MD of Greater Anglia** (GA) will be our guest speaker. GA is now managed under a single leadership with c2c and Network Rail Anglia.

BEAULIEU PARK STATION — DOES IT SET A NEW STANDARD?

BY JERRY ALDERSON

COVER STORY

RAIL EAST usually confines itself to matters within its official branch area, except where it matters to people living in East Anglia such as LNER's dreadful fares trial. Beaulieu Park station is just south of the border within Railfuture London & South East branch 'territory', but is a valuable insight into what can be achieved.

If the railway were a normal business it would want to be successful, and want to grow in size, serving more customers and operating a larger network with more stations. British Rail (BR) was financially constrained but it still followed that model. It is ironic that the privatisation era saw an end to that kind of expansion. Train operators had no security of tenure, were lightly capitalised and made insufficient profit to guarantee a return on large investments. Network Rail focused on the day job of operations, maintenance and renewals (OMR) rather than growth. So, barring a few exceptions, such as Chiltern's Warwick Parkway, new stations (and the rare reopened lines) have been left to the local authorities to take forward. They have been limited to what central government has been willing to fund, based on the business case put forward by local government, with penny-pinching driven by the Treasury's Minimum Viable Product (MVP) policy.

Passengers have usually come last in the priority list. Is Beaulieu Park the same?

The first thing you notice at Beaulieu Park is just how vast it is. It really is! How did Essex County Council get away with this? Firstly, it's not just about money but available space. Cambridge North is on a constrained site, with the station being designed around the need to serve the freight yard — the tail wagging the dog. It's a similar story at Cambridge South, where the Biomedical Campus buildings almost touch the railway reserve with a precious public open space on the other side. The space around the lift on the island platform is generous — one might ask why it's not a pair of lifts (for resilience and passenger flow) as it could easily be accommodated. At Cambridge South the lifts are in pairs (something that Railfuture called for), which leaves no room on the platform so they have to be located at the northern end.



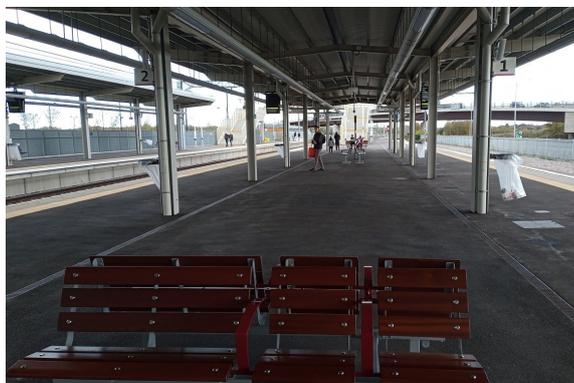
At Beaulieu you'll struggle to find anything cramped. In fact it is the opposite, there is a mass of underused, arguably wasted and unusable, space.

The ticket hall is vast, but it is just floor space with nothing on it. The cover photo of the public mingling with the VIPs on the official opening day (Monday 27 October 2025) shows the generous space before the gate-line. But beyond it there is even more space (photo, right). The stairs to the footbridge are really wide — almost twice as wide as Cambridge and Cambridge North. At the footbridge level the area before the lift (photo, below) is impossible to use sensibly. Looking inside the gents toilets, there is quite a lot of space, but it is poorly used. It is almost as if the Treasury said: 'you can only have one cubicle and two urinals because that is our policy based on the expected patronage'. A slight rearrangement could easily have enabled a second cubicle. For obvious reasons, the author did not inspect the ladies' toilets, but RAIL EAST would be delighted to receive any feedback as to the quality of that provision now that the station is up and running.



A constant annoyance is providing the minimum of everything that benefits passengers and would improve their experience of the station. A simple example is provision of seats throughout the station. There are quite a few outside, which is great when the weather is good, especially in the summer, but very few in the ticket hall before the gate-line for 'meeters and greeters', and none beyond, presumably because people would prefer to use the seats on that platform in the cold weather rather than keep warm inside! Like Cambridge South, there appear to be no doors between the ticket hall and the platforms so it's going to get quite cold in winter, especially for the staff who have to stand there for hours.

All the platforms support 12-car trains, and the island platform is wide, as said previously, but under the canopy there is nothing apart from a couple of sets of seats. Why not? How much extra would half a dozen more sets have cost? Ah, the MVP algorithm dictates everything! Room for a car boot sale. The photo (right) appears to be show more litter bins than rows of seats.



It has a longer canopy than Cambridge South platforms, which are also 12-car length, but unlike there it has no bus-style waiting shelters to provide protection from the wind and the cold.

There is a proper waiting room (right) but hardly large. How much (little!) would it have cost to be twice the size?



The Network Rail promotional literature for Cambridge South falls over itself to reveal how few passengers it expects in a year (a mere 1.8 million in the worst case scenario, which everyone with common sense believes will soon be exceeded, but the Treasury Green Book rules, OK!). However, trying to get a figure for Beaulieu Park eludes even Google AI. This is a pity, because it is difficult to make sense of the decision, for example, of why there are eight ticket vending machines (TVMs), compared to 10 at Cambridge station, which has far larger patronage and many tourists to cope with, albeit with up to 10 ticket office counters taking up the strain.



The lack of proper retailing facilities is a disappointment. Use is declining but will never fall to zero. Shaken by the 700,000 objections to its mishandled ticket office closure proposals in 2023, the DfT has clearly decided not to provide any new staffed facility that would be difficult to reduce or abolish in future. But this misses the point. TVMs cannot do everything (even improved ones — see next issue of RAIL EAST). The 'chair, desk and window' which has existed for nearly 200 years is not essential, but having staff with equipment (portable will suffice) who have the ability (training and authority) to deal with any financial transaction is. Ironically, one of the reasons for building Beaulieu Park station is to reduce pressure on the two-platform Chelmsford station, which passengers will have to go to if they cannot buy what they need from a TVM or online.

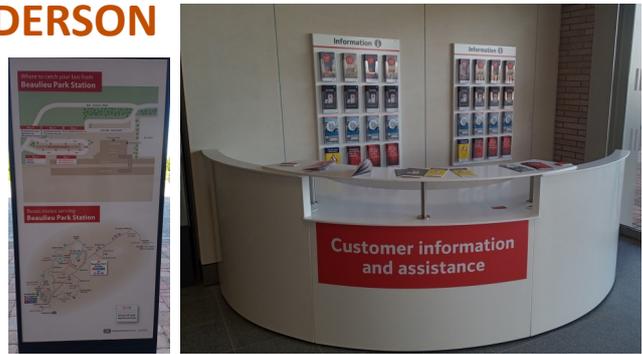
Judging a station isn't just about infrastructure and facilities, though. Something to be praised is that the station will be staffed from first train to last, just like the three stations in Cambridge. This is something that Railfuture has campaigned for at all the larger stations.

BEAULIEU PARK ON OPENING DAY — 16/10/2025

PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS BY JERRY ALDERSON

(Tornado photo by Ray King on 17/10/2025)

The customer services desk is located near the 'front' entrance (nearest the buses and cycle parking, not the 'side' entrance, which is near the carpark), beside the TVMs, and large enough for two staff, unlike the little 'pod' at Cambridge North. The assistant would have to walk all round the desk to reach someone at a TVM.



The integration with buses is excellent — it is almost a mini bus station, with clear signage (above, left) and full-length canopies, so passengers can wait under cover for every service. There are also 500 cycle spaces.



The width of these stairs needs to be experienced to be believed



Might three cubicles be better than one cubicle and two urinals?



Chelmsford City Council

Secure Bike Locker Permit

Annual Fee: £25 per bike
Access: 24/7 with electronic fob

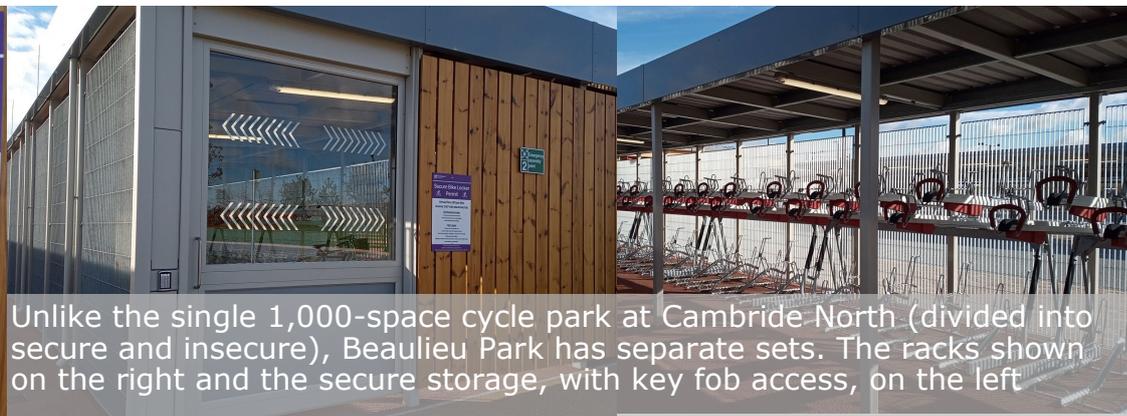
Membership includes

- One secure space for one bicycle
- Personal access fob (non-transferable)
- Safe monitored cycle storage.

T&C's Apply

- Lockers are for bicycles only.
- Lost or stolen fob: £25 replacement fee.
- The Council accepts no liability for loss, theft or damage.
- *Please insure your bike.*
- Misuse or breach of rules may result in removal of your bike and/or termination of membership.

Full terms and conditions available online.
From: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/cycling-lockers
Chelmsford City Council Civic Centre, Oak Street, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1JL



Unlike the single 1,000-space cycle park at Cambridge North (divided into secure and insecure), Beaulieu Park has separate sets. The racks shown on the right and the secure storage, with key fob access, on the left



The canopies stretch a long way down the platform but not to the end. At both ends of the island platform there is a 'refuge point' although it is unclear how and when this would be used—presumably during an evacuation where a vulnerable person is not able to exit via the station building.

EAST WEST RAIL – EAST: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN THE EASTERN SECTION OF THE EAST WEST RAILWAY

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

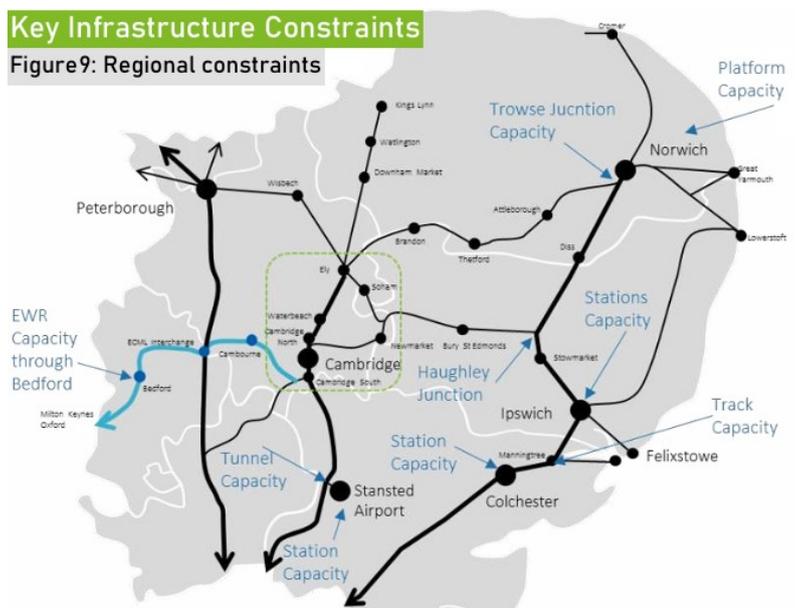
At a conference hosted by the Newmarket National Horse Racing Museum on Thursday 19 September 2025 Transport East – the sub national transport body that covers Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend & Thurrock – unveiled the study it had commissioned Arup to carry out. As well as announcing its positive findings, an informative and detailed document was produced, the contents of which can be studied by following this link: <https://www.transporeast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/East-West-Rail-Eastern-Section.pdf>.



It clearly demonstrates that leaders of all the relevant local authorities (as above, the members of the EWR Eastern Section Board) understand the importance of the role of both the new East West Railway and the high-quality existing network as enablers of growth around the knowledge based industries in the area bounded by Cambridge, London and Oxford. In particular, when East West Rail is completed with a frequent, fast train service across its entire route between Oxford and Cambridge, quite rightly, planners east of Cambridge point out in the document that Cambridge station is not the end of the line; it is at the centre of a fast growing and very productive economic area stretching out eastwards to Ipswich and Norwich with research centres in Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds, Thetford and so on – all just as important as those centres to the west. Their conclusion is that East West Rail must continue on to Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds, Thetford, Ipswich and Norwich.

The report politely makes the point that if EWR was running today, passengers arriving at Cambridge from points west would have to wait for up to an hour for onward connections to all major economic centres in the east including Norwich, Ipswich and Stansted Airport. It stresses that east of Cambridge the many growing communities such as Newmarket are also home to skilled and talented people.

Having established the above logic, the report then centres on the constraints the existing railway from Cambridge eastwards suffer from — the result of the degradation of the routes in past generations... Cambridge to Newmarket reduced to single line, single lead junctions at Ely, Trowse and Haughley and so on. Perhaps it should have added that the current generation hobbles Network Rail with crazy rulings such as when necessary renewals such as track and signalling occur, even when the new equipment is much better than what it replaces, no improvement is allowed. For example, the 60mph limit on the



high quality single track between Cambridge and Newmarket means the modern 100mph trains are forced to trundle along at speeds way below their capacity. The modern fleet is the equivalent of a greyhound forced to keep pace with a class 153 dachshund. Even without restoration of the double track, much more capacity could be achieved by allowing the trains to run at higher speeds.

After acknowledging the legacy bequeathed us, the report concludes by pointing out the urgent economic priorities compelling us not to hang about but urgently work to put back the lost capacity. It highlights the line between Newmarket from Cambridge where restoration of the double track will enable the urgently needed increase in service frequency – as well as providing more paths for freight operation – once and for all. It also identifies that this route should have additional stations, including one to serve the many present and future jobs in east Cambridge and to enable more housing to be provided. And westward beyond Newmarket, once the line is doubled, the Snailwell curve should be restored to allow through trains from Ely and Soham to east Cambridge and beyond.

Service frequency is shown to be key to enable modal transfer from road to rail, as would happen if up to four trains an hour to Newmarket were provided, three an hour to Stansted and so on. The bonus for Cambridge is that between them, this service level will provide a vital metro-like service across the city east to west, north to south.

Having clearly identified what needs to be done, Transport East commits 'to ... work with partners to assemble a funding package to develop a formal Strategic Outline Business Case for the EWR-Eastern section, to make the case for entry into the Government's investment programme.'

In other recent related developments, it is good to note Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's Board has accepted the Mayor's local plan which amongst other things prioritises the doubling of the line from Cambridge to Newmarket. And at the western end of East West Rail, in Oxford, the go ahead has been given to restore the Cowley Branch railway to passenger use as part of a government package in excess of £100 million. At our end, the sooner funding is made available for the restoration of the Newmarket branch to full use the better.

STOP PRESS: On 19 November the government announced good news about East West Rail – a new 'Cambridge East' station and an eastern entrance at Cambridge.

WHAT NEXT FOR SUB-NATIONAL TRANSPORT BODIES?

BY PHIL SMART

Ask the average Railfuture member which region they live in, and the chances are most would nominate the region or route of their nearest rail station. The railway regions in Great Britain have been with us for over a century, mainly based on the companies formed at grouping (1923) and with minor amendments, perpetuated after nationalisation (1949). But ask the same question of your neighbour and you might get a variety of answers. Some might identify with their local television news channel and give answers like South West, Midlands or East for example, none of which has a corresponding territory on the railway. Regional identity is not something England does particularly well, regional governance rather fell from favour with the demise of the Anglo Saxon Kingdoms. More recent attempts have had little success and given rise to some curious anomalies.

Regional assemblies have been tried, but comprised politicians nominated by constituent local councils rather than by elected mandate. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were established in England in 2011 to drive local economic growth. They were created by the UK's coalition government to replace the regional development agencies (RDAs), which were abolished in March 2012. The LEPs were largely business-based organisations with whom Railfuture enjoyed a good working relationship, but more recently their transport functions have been subsumed into Sub-National Transport Bodies (SNTBs) – see map on the next page.

These at least had the advantage of uniform coverage in England, and we have seen some good work undertaken in identifying regional priorities for rail investment. See for example the recent work on developing a strategy for the eastern leg of East West Rail coordinated by Transport East and reported on page 8 in this issue. But again, these are bodies made up of nominees and many anomalies remain. Cambridge is at least joined with Oxford in the England's Economic Heartland SNTB (EEH), but Cambridgeshire is then separated from the rest of East Anglia that comes under Transport East.

But why does this matter for the railways, and in particular the freight railway?

Well, because things are about to get interesting. The concept of the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) chaired by a *directly elected mayor* and first established in London, has since been extended to 13 other areas of which Greater Manchester is a good example. Each enjoys a democratic mandate and has responsibilities including strategic transport planning. In the era of elected mayors, what the future holds for the SNTBs has now become unclear. In the last few weeks, they have all had a letter from the DfT informing them that funding for their operations will cease at the end of March 2027 and that the 2026/7 financial year will be a 'transitional' year. The DfT will no longer expect them to produce or update their strategies.

It is possible that they may continue under joint funding arrangements, provided the constituent MCAs agree to this. In the case of Transport East, there will be just two MCAs, Essex and Norfolk & Suffolk.

It is possible that EEH might survive in a scaled down format, its activities solely focused on the 'Cambridge/Oxford Arc', a plank of the government's growth policy. EEH is also yet to establish a pattern of MCAs within its boundary.

The new Rail Reform bill proposes giving regional mayors more influence over the railway timetable in their respective areas. Quite how far this influence will reach remains to be seen but we need to sound the alarm. We have often pointed out that the freight railway is used by everyone every day, yet the adage that 'freight doesn't vote' risks passenger services taking priority in any devolved planning. The railway has linear communities of interest that span many regions. Each of the UK's deep seaports relies on rail to convey containers to their destinations via the emerging mayoral regions – from Southampton via the proposed Solent MCA, from London Gateway via Essex and London and from Felixstowe via Norfolk and Suffolk and Cambridge and Peterborough MCAs. With capacity constrained in many of these areas, it is essential that freight is planned in a coordinated way rather than left as an afterthought in the minds of those who might be less focused on achieving a rail freight growth target!



PETERBOROUGH-ELY-NORWICH RAIL USER GROUP – AIMING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BY MARK CROSSKILL (PICTURED)

In the nineteen seventies and early eighties, Norwich had a handful of direct trains to Birmingham but the cross-country transformation came in 1988 when new 'Sprinter' units were deployed to provide a regular service between Norwich and the major cities of Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool.



The group which eventually became the Peterborough-Ely-Norwich Rail Users Group (PENRUG) was re-activated just ahead of the fragmentation and franchising of railway passenger services three decades ago, so one of its first tasks was to offer feedback on the Passenger Service Requirement for the Central Trains franchise. Its credibility with council officers and the rail industry was helped by the work of its then Chairman Thelma Paines as a councillor and JP (Thetford Labour Party's summer social, right).



Thelma Paines pictured with Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner. (Image: Thetford Labour Party)

In 2007 several franchises were re-mapped and the Department for Transport took the opportunity to take eight carriages out of the Liverpool-Norwich fleet, leading to severe overcrowding and the formation of the route Stakeholder Board, on which we were given a seat. When Thelma retired, we were again fortunate to secure the services of Cliff Pitchers, the highly regarded former booking clerk at Thetford.

We became members of the Hereward Community Rail Partnership on its formation and during the recovery from lockdown, by working in close co-operation with both the partnership and Lincolnshire County Council, were able to persuade the train operator to restore trains into Peterborough or temporary bus services for those working or attending school in the city.

Local links had been boosted back in 2002 with the introduction by Anglia Railways of a direct service between Norwich and Cambridge after more than a decade of passengers needing to change at Ely. Journey time was 70 minutes with four intermediate stops. The service later developed with hourly clock face departures, the two car class 170 units giving way to three cars, and then four car bi-mode trains over a route which was extended to Stansted Airport. These trains complement the Cross Country service from the Peterborough end of our line towards Cambridge and Stansted Airport. Further development is likely to be affected by infrastructure constraints at Ely.

Our main concern today is the high number of cancellations and lack of wi-fi on the Liverpool-Norwich route.

At PENRUG we are focused on the customer experience and welcome feedback from our members and others on the trains and stations on our route and beyond. Whether you live at Whittlesea or Wymondham, Eccles Road or Ely, we would be glad to hear from you, particularly if you are able to make even a modest contribution to the work of our group. We produce quarterly newsletters (see below for image from the October 2025 issue) and email updates for our members.

PETERBOROUGH-ELY-NORWICH RAIL USERS GROUP
www.penrug.org.uk
Newsletter – October 2025
Secretary: John Saunders - penrugjohn@gmail.com
Membership details: please see our [website](#) page

Welcome to our latest newsletter. This edition includes . . .

- More Liverpool – Norwich cancellations
- Looking ahead to the December timetable
- EMR class 158 train refurbishment
- EMR expansion of penalty fares
- Major infrastructure works in the Ely area
- Norwich – Stansted Airport refreshments
- XC industrial action
- Nottingham footbridge resolution
- Latest journey experiences

Membership is only £5 a year and can be paid at our AGM if that suits you better. Details can be found on our website www.penrug.org.uk.

We look forward to your support!

If you have any questions, please contact markcrosskill@gmail.com.

GREATER ANGLIA STATION ADOPTERS' EVENT – MORE THAN GREEN SHOOTS!

BY SARAH GROVE

The Greater Anglia Station Adoption Conference and Awards took place on Friday 17 October 2025 at Ipswich Town Football Club's Portman Road Stadium with the Bobby Robson Suite filled to capacity. The event brought together volunteers, rail professionals and community rail partners to celebrate the remarkable contributions of station adopters across the network.



The day began with a warm welcome from Jonathan Denby (pictured speaking, above), Head of Corporate Affairs at Greater Anglia (GA), who expressed GA's heartfelt thanks to the volunteers for their dedication. Jonathan also highlighted recent station improvements and previewed the upcoming openings of Beaulieu Park and Cambridge South. Addressing the shift into public ownership, he reassured the audience that station adoption would not change under nationalisation and that the Department for Transport was 100% supportive.

Next, James Brennan from Railscape took the stage. He shared the company's journey from humble beginnings in trench digging to its current role holding the contract for vegetation maintenance across the entire Anglia route. The recent diversification into drone technology has been used to map and assess 33,000 trees along the 700 miles of track.

Colin Burcombe from the Community Rail Network (CRN) followed, offering a national perspective. He noted that half of the 2,600 or so stations in Britain are adopted, supported by 75 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) and 8250 volunteers who collectively contribute 380,000 hours annually, a value of £30.9m. Colin encouraged adopters to explore the benefits of CRN membership and a discussion followed about how to recruit adopters in harder to reach urban areas.

After a buffet lunch and seed swap organised by the Essex and South Suffolk CRP, Alan Neville, Greater Anglia's Customer and Community Engagement Manager spoke. He proudly announced that 128 out of its 135 stations are now adopted. His presentation showcased the breadth of adopter activities, illustrated with copious photographs, highlighting Railway 200 celebration events, environmental improvements and engagement with young people. Alan emphasised the vital role adopters play as the 'eyes and ears' of the railway, with himself as the conduit channelling information to the right teams at GA or Network Rail. He was pleased to note the expansion of the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton CRP to include Shelford and Whittlesford Parkway, marking its rebrand as the Cam Valley CRP. He also introduced Lesley Rayner, the Ipswich to Cambridge CRP Community Rail Officer.

To stave off the post-lunch slump, Alan hosted a quiz including questions about the railway both domestic and international (e.g. which is Britain's highest railway?). The award ceremony was a heartfelt celebration of dedication and creativity. Alan spoke with passion and insight about each winner, highlighting the stations, projects and the people behind them. This year saw more awards than ever, eleven in all, ranging from 'best tubs and hanging baskets' to 'best innovative contribution'.

Dullingham on the Mid Anglia route scooped the Best Adopter Group and Best Newcomer categories. There was a Judges' Special Award for David Gibson for his Railway 200 children's book, created in partnership with Essex & South Suffolk CRP.

The Station Adoption scheme truly exemplifies the spirit of community rail and aligns with Railfuture's mission to promote a thriving, user-focused rail network. Have you considered getting involved or supporting your local station adopters?

The author is project officer at the recently expanded Cam Valley CRP.

There was some positive news at the meeting of the Norfolk Rail Group, an informal stakeholder group convened by Norfolk County Council, on 29 September 2025.

Greater Anglia, on the eve of being taken back into public ownership, confirmed that passenger numbers were now higher than pre-

pandemic levels, including those on the Great Eastern Main Line. The company was the best performing train operator in the UK with excellent levels of reliability. The Norfolk branch lines have an extraordinary level of reliability, with over 96% on the Bittern Line, 97% on the Lowestoft Line and 98% on the Yarmouth Line (see slide).

Fitting of tables in the Stansted Express trains was now almost complete, important because some of these units double up as intercity units on the Great Eastern Mainline. The 12-car trains prove their worth by providing valuable extra capacity.

A local timetable change will take place from December 2025, in that Sunday trains will stop at West Runton hourly instead of two hourly as at present. The Bittern Line CRP has been lobbying for this change for some time, and so thanks are due to GA for delivering on this.

Accessible stations

There is some progress being made on accessible stations with the delayed installation of lifts and new footbridge at Stowmarket due for completion by the end of 2025. As a junction station this will benefit passengers from Norfolk travelling onto the Mid Anglia Line as well as the many local users of the station.



In addition, stakeholders were waiting for government confirmation on funding for a step-free access bid at Wymondham station. Meanwhile the County Council is creating a safer walking route under the railway bridge at the station's north end.

Integrated transport progress

Integrated transport progress with the County Council was also reported with new improved train indicators at Norwich and Great Yarmouth showing onward bus connections. An improved bus interchange was also being implemented at Diss with better walking and cycling access to the station.

Potential for new stations

The County Council stated that as a result of work done by consultants on potential new station sites, two locations were being taken forward for further investigative work. One of these was at Broadland Business Park (East Norwich) on the Bittern line, and the other was to the south of King's Lynn near where new housing is planned. The Business Park site had been looked at some years ago so it is good to see this revisited. However, Salhouse station will need a major upgrade to accommodate demand from the new North Rackheath development and that needs to be taken into account when considering future service patterns on the line. We believe this can only be achieved by an additional hourly service to North Walsham providing additional stops to stations on the southern section of the line.

While it is good to know that the County Council is taking two potential sites to the next stage, we believe as stated previously there is merit in looking also at Hethersett (SW Norwich) and Long Stratton on the GEM. The consultant's report may shed some additional light on the potential for these locations but the report has yet to be released – although we are assured it will be.

- As mentioned, annual performance on Intercity services still over 94% - historically high levels
- Annual performance on Great Yarmouth line over 98%, Lowestoft line over 97%, Sheringham line over 96% and Cambridge route almost 92%
- New Discovery Hub at Great Yarmouth
- Art displays at Norwich station with Hewett Academy
- Special trip for school children to the Broads
- Sponsorship of GoGoSafari Charity Art Trail
- Extra trains for Cromer Carnival



greateranglia



1997-2025 – “ALL CHANGE”? TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS OF THE PRIVATISED RAILWAY... GONE

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Most of our East Anglian railway network (see top of page 24 for our branch area), Network Rail, Greater Anglia, c2c, is now publicly owned (GA from 12 October 2025), the rest, in the form of GTR, following on 31 May 2026. You will have your own thoughts about it all but here are a few reminders about the whole saga.

Nowadays, our railway is busier than it ever was, with footfall more than double what it was in 1997 – a fact that is often attributed to privatisation. But would it have happened anyway? Nobody can tell of course – but we can note that in the same period there has been huge growth across the North Sea in The Netherlands, Germany and in France, where the railway networks are nationalised.

In case we forget, here is a reminder of the shifting and very convoluted “ownership” of our network since 1997:

1997 - 2004 GB Railways ‘Anglia Railways’, taken over by First Group in 2003. National Express ran the inners on the Great Eastern Mainline (GEML).

1997 Bus industry managers form Prism to take on the West Anglia Great Northern franchise – WAGN.

2000 Prism, operator of WAGN, bought by National Express.

2004 - 2012 National Express East Anglia created by merging Anglia Railways and National Express, becoming ‘Greater Anglia’ which briefly (and oddly) was named ‘One’.

2004 Strategic Rail Authority splits WAGN, with the West Anglia Mainline Line going in with ‘One’ Greater Anglia. WAGN continues operating the profitable ‘Great Northern’ King’s Lynn - Cambridge - London King’s Cross route.

2005 Thameslink franchise awarded to First Group.

2006 WAGN’s GN service becomes First Capital Connect (FCC).

2011 National Express has its contract ended after defaulting on a franchise elsewhere.

2012 - 2025 Abellio Greater Anglia (AGA) created. Abellio is the UK arm of Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS).

2014 Govia awarded the management of Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR). FCC becomes GTR Great Northern once again, which along with GTR Thameslink operates services from London King’s Cross/St Pancras to Peterborough/Cambridge, Ely and King’s Lynn.

2016 Abellio awarded a further nine years to run the franchise as Greater Anglia (GA) – owner names were no longer allowed in the brands

2017 Abellio sells 40% of the GA franchise to Japanese company Mitsui.

2021 GA taken over by government by a direct award as result of the downturn in traffic caused by the pandemic.

2022 GTR given a direct award contract by DfT, replacing its franchise agreement, expiring in 2028.

2025 Greater Anglia returns to public ownership.

2026 GTR returns to public ownership.

2027 Cross Country returns to public ownership.

Looking at this list, one can only say what a tumultuous 28 years we have had. We would be interested to hear readers’ views. Please let the editor know.

Railfuture East Anglia believes we have the best passenger train service ever; every station, staffed or unstaffed, is presented and kept in better order than in living memory; the train fleets are better than most of us can remember – think of those rattling class 105 diesel multiple units, draughty slam door electric units, the overcrowded class 153 units and so on. We hope that GA management in particular will feel proud of the network it is handing on. We also hope that the current positive ethos of all who operate the railways of East Anglia is sustained into the future – we thank you all. Now to the ‘Railfuture’ – no more convoluted management changes – here’s to a bigger and even better railway!

LIGHT RAIL FOR CAMBRIDGE — A LOOK AT ‘NET’ DEPOT

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Light rail (i.e. trams) in Cambridge has been an aspiration for many years, but people forget that despite a good choice of routes being essential to the business case, it is not just a case of drawing lines on maps, you must also think of the requirements to keep a tram system operating, not least depots and where they are located relative to the network for efficient operation. A delegation from Railfuture was privileged to be invited to look behind the scenes of the tram depot and control centre of Nottingham Express Transit (NET) on 4 October 2025. We briefly look at how a depot works, but first Peter Wakefield explains how a tram system in Cambridge has never looked more likely following the election of the new Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Mayor, Paul Bristow.

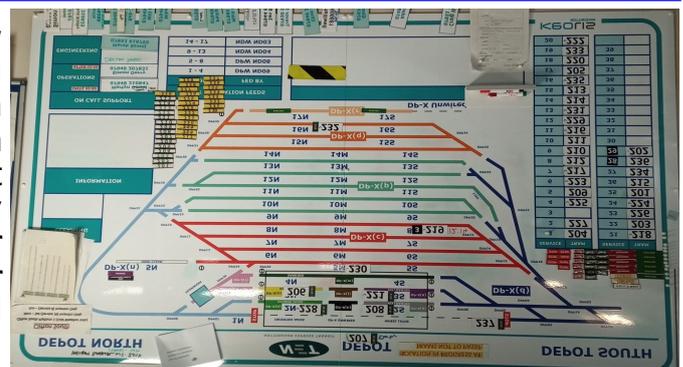
Railfuture East Anglia strongly supports the construction of a light rail network for Cambridge. We do so on the basis that the projected growth of the city is such, that capacity on the existing road network and hence the bus network will just max out within a very short period. Many people would say it already has at some periods of the day. For example, a bus journey from the railway station to the historic centre can take up to 45 minutes to get along the first kilometre of its route.

Even though use of the existing railway network for many cross city north-south (and eventually east-west) journeys is already evident, in our view and in the short term, work needs to start on the development of a high-capacity light-rail route towards the fast developing Cambridge West area from Cambridge North Station.

To that end, it is very encouraging to note that the elected Mayor, Paul Bristow, has now gone beyond his original careful commitment to a ‘mass transit’ network by saying that it will be ‘light rail’ as ‘accelerating growth means being bold’, saying: ‘That is one reason why I have made light rail a key part of that growth. I’ve already appointed Peter Cushing as our light rail Commissioner who has a proven track record of delivering such infrastructure across the country.’ Mr Cushing (pictured) masterminded the development of the Manchester Metrolink tram.



The first thing about a depot is just how large an area it needs, mainly for stabling the trams and getting them around each other in and out, back onto the tram network, as this diagram (right) shows. At Nottingham, as the network expanded they had to steal part of the public car park for more track, but have now reached their limit. A new line will need more trams and a second depot.



A large amount of space is needed to maintain the trams as well (photo, below) because everyone needs to work in their own space — safety is the priority.



Planning is needed to ensure that tram vehicles can be maintained on schedule to ensure service availability.

NET operates trams of two types, both being leased: 15 Bombardier Incentros built in 2002-03 at Derby Litchurch Lane for the original lines running north from Station

Street to Hucknall and Phoenix Park, which were supplemented by 22 Alstom Citadis trams delivered in 2013 -14 to accompany the significant expansion of the network on the two southern branches to Toton Lane and Clifton South.



The two fleets are not fully compatible, so operations have been standardised. For example, maximum operating speed has been reduced from 80 to 70kph to match the lower top speed of the Citadis trams and allow flexibility in deployment. The trams can cope with fluctuations in the overhead line voltage, which can vary with regenerative braking (increasing it) and more trams in service (draining it). The 750V dc can drop to 700V dc and rise to 1000V dc.

Having trams from two different builders used to cause complications in terms of spare parts and associated workshop tools. However, Alstom later took over Bombardier, which has resolved this. Nonetheless, the depot's stores room (right) is substantial and holds a full set of spare parts.

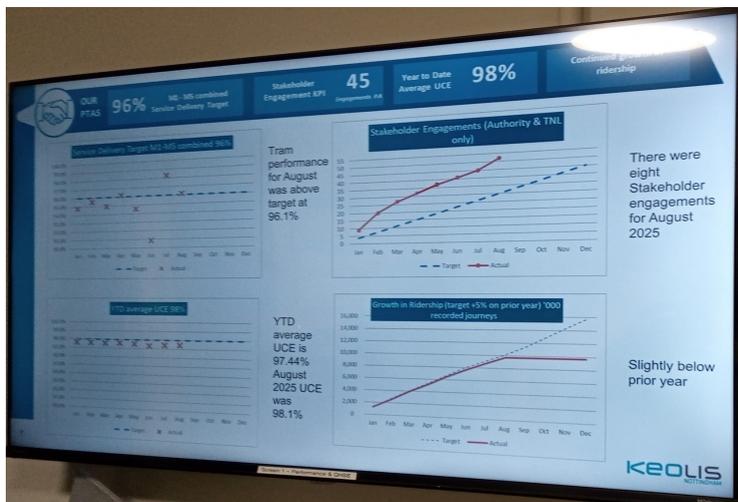


The Control Centre is housed upstairs in the main depot building. This has two rows of workstations, with a large bank of CCTV screens on the wall; these cover the whole network. Five people typically work in the Control Centre, which deals with incidents as well as maintaining a general overview of operations.

For operational reasons, this article does not include photos inside the control room, where the staff not only control the movement of trams, but also observe everything happening across the entire network, as some of the CCTV images show below.



Communications with the large number of staff who work at the depot and across the network is important, not least for morale. Staff turnover is very low, according to our hosts. It was also fascinating to learn that new drivers only need about 12 weeks to fully learn their job – compared to more than 13 months for trains.



The author thanks the depot operator for hosting the visit and the Railfuture East Midlands branch for the invitation to join them, and assistance in writing this article.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES AT WESTERFIELD

PART 2 – A POSSIBLE ANSWER

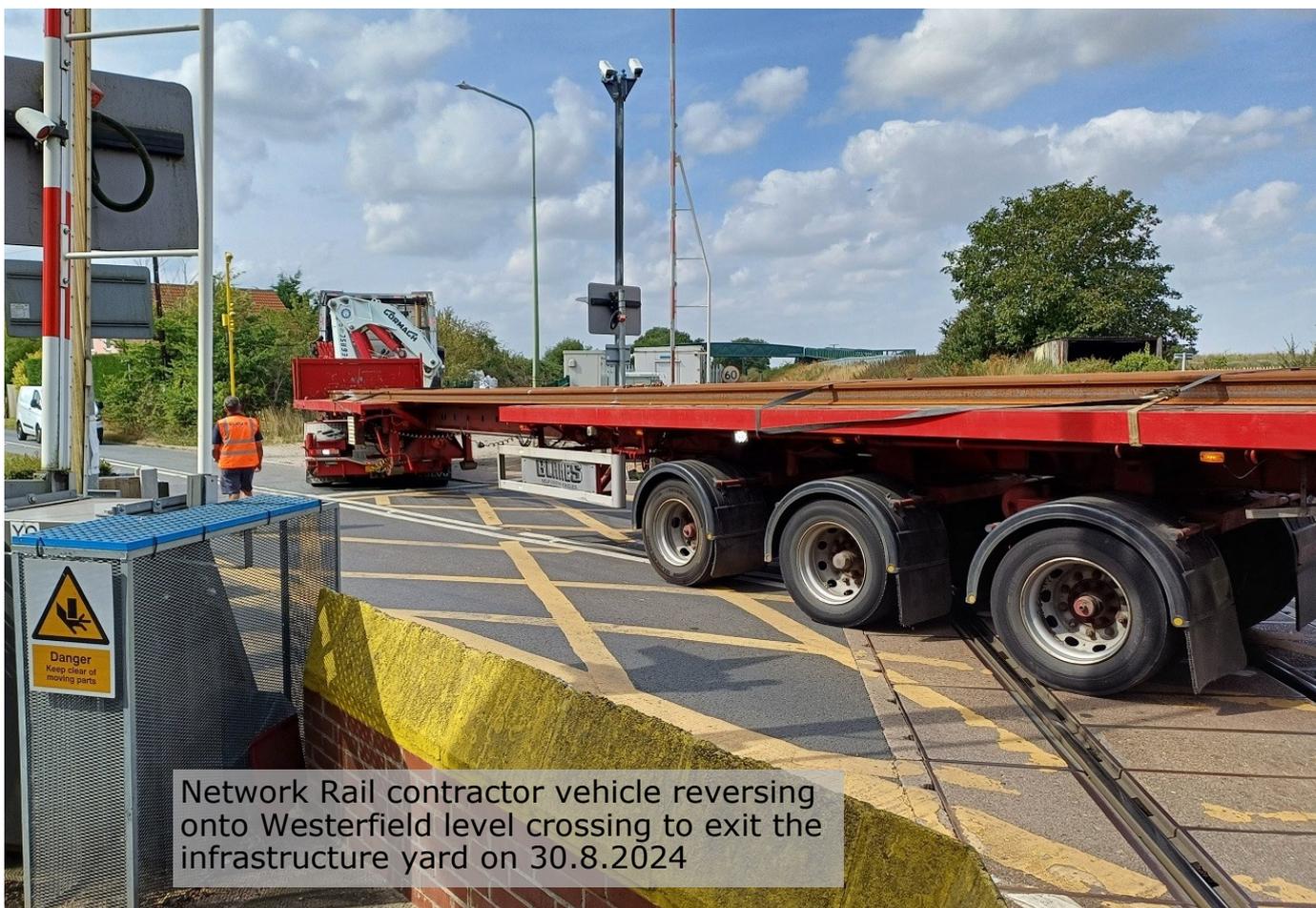
BY ANTHONY CARNELL

Relocating the Station

In part 1 (RAIL EAST issue 207) I outlined a complex set of issues that contribute to unsatisfactory outcomes at Westerfield for train services, rail users and vehicle traffic.

Moving the station 200 metres towards Ipswich to the new long-slope footbridge would place the station almost in the middle of the new developments and country park, whilst continuing to remain accessible to Westerfield and North Ipswich users. When it is eventually commissioned, the new footbridge will provide access-for-all between platforms for users of the repositioned station. A much-needed station car park and drop-off point could be made available if Network Rail (NR) vacated its adjacent infrastructure yard. However, in its recent response to the Westerfield Local Plan, NR stated it has no intention of giving up its use of the infrastructure yard. With the huge increase in vehicular traffic (see below) set to use the B1077, continued safe operation of the yard is unfeasible.

Although it is conveniently placed for holding rail and other track components for the Felixstowe and Lowestoft lines, Westerfield yard is not wide enough for long articulated vehicles to turn within it to make cab-first exits. To exit the yard involves a complicated procedure where NR staff have firstly to take local control of the barrier operation. When the traffic has cleared, the NR van is able to leave the yard entrance, overtake the long vehicle and escort it forward. This operation causes significant delays to highway and its continued use raises questions as to its safety of operation. Whilst these manoeuvres continue from the yard, it is clear that closure of the level crossing cannot be considered.



Increases in Rail and Road Traffic

Westerfield Junction can justifiably claim it handles more Felixstowe Port rail movements than either Ely or Haughley junctions, since it also has the container traffic to and from the London end of the Great Eastern Main Line. Westerfield arguably has a good business case for the upgrade of its junction prior to Ely North and Haughley junctions. As emphasised in part one of this article, any eventual increase in rail paths created by Ely and Haughley will only have limited benefit if Westerfield Junction remains unchanged.

The local rail user group, ESTA, also has an objective to gain additional hourly passenger services between Ipswich and Saxmundham with intermediate stops, which will then provide a half-hourly service between the two. Highway traffic is also set to increase considerably if a new quarry north of Westerfield village receives planning consent. The scoping proposal is for a daily total of 252 articulated HGV movements to and from the site each day for the next 16 years. Add to these, the additional car use the new schools and housing developments will generate along Westerfield Road, and it will be seen that this level of increased rail and highway traffic materially changes the risk profile of the level crossing from that of 2019 when the automatic half barrier (AHB) was converted to MCB-CCTV (manually controlled) operation.



Westerfield station on 9.5.2025. Access from the street to platform 1 is between the road signal on the right and the dwelling fence.

Westerfield Level Crossing

Apart from the heavy rail usage through Westerfield causing the lengthy barrier-down times, there are infrastructure measures that could be carried out to reduce the time the level crossing barriers remain lowered. Not least of these is the single lead junction, which prevents trains to and from the branch passing each other through the station. Restoration of the double junction at the east end of the station to overcome the necessary 'one train off, one train on' type of operation in use at present, would also require the single line to be converted to double

line to Spring Road viaduct, around 2 miles from Westerfield to the west of Derby Road station. With improved signal spacing on the doubled line, more trains could be accommodated.

Another infrastructure source of delay is the signalling and the operation of the barriers. When the level crossing was converted from AHB to MCB-CCTV, the existing Up Felixstowe line colour light signal, located an excessive distance from the junction it protects, was not repositioned to complement the changed method of operation of the crossing. Upon commissioning of the MCB-CCTV arrangement, the level crossing became interlocked with the protecting signals. Thus, 2,000 tonnes container movements from Felixstowe that are now brought to a stand at the junction signal have to accelerate from a stand on a rising gradient which takes around five minutes for the last vehicle to clear the level crossing.

The new full barriers were designed to operate automatically when lowering and raising, but do not incorporate obstacle detecting radar equipment for revealing obstructions on the crossing. Because of this, the signaller has to monitor the lowering sequence of all four barriers using the CCTV equipment to ensure the crossing is clear of obstructions, before confirming such to release the signalling

interlocking. Being designed for automatic operation, the MCB-CCTV operating circuitry ensures the optimum efficiency in minimising delay to highway users. However, according to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the automatic operation is 'frequently' overridden by signallers to prevent short duration openings which, it states, causes users to run the red flashing lights. This is questionable, as either side of the crossing Red Light Safety Equipment cameras are provided for the detection of vehicles that do run the lights, and of which locals are well aware. Contrary to the reason given by the ORR, human behaviour would suggest that users are more likely to run the red lights if they are routinely subjected to lengthy barrier-down times. It is also worth noting that the previous AHB installation at Westerfield was designed to provide a minimum 'road-open' time of just 11 seconds between flashing light initiations and, as such, it is difficult for ORR to substantiate its statement.

A more plausible reason is that signallers are trying to accommodate significant rail movements over the inadequate infrastructure at Westerfield by overriding the automatic function of the barriers. The barriers are then maintained in the lowered position for consecutive trains, which saves the signaller from supervising the lowering operation more frequently than if the barriers were in automatic mode. This is confirmed by ORR, which has stated that in order to prevent Up Felixstowe container trains from having to accelerate from a stand at the junction signal at Westerfield, barriers are lowered earlier to ensure trains are kept moving by running on green signals. This is another avoidable source of delay which cannot be reconciled with ORR's statement that NR is required to keep delays to highway users to a minimum. Knowing this practice is occurring on a regular basis, and with its obligation to highway users, one wonders why ORR has not pressed NR to improve the situation.

Missed Opportunities

The ultimate solution at Westerfield is to separate the B1077 highway away from the railway and to close the level crossing. NR has, perhaps, missed an opportunity to achieve this as most of the farmland surrounding the station has been acquired by housing developers. With the continued use of Westerfield yard for infrastructure component storage, lorry reversing movements will still be required over the level crossing to exit the yard, thus prolonging its life. Whether the usage of the yard and level crossing remains or not, the adjacent station requires upgrading to eliminate the risks to users arising from the restricted and narrow access to platform 1.

Conclusions

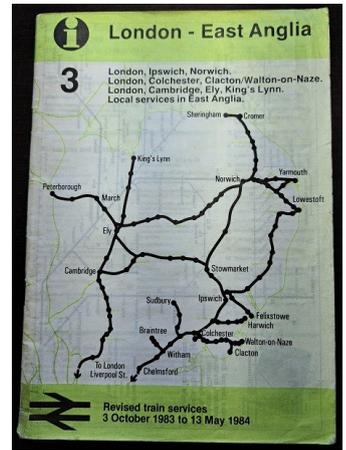
Whilst the rail industry is to be praised for seeking to increase its share of container traffic to and from Felixstowe, it has not provided the infrastructure at Westerfield to minimise the significant inconvenience to highway and station users caused by lengthy barrier-down times, which are related to the high volume of rail traffic passing through. ORR has confirmed that signallers are 'frequently' overriding the optimum, road traffic delay-reducing, automatic lowering and raising function of the barriers, in favour of keeping the barriers lowered to keep trains on the move. This often results in extended delay in raising the barriers after a train has passed, when signallers forget the manual raise operation. Delay to highway users, including the emergency services on 'blue-light' operations, is the unseen cost of running so many trains over an inadequate infrastructure. NR is required to keep delays to highway users at level crossings to a minimum, but how to quantify what the 'minimum' delay is for a given location, not to mention how it is policed, is not mandated by the rail industry. Thus, theoretically, rail traffic could increase at a level crossing to a point where it could be closed to the highway for very extended periods, and would be justified, but unsustainable, purely because of rail usage demands. In the case of Westerfield and its lifesaving 'blue-light' requirements, it will be interesting to see what NR does to address this need and how it reduces barrier-down time at the level crossing.

TRAIN TIMETABLES: 40 YEARS OF CHANGE

PART ONE – COLCHESTER AND IPSWICH

BY DEREK MONNERY

When I moved to East Anglia in 1983, I joined the ranks of commuters to London. At that time, electric trains could only run as far as Colchester on the Great Eastern main line and Bishops Stortford on the West Anglia line. All main line trains were hauled by diesel engines (mainly class 47, but occasionally a class 37 or even a class 31 if nothing else was available). Local services north of these points were generally class 105 or class 101 diesel rail cars. The expansion of Stansted Airport was still at the planning stage.



I still have my timetable booklet for Winter 1983/4 (above). It is instructive to see how train services have changed (and very often improved) over the years. The entire network shown on the front cover survives, thankfully, but no reopenings.

Table 10 - Colchester to Sudbury

In 1983, most Sudbury trains ran between Colchester North and Sudbury, with some originating at St. Botolphs (now Colchester Town). Today, all trains are 3-car class 755s that run only between Marks Tey and Sudbury, apart from the last return trip in the evening. The reason given for this cutback is the potentially unsafe pedestrian railway crossing at Marks Tey that links the station to the west car park.



Three-car class 755 at Sudbury station during COVID-19 — seats out of use.

Table 11 - GE Main Line, Braintree, Walton and Clacton

Back in 1983, most Norwich trains included not only a buffet, but also full dining facilities. Journey times were longer as diesel engines had much slower acceleration. Class 47 diesels were dominant, hauling mark 2c and 2d coaches, with mark 1 catering vehicles. Now class 745 12-car units are usual, with most having a buffet and/or trolley service. Some trains use Stansted Express units (no buffet) or three class 755 bi-modes running in tandem.

Then, Manningtree was served by one train every two hours; now there are two main line and one semi-fast train every hour, a six-fold increase. The last train back from London was at 2359 to Ipswich; it is now 2330 to Ipswich. The 2359 was a class 47 with four old mark 2 coaches reserved for the purpose; it was packed with well-oiled passengers, especially on a Friday night and stopped at all intermediate stations.

All suburban trains now use class 720 5-car units. Braintree services remain as they were all those years ago, but with the addition of an extra station, Braintree Freeport, opened in 1999 to serve the adjacent shopping village. Fast trains to Clacton and Walton used class 309 stock and were combined and separated at Thorpe-le-Soken. Stopping trains used a mixture of first generation electric stock. Today the through train from London goes directly to Clacton, leaving the Walton line as a shuttle to Thorpe-le-Soken with substantially increased journey times and the inconvenience and potential unreliability of changing trains. A recent local survey suggested that the number of passengers using the two branches is roughly equal, so a return to the 1983 service pattern could benefit everyone.

Table 12 - Ipswich and Manningtree to Harwich

Services on the branch operated every two hours in 1983; now it is hourly. Then it was a two-car class 105 DMU, now a five car class 720. Special boat trains ran, the 'Day Continental' and the 'Hook Continental' from London, and the 'European' from Ipswich and further afield. Services also ran to link with DFDS sailings to northern Europe as required. All the boat trains used locomotives with coaches and a buffet car. Today, the boat trains are gone apart from one train morning and evening to and from each sailing from London (Class 720) and from Ipswich (class 755).

Table 13 - Ipswich to Felixstowe

As with Harwich, the service used to run every two hours, and is now hourly. The service is now provided by class 755 units, a great improvement on class 153 single car units used after the last of the class 101 and 105 units had been withdrawn. Despite the provision of extra double track, the branch remains congested with freight trains from Felixstowe container port, which has grown massively since 1983.

Table 14 - Ipswich to Lowestoft

This service ran two hourly, but at 1017 (up) and 1650 (down) there was a through train to and from London. This was class 37 hauled with mark 2a coaching stock that was steam heated until the train was withdrawn a couple of years later. Riding that train was a special treat. It was comfortable, warm and not too crowded. In 1983 there were no Sunday morning services provided. There was talk of closure, but ultimately much of the line was singled in the mid-1980s, making timetabling a headache.

The station at Melton was reopened shortly after this. Today, following work to provide a passing loop at Beccles (photo, right), hourly four-car class 755s have replaced a mixture of one-, two- or three-car 153s, 156s and 170s. Trains are now much busier than they were then.



The passing loop at Beccles was laid in 2012, to enable the hourly service. This photo shows the new track in place but before the station's then derelict second platform was brought back into use. The total cost was around £4 million, because it was done at the same time as the line was re-signalled. Jerry Alderson

Table 15 - Ipswich to Cambridge

Although the route from Ipswich to Kennett was originally double track, the route from Chippenham junction near Newmarket to the West Anglia main line at Coldham Lane junction in Cambridge had been reduced to single track by 1983, restricting the number of trains that could run, and this remains the case today. In recent years, the demand for this service has risen greatly. With East West Rail now on the horizon, and acknowledging the ever growing footfall on this route, the case for increasing capacity by restoring some of the double track between Chippenham junction and Cambridge becomes increasingly powerful. The service in 1983 was hourly and remains so today, with three and four car class 755s replacing two and three car older units. In 1983 there were no Sunday morning services provided. Today the Sunday service is hourly – a huge improvement.

In the second instalment, I will look at how timetables have changed over the intervening four decades regarding services to and from Norwich.



ALL ABOARD TO NORTHAMPTON... BY PHIL SMART

Railfuture was one of the organisations that campaigned for the retention of ticket offices in the face of their threatened closure in 2023. As a devout user of the ticket office at Ipswich, and an equally devout user of paper tickets, my attention was drawn to the above campaign. If you search 'All aboard to Northampton' in your preferred web browser, you will learn about a

wonderful public art project that celebrates rail travel. Since 2015, Elliott Badger, one of the station staff at Northampton whose job includes emptying the paper tickets out of the barriers, has collected tickets from each rail station in Great Britain. There are round 2,700 of them! He was successful in persuading his manager that it would be a good idea to display these at the station, and a movement was born. More on this here: www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2067p12d21o.

So what on earth has this got to do with the East Anglia Branch of Railfuture?

Well, the collection is not yet complete. There are just under 600 stations left to fill in the gaps and some of these are within our branch area. I had reason to travel to Northampton in November so I thought I would check to see if my local station, Derby Road, was already accounted for. It was. However, longer journeys usually use zonal fares and Ipswich, Trimley, Felixstowe, Derby Road, Woodbridge and Westerfield fall within the same zone. From a revenue perspective it didn't really matter which of these I bought my ticket from, so I went into the ticket office at Ipswich and was sold a journey from Westerfield to fill a gap on the wall at Northampton.



Should anyone reading this happen to have a reason to visit Northampton and is prepared to visit their nearest ticket office to arrange their journey, you will be doing a beautiful thing. The table (right) shows stations in our area that are still needed as of October 2025.

Breckland Line	Wherry Lines		Mid Anglia	Fen Line
	Cromer Branch	Lowestoft & Yarmouth		
Eccles Road	Salhouse	Brundall	Dullingham	Manea
Harling Road	West Runton	Buckenham	Soham	
Lakenheath	Worstead	Cantley		
Spooner Row		Haddiscoe		
		Lingwood		

If you think this is a bit of an extreme sport, look again at the table above. Some enterprising travellers have already managed to book journeys from Berney Arms and Shippea Hill – annual footfall at the last count 800 and 70 respectively! There is also a section of the Northampton display reserved for *stations yet to be opened*. If you might be thinking of journeying from sparkling new Beaulieu Park to Northampton to help fill the wall – no need, since at least one person has already thought of that and bought the ticket. Indeed, someone has already advance purchased a ticket from Cambridge South! Perhaps one day Alconbury Weald, Broadland Business Park, Cambourne, Tempsford and Wisbech will join the list.



This is a shortened version of an article written for Modern Railways on behalf of the Rail Freight Group by whom the author (left) is employed.

FLUA AGM CELEBRATES 40 YEARS / PEAT PROBLEM



Trevor Woods, Andrew Chillingworth, Charles Salter and Karen Gregson of Great Northern (GN), Alan Neville of Greater Anglia and Angie Palmer (GN) surround FLUA's Robert Stripe, who is holding the picture.

The Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) celebrated its 40th anniversary at its AGM at Marriott's Warehouse in King's Lynn on Saturday 15 November 2025. Former chairman, Robert Stripe, who has been its President for several years, had decided to stand down and was presented with a painting of Waterbeach station.

At the start of the meeting, Alan White who is the Instructure Maintenance Engineer for the Fen Line, talked about the significant issues facing Network Rail (NR) in keeping the railway line open for trains. It consists of a large number of embankments, which were created in Victorian times from peat after the draining of the fens. Unlike clay, which contracts and expands according to temperature, when peat loses enough moisture it disintegrates into dust. Alan talked about Soil Moisture Deficit (SFD), explaining that the figure on the Fen Line is currently 396. Once it reaches 400 the peat vanishes; the target is 250. Because of the loss of peat, NR has had to replace it with around 70mm of ballast this year alone, and NR will have to continue topping it up indefinitely, unless an alternative is found. It is investigating a solution. However, Alan explained that drastic measures such as piling to effectively put the railway on stilts would cost '£ trillions' based on a similar estimate on the c2c route.

RAIL EAST BACK ISSUES WANTED — CAN YOU HELP?

Enormous thanks to Chris Milnes, who joined Railfuture in the Railway Invigoration Society (RIS) era, for providing a phenomenal 40 back issues covering 1976 to 1989. Some are duplicates, and we will scan the others over the coming weeks and upload them to the Railfuture website. It cannot be stressed enough how valuable these are for historical research, and we are sure that researchers will find them useful. We will provide a list of issues that are still missing in RAIL EAST 209.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

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

All submissions by Friday **23 January 2026**, 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.

railfuture East Anglia

Our part of the railway network covers lines linking King's Lynn/Peterborough-Hitchin to London King's Cross plus Cambridge-Bishop's Stortford to London Liverpool Street in the west and Sheringham/Yarmouth/Lowestoft-Ipswich-Colchester and branches to London Liverpool Street in the east. These radial routes from London are linked by east west 'regional' routes from Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich plus the branch from Marks Tey to Sudbury. Our boundary is with the London & South East, Lincs and East Midlands branches.

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MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 6 DEC 2025

Signal Box Comm. Centre
Glenalmond Avenue

CAMBRIDGE

CB2 8DB

SATURDAY 28 FEB 2026

Friends Meeting House
St John's Street

BURY ST EDMUNDS

IP33 1SJ

SATURDAY 13 JUNE 2026

St Mary's at Stoke
Stoke Street

IPSWICH

IP2 8BX

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 X/Twitter <https://twitter.com/RailfutureEA>

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