

raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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RAILFUTURE PARTNERS WITH CAM VALLEY CRP TO MEET THE PUBLIC AND HOLDS RECEPTION IN PARLIAMENT FOR MPs



Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

- Greater Anglia MD speaks to us
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- Stainless steel at Stowmarket
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Calling all readers – have you anything to say?

We are always on the lookout for new contributors to RAIL EAST. The readership is extensive, including Railfuture members but also extending to a diverse group of people who influence the direction of the railway in East Anglia — rail professionals, councillors, regional MPs. Could you write an article for RAIL EAST? For example, how the railway could service your area better? For more information — and support to help turn an idea into an article if helpful — please contact Peter Feeney by email on raileast@railfuture.org.uk. We are also looking for someone to take over the formatting of RAIL EAST from the November 2026 issue onwards, as Jerry Alderson, who has done so since 2017, will be stepping down.

We are pleased to announce that there will be two guest speakers at our public meeting in Ipswich on 13 June. They are Thalia Woodgate of the East Suffolk Lines CRP and Lesley Rayner of the Ipswich-Cambridge CRP, which is currently asking the public to choose a name. See: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/WJK1QS/>.

Front cover photos: Inspiration train visit by Sarah Grove and Ben Walsh.
Parliamentary reception by Cogitamus, which organised the event for Railfuture.

FROM THE CHAIR

BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH



Greater Anglia Service Improvements from May 2026

It is only to be expected that with excellent trains and punctual services, passenger numbers are steadily increasing across the Greater Anglia network. (See the latest station by station footfall statistics and accompanying analysis on [pages 11-13](#)). Success does bring its own problems of course, notably overcrowding on some trains – but it also brings new opportunities to be exploited. It is therefore good news to see a raft of new services and other improvements to be introduced from May. Here are some of the main changes.

There will be an additional service in peak hours between Norwich and Cambridge, and between Ipswich and Cambridge, together with additional early morning services between Cambridge and Stansted Airport. This is a really helpful improvement to alleviate peak hour overcrowding into Cambridge – even if it will create some logistical headaches at Cambridge, where peak hour traveller numbers continue to grow.

More Norwich to London trains will stop at Stowmarket, giving a half-hourly service for most of the day. This is a logical and very welcome move since Stowmarket is a growing town with a significant hinterland and previous timetable changes did see improved journey times to London. As Stowmarket is a junction station there will also be greater resilience for passengers transferring between Norwich services and the Mid Anglia line to Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Cambridge.

Great Yarmouth sees an additional morning and evening peak hour service; importantly, departures are timed to connect better with East Midlands trains at Norwich. Lowestoft will see two early morning services running through to Cambridge, with one extending on to Stansted Airport. As we've been calling for direct services from both towns beyond Norwich, this is a positive step forward.

In other changes, the early morning service from Ipswich to Saxmundham is now extended to Lowestoft, while Sheringham receives an additional late evening service. Salhouse and Worstead will both receive an hourly service which in future will be particularly important to Salhouse as the North Rackheath development begins to take shape.

The feedback Greater Anglia receives from rail user groups, Community Rail Partnerships and of course ourselves in Railfuture all helps to identify issues and bring about improvements, but the train company's willingness to take the necessary steps to implement change on a timely basis is really welcome.

More social media

I believe we can safely say Railfuture East Anglia is well known and respected within the rail industry and amongst local policy makers. Our excellently produced RAIL EAST is sent to all stakeholders as well as our own members. However, there is too little awareness of what we do amongst the wider public and it would be good to address this to some extent, by more use of social media.



While we have used an X/Twitter account for many years and a Facebook page specifically for the Wisbech restoration campaign, we have now set up a general *Railfuture East Anglia* Facebook page at www.facebook.com/railfutureeastanglia, which we will use to post regular reports of our activities and other rail news across our branch area. If you are already a Facebook user please would you 'follow' our page, and if not on Facebook do consider signing up! As it is a public page you will be able to see the page and its content on the web in any event.

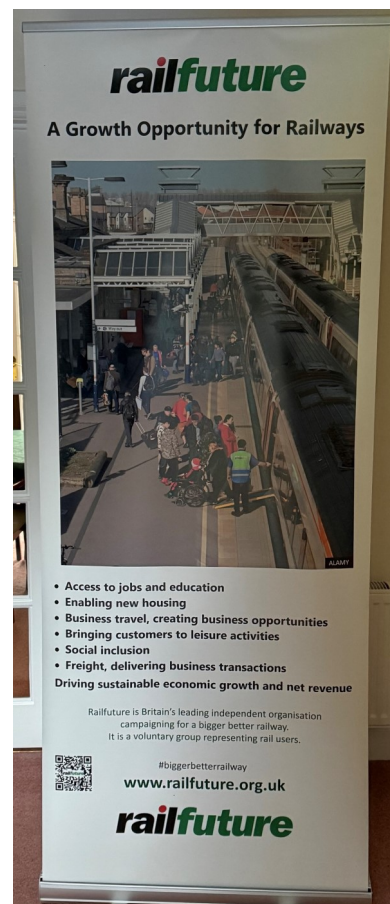
Meeting the public and parliamentarians

Railfuture East Anglia was present at Cambridge station on Saturday 31 January and Sunday 1 February when the Rail200 'Inspiration' train visited. It attracted over 1,500 people across two days, with families, enthusiasts and visitors attending from around the region. Railfuture shared a stall with the local Cam Valley Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and had so many visitors that we exhausted our supply of RAIL EAST, Railwatch and Railfuture membership leaflets. Let's hope that we get some new members! Tom Watts and Eileen Wakefield managed the stall on Saturday, whilst Chris Burton and Paul Hollinghurst did so on Sunday. Thanks to them all.

The CRP gave away around 300 copies of its line guide, about the same in postcards, and around 200 each of the walk leaflets. Not to mention around 400 pens!

On Tuesday 3 February Railfuture held a Parliamentary Reception at Westminster. Whilst our branch was not directly involved, we reviewed the six-page leaflet produced for the event (see www.railfuture.org.uk/display4276) and had some copies on our stall to hand out. Photos from this and the Inspiration train stall are on the front cover.

Finally, I hope as many people as possible (all RAIL EAST readers are welcome, not just Railfuture members) take the opportunity to attend our upcoming AGM in Bury St Edmunds (see below) to find out more about Greater Anglia's future plans for services and ask pertinent questions.



We are delighted that Martin Beable as Managing Director of Greater Anglia (GA) has accepted an invitation to talk, saying "It's an exciting time for our railway, and by February we'll have made inroads into our integration with c2c and Network Rail – as well as have a clearer understanding of progress of the Rail Reform bill." He will speak at the start of the meeting as he needs to leave afterwards for another engagement.

Having recently steered the business through its transfer to public ownership (it transitioned in October 2025), Martin's tenure at Greater Anglia started as Engineering Director, where he led its full fleet replacement – introducing £1.5bn of new trains. This investment, and the subsequent performance focus, has helped to establish GA as a standard bearer across the industry. A Chartered Engineer by background, Martin has held several high-profile roles across a 20-year railway career, spanning three operators and two major UK owning groups.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA MEETING — SAT 28 FEBRUARY **FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, ST JOHNS STREET, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 1SJ**

Like all of our meetings this is free to attend. We start at **14:00** with our guest speaker after which there will be refreshments (donations appreciated). Our AGM will then be held, with reports from the branch chair and others — only members can vote but everyone can attend.

This is our usual venue in Bury St Edmunds, and holds more than 50 people. It is a 15-minute walk from the railway station.

WHAT HAS GREATER ANGLIA EVER DONE FOR US?

BY SARAH GROVE

This issue of RAIL EAST focuses on stations, coinciding with the publication of the patronage figures and is also the first real look at artificial intelligence (AI). Jerry Alderson's article on page 14 covers both, with somewhat alarming results.

As we are privileged to have the Managing Director of Greater Anglia speaking to us on 28 February, I wondered when his predecessor, Jamie Burles, last spoke to us and asked Google AI. It found the (correct) answer with no trouble — it was just over nine years ago.

When was the last time that Jamie Burles was the guest speaker of a Railfuture East Anglia meeting?

Jamie Burles was the guest speaker at a Railfuture East Anglia meeting on **Saturday, December 3, 2016**.

Topic: Burles, who was the managing director of Abellio Greater Anglia at the time, discussed the company's plans following its successful franchise bid.

Having experience with using AI in my role at the Cam Valley Community Rail Partnership, I was tasked by Jerry to create an article entirely written by AI with no human intervention. I asked it "Please write an article for RAIL EAST magazine with reference to the Monty Python 'what have the Romans ever done for us' sketch, entitled 'What have Greater Anglia ever done for us?' concentrating on their achievements in the Network Rail Anglia region since 2012." Here's what it came up with (text and image) — what do you think of it? Are we out of a job?

Scene: A draughty back room in a station café. A group of rail campaigners sit around a table, mugs of tea in hand. The leader slams a fist down.

Leader: "Right! We've had enough. Greater Anglia—what have they ever done for us?"

Voice from the back: "Well... they gave us new trains."

Leader: "Oh yeah, yeah, they did do that. But apart from new trains, what have they ever done for us?"

Another voice: "More seats."

Leader: "Alright, seats. But apart from new trains and more seats?"

Third voice: "Better accessibility."

Leader: "Yes, yes, granted. But apart from new trains, more seats, and better accessibility?"

Fourth voice: "Station upgrades."

Leader: "Okay, okay, station upgrades. But apart from that—"

Fifth voice: "Improved punctuality."

Leader: "(sighs) Fine. But apart from new trains, more seats, better accessibility, station upgrades, and improved punctuality, what have they ever done for us?"

Voice from the corner: "Digital ticketing."

Leader: "Oh, shut up."



The Real Achievements Since 2012 when Greater Anglia took over the franchise. Here's what they've delivered:

- **Complete Fleet Renewal:** Every train replaced with modern Stadler bi-modes and electric units, offering faster journeys, air-conditioning, and level boarding.
- **Capacity Boost:** Thousands more seats and better layouts for bikes and luggage.
- **Accessibility:** Step-free boarding on many routes and improved facilities for all passengers.
- **Station Investment:** From Cambridge North to the soon-to-open Beaulieu Park, stations have been modernised with better shelters, ticketing, and passenger amenities.
- **Performance Gains:** Punctuality and reliability have improved thanks to closer collaboration with Network Rail.
- **Sustainability:** Energy-efficient trains, solar panels, and biodiversity projects at stations.
- **Customer Experience:** Smart ticketing, mobile apps, and streamlined compensation processes.

CONTACTLESS TICKETING COMES WITH STING IN THE TAIL

BY JOHN GRANT, CHAIR OF THE FEN LINE USERS ASSOCIATION (FLUA)



It’s long been recognised that train fares need to be rationalised, but the spread of contactless outwards from London without much thought being given to the needs of longer-distance travellers is resulting in new anomalies and a less helpful offer to passengers. Although there is no immediate prospect of contactless north of Baldock, recent changes on the Southern network have already thrown up some anomalies, such as that passengers on the 09:28 from Reigate to Victoria can apparently save £4.50 by getting out at Redhill, touching out, touching back in again, and getting back on the train. (They have time to do that because it waits for a unit from Gatwick to couple onto it.)

The railway needs enough capacity for the peak-time demand (see seat utilisation, right). Charging higher fares in the peak — effectively a congestion charge — encourages passengers to travel off-peak, which reduces the capacity needed and also contributes to the capital cost of providing it. The question is, how do we define the peak?

Dynamic pricing only works for services for which people book ahead, but we want people to be able to simply touch in and out at ticket gates. The system doesn’t know where someone is going until they touch out, by which time it’s too late to adjust the pricing for the service they’ve used. So fares can’t depend on the actual demand on the day, though they can depend on (for instance) the time of day, as a proxy for the estimated demand.

Operator	Service	Length	GN	TL	GN	GN	GN	TL	GN	GN	TL
Kings Lynn	KLN	d	-	-	-	0645	-	-	-	0715	-
Watlington	WTG	d	-	-	-	0652	-	-	-	0722	-
Downham Market	DOW	d	-	-	-	0659	-	-	-	0729	-
Littleport	LTP	d	-	-	-	0708	-	-	-	0738	-
Ely	ELY	a	-	-	-	0716	-	-	-	0746	-
Ely	ELY	d	-	-	-	0717	-	-	-	0747	-
Waterbeach	WBC	d	-	-	-	0726	-	-	-	0756	-
Cambridge North	CMB	d	-	-	-	0731	-	-	-	0801	-
Cambridge	CBG	a	-	-	-	0736	-	-	-	0806	-
Cambridge	CBG	d	-	0721	0725	0742	-	0751	0755	0812	-
Foxton	FXN	d	-	-	-	0736	-	-	-	0806	-
Shepreth	STH	d	-	-	-	0738	-	-	-	0808	-
Meldreth	MEL	d	-	-	-	0742	-	-	-	0812	-
Royston	RYS	d	-	0737	0747	0758	-	0807	0817	0828	-
Ashwell & Morden	AWM	d	-	0742	0751	-	-	0812	0821	-	-
Baldock	BDK	d	-	0747	0757	-	-	0817	0827	-	-
Letchworth Garden City	LET	d	0745	0750	0800	0808	0815	0820	0830	0838	-
Hitchin	HIT	d	0750	0755	0805	-	0820	0825	0835	-	0839
Stevenage	SVG	d	0756	0801	-	-	0826	0831	-	-	0845
Knebworth	KBW	d	0759	-	-	-	0829	-	-	-	0849
Welwyn North	WLW	d	0803	-	0814	-	0833	-	0844	-	-
Welwyn Garden City	WGC	d	0808	-	-	-	0838	-	-	-	-
Hatfield	HAT	d	0811	-	-	-	0841	-	-	-	-
Potters Bar	PBR	d	0817	-	-	-	0847	-	-	-	-
Alexandra Palace	AAP	d	0828	-	-	-	0858	-	-	-	-
Finsbury Park	FPK	a	0832	0821	-	-	0902	0851	-	-	0906
Finsbury Park	FPK	d	0833	0822	-	-	0903	0852	-	-	0907
London Kings Cross	KGX	a	0840	-	0835	0839	0910	-	0903	0909	-

Currently we have two main pricing levels on weekdays: anytime and off-peak. Looking specifically at the Fen Line services between King’s Lynn and King’s Cross, which I travel on, when going up to London off-peak tickets are valid on trains due to arrive after 10:00. The evening peak is spread over a longer time than the morning peak, so there is less need to reduce capacity and there is no restriction on these tickets for the return journey. Thus an off-peak day return can be used for travelling to a meeting in central London starting at around 10:30, and returning home whenever it finishes.

(There are also super off-peak tickets, but they are only a few pence cheaper. They are valid on up trains due to arrive after 10:55, and on the return journey for trains departing before 16:30 or after 19:01.)

Peak time no longer defined by arrival time in London but when you depart

The contactless system inherits Transport for London's definition of peak time, and the fare structure for journeys for which contactless is available is being changed to match. With contactless, the off-peak fare is charged if you touch in before 06:30, between 09:30 and 16:00, or after 19:00. As I understand it, off-peak tickets will be valid on trains scheduled to depart during those times (independently of the actual departure time and the time you go through the ticket gate).

This definition of the peaks originated with Oyster cards in central London, where journeys were fairly short and fairly randomly distributed. But increasingly it is being used for longer journeys, into London in the morning and back in the evening. And, particularly in the morning, there will be winners and losers and some anomalies.

Looking at how the system would work for the Fen Line, currently the first off-peak train (from any Fen Line station) is the one that leaves King's Lynn at 08:15 and arrives in King's Cross at 10:07. Under the new rules it will still be off-peak from Letchworth but peak time from anywhere else, so I suppose the rest of us are being encouraged to leave some seats free for the travellers from Letchworth.

The next train (08:45 from Lynn) leaves Cambridge North at 09:31 so off-peak tickets would be valid from there although there is no way you could catch it if you touch in after 09:30. However, it would be off-peak for passengers from Cambridge using contactless, unless they had arrived early and passed through the ticket gates before 09:30. So if you want a coffee, get it at one of the shops in Station Square, not on the platform. (Of course, in the Tube stations for which the system was designed such facilities are outside the gate line anyway.)

Passengers from Ely and Waterbeach have an off-peak train due into King's Cross at 11:02, but from further north the first off-peak train doesn't arrive until 11:32.

The winners will be the early risers who travel (or at least touch in) before 06:30. Although off-peak tickets would not be valid on the 06:42 from Cambridge, passengers who had touched in before 06:30 (and maybe bought a coffee inside the station) would be able to ride on it for an off-peak fare.

The first four trains from King's Lynn would be off-peak, and passengers from Lynn, Watlington, and Downham Market arriving in London as late as 0807 would pay an off-peak fare. So as far as their travel in London is concerned the morning peak would, in effect, be from 0830 to 1130.

John Grant attended a GTR Stakeholder meeting where the changes to fares from December 2025 were announced as part of the expansion of contactless, which the Department for Transport has been pushing for. He has since been in contact with GTR to ask question about certain scenarios. There is not space here for answers.

Some of the potential issues of contactless PAYG include:

- Supposing the next train is 09:35 and I go through the gate at 09:25, possibly to get a coffee on the platform or use the toilet. Will I be charged peak or off-peak?
- If it simply goes by gate touch-in time, then it will be peak, but if it uses the timetable information to work out when the next train is due it could charge off-peak. Would it be that 'clever'?
- But supposing I enter at 09:25 and there is a train in the wrong direction at 09:28 with the train in my direction at 09:35. What happens then? It could look at where I touch out to work out if I used the 09:28 or 09:35 train, but would it?

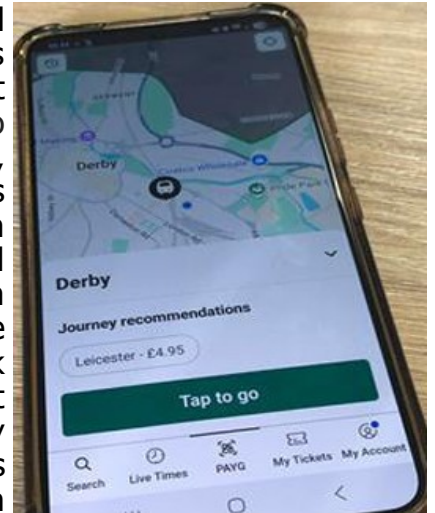
Cambridge station car parking used to have an evening rate after peak at 16:00. There used to be a queue of people all waiting for it to tick over, then pay and dash for the 16:15 train. Let's hope that we will not see this kind of behaviour to get an off-peak fare.

DIGITAL PAY-AS-YOU-GO TICKETING — HOW IT WORKS

BY JERRY ALDERSON

John Grant's article on [pages 6-7](#) looked at using bank cards to tap in and tap out on pay-as-you-go (PAYG) journeys, and the pitfalls. It requires a scanner at the origin and departure stations to be installed for every contactless journey, which essentially means the technology must be installed and working at every station on the route—not necessarily cheap, but justifiable on routes with high patronage.

On rural routes it is more economically viable to only install readers on automatic ticket gates (ATGs) at larger stations and use alternative technology to identify the journey that the passenger makes. This is where Digital Pay As You Go comes into play. It hasn't been tried in East Anglia yet, although East Midlands Railway (EMR), which runs services to Norwich, has been trialling it since September 2025 on journeys between the three cities of Derby, Nottingham and Leicester. Soon after, Northern also began trialling it on certain routes. The system requires passengers using the TOC's location-identifying smartphone app and it will track the journey that they have made (using GPS) and work out the best 'walk-on' price based on where and when they travelled having simply clicked the 'start' and 'end' buttons on the app. Both daily and weekly capping is applied, with the fare being substituted for a weekly season if the same journeys were made multiple times that week — whether it can cope with different journeys in a week is unclear; the question was asked in RAIL EAST issue 203 (September 2024).



This digital ticketing technology has already been tested widely in Switzerland and Denmark (and in Scotland) but the trials is the first in England. The initial problem is that it only covers a small area and only for journeys by one train operator — an annoyance with the fragmentation on Britain's railway. A common complaint about public transport in Britain is that there's no single nationwide app or smartcard. It doesn't mean that the app can only be used on full journeys — it can be turned on and off during a longer journey to use its money-saving fares where applicable.

The trial requires people to opt-in to use the system. Once proven it will be open to anyone. However, for the time being at least, it does not support child fares. Richard Bowker of Green Signals tried it out, and there is an excellent in-depth YouTube video of his experience at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0L_HkgDD2Q.

The system has many features and most things seem to have been thought of. Rail cards can be used, unlike contactless (where it is perfectly possible but has just not been designed in). It requires the smart phone to be active all of the time, and records a low battery reading. If the phone goes offline the user can manually record what journey has been done, but the system monitors the number of times this occurs to try to detect fraud. The great feature of PAYG is that you don't need to buy a ticket before you travel — it is automatic, just like Oyster has been for 20+ years — and is therefore a convenience. However, it exacerbates the 'digital divide' whereby the tech savvy and younger people get the better deals. Moreover, whilst it can apply fare capping it won't consider special fares, especially advance ones.

The EMR website says that passengers will not pay more than £23 a day or £73 a week for travel within the trial area on permitted routes. Capping can act as a sticking plaster to avoid some of the worst effects of fare anomalies. Digital PAYG may work technically, but it is only as good as the fares and obstacles, and if someone ends up paying more than they could have done by purchasing a ticket before boarding then they will not want to use it again. How about giving the passenger the ability to try it without paying so that they can compare the price it has calculated with the price of the ticket they have already purchased?

See: <https://www.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk/form/digital-pay-you-go-trial>

A MORE ACCESSIBLE RAILWAY – THE CASE OF FOXTON

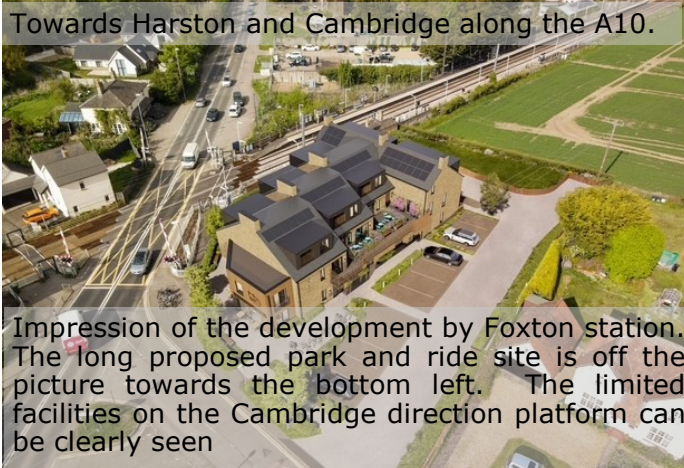
BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Previous issues of RAIL EAST highlighted the need to build housing near and around railway stations and identified thousands of new homes being built around Baldock in Hertfordshire (issue 207, September 2025) as a good example of this policy.

The government's reform of planning laws is not only speeding up the process of getting new houses built, it is actually accelerating housing development near railway stations across England with the aim "to connect commuters and working families with new job and education opportunities, as well as stimulating economic activity" – a quote from a government press release issued late in November 2025.

The prioritisation of development around railway stations will help create more sustainable communities, reducing reliance on private car usage if properly integrated into the railway and other public transport, as well as encouraging active travel links with their triple value of lowering congestion, mitigating emissions and enhancing physical and mental health. Although not all stations will fit into the necessary criteria, in our view one station that clearly does serves the village of Foxton, seven miles south west of Cambridge station on the Royston line.

Foxton railway station is a very busy place, served by two trains an hour in each direction much of the day, early until late, many other trains racing through and the very busy A10 trunk road crossing the railway at the station. The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) has drawn up plans for a park and ride ("travel hub") by the station that would intercept the huge volume of private cars moving over the crossing into Cambridge, particularly towards the Cambridge Bio Medical Campus.



We put "travel hub" in quotes because other than a car park, few other facilities are being proposed to make it a true travel hub. Railfuture was doubtful if it would be attractive enough to actually work as intended. But by chance, Develory, a developer, has proposals for a "windfall" site by the up platform at Foxton that would help turn the station and the proposed park and ride into a genuine travel hub. The proposal is for seven homes above three retail units plus bicycle stands and some necessary parking spaces. The retail units face the station with a suggested use for a café, including bike repairs/sales. With a proposed large car park nearby, we'd suggest that the addition of a convenience store to serve those transferring between rail, car, bike and bus, would make the concept of a travel hub complete.

The rather bleak facilities currently available at Foxton station would be transformed by this small development that would give rail users access to the café and other facilities. Next to the station, it is a perfect example of how with good planning we can make public transport, the railway in particular, accessible and attractive to those seeking to move from their car to the railway. The GCP has proposed a footbridge and lift at the station to address the anxiety users can face when crossing the line at the level crossing for their train.

We hope that the planning committee for South Cambridgeshire District Council put all the pieces of the jigsaw together that will make a travel hub at Foxton work, with its potential to help stem the flow of traffic through Harston and onto the Bio Medical Campus, as well serving Foxton and its neighbouring villages with a facility all local communities deserve.



STAINLESS IN STOWMARKET

BY PETER FEENEY

RAIL EAST readers may be aware that a new footbridge with passenger lifts at Stowmarket station (right) was successfully installed late in 2025, following a near six-month delay due to production difficulties experienced by the manufacturer. Over the weekend of 29/30 November 2025 several teams of engineers worked very efficiently to complete the task within the available time window. The much hyped bridge with its lightweight steel construction and modular composition — making it significantly easier to install because it arrives on site in readily transportable bits — is a first of its kind, and potentially a template for future use on the railway more widely. RAIL EAST has highlighted innovative features of the bridge in two earlier articles: issues 194 (June 2022) and 205 (February 2025).



Removing the 1980s concrete bridge and installing a temporary replacement took place in January 2025.

Since the principal installation work was completed, further work to put in lifts and check operating systems has got underway. This stage three once accomplished will lead to the bridge being commissioned for passenger use. The good news for rail users is that this follow-up work has not required any weekend line closures and consequent rail replacement buses. The inevitable bad news is that the universally unpopular temporary bridge has had to

remain in use far longer than might reasonably have been expected. Remember, the former footbridge was removed and the temporary structure installed during a weekend engineering possession in January 2025. So, station users have had the delights of this steep beast for something around 12 months. Fitness levels in the local community — including station staff frequently using the bridge to oversee intercity departures — must have soared!

The new structure is the real step change in terms of Access for All (AfA). Travel becomes much easier for anyone using the Ipswich bound platform who finds stairs either impossible or a real challenge. Installation dates for the lifts are still to be confirmed. The new bridge also incorporates a roof, so the days of trudging across the line in the rain should soon be over. This is a point worth stressing — new stations are still being commissioned and constructed elsewhere with footbridges open to the elements, such as the new roofless footbridge at Biggleswade on the East Coast Mainline (ECML).

Much to welcome here then — but too many stations across the network continue to pose real access difficulties for many potential travellers. Until more capital funding from Network Rail, local authorities and building developers can be found to expand the Access for All budget, those barriers to travel are likely to persist. In East Anglia, our next priority is Marks Tey, the junction between the Great Eastern Mainline (GEM) and the Sudbury line, an extremely awkward interchange for many people — and an unsuccessful candidate for AfA funding in previous rounds.

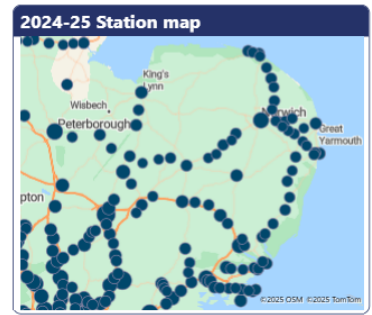


Three bridges over the railway: the new structure, the temporary footbridge and beyond that the Navigation Approach road bridge opened in 2010 as a means of bypassing the congestion caused by increasing traffic volumes at the B1115 station level crossing.

EAST ANGLIA STATIONS FOOTFALL— 2024/25

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

The table on [pages 12-13](#) presents the data from the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) official annual footfall figures for the year April 2024 to March 2025 — the most recent available — for all stations in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, north Essex, north Hertfordshire and three stations in Bedfordshire — the territory covered by the Railfuture East Anglia branch.



The stations are arranged in order along each of the routes radiating out of our major regional centres. Most lines have a minimum of one train an hour in each direction. Some stations on some lines have a bare minimum service which reflects in their footfall figure.

We compare the figures with the previous year (2023-24) and five years ago: April 2019-March 2020...the pre-Covid year, although still affected by it in the last three or four weeks — Railfuture has added the year to March 2019 (the last full year before COVID) for completeness only, but it is not used in the comparison or commented upon here. It's good to see that many stations are now above that year's footfall figures, with only five out of the nearly 200 lower than last year's.

This year we have incorporated a new piece of information that shows, for each station, the station most tickets are sold to and/or from. Not many surprises (the London termini are obvious, as are Cambridge and Norwich), though Lakenheath with its token service just on a Sunday, does provide one. A single person making a journey each day from lightly used stations makes a big difference and all five stations with a minus sign this year over last year probably reflect that point.

Note also the stations that "suffer" from a high level of weekend rail replacement services are depressed too. Cambridge might be one, but the ORR figures give no weekly or monthly breakdown to substantiate this.

The increase in usage at each of the four stations on the Felixstowe to Ipswich line is impressive — note 32% at Westerfield!

Eye catching too is the increase at Colchester Town – over one million now, up 57% in one year. Conversely, Colchester "North" is down by 2%. It is notable that the other Colchester station at Hythe is up 32% too. The data suggests a better service along that line is urgently needed.

The Mid Anglia line from Ipswich to Cambridge continues to gain users rapidly — spectacularly since 2020 and well above the national average recently. (On this line, Greater Anglia plans from May 2026 to operate one extra train towards Cambridge in the morning peak and return in the last afternoon to cope — see timetable update on [page 3](#)) The re-doubling of the track between Cambridge and Newmarket cannot come soon enough.

On the Great Northern (GN) route south west of Cambridge towards Stevenage it is notable that growth has NOT returned to pre-Covid numbers at Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth – presumably because GN has not restored the half hourly service during the middle of the day. Conversely, Ashwell & Morden shows a 9% increase because its service has been transferred from the hourly off peak GN service to the half hourly Thameslink service.

All these stations recorded good increases over the last year but it's noteworthy Ashwell & Morden increased by 19% compared to only 7% at Meldreth (& Melbourn) – large settlements compared to the low density at Ashwell.

The data conveys a clear message – **frequency** is key to modal transfer from road to rail. Overall the table shows 73,224,284 users at the stations we describe as being in East Anglia, up 10% on 2023/2024 and 2% over 2019/2020, the last count before Covid.

Station name [code]	Year ended 31 March							% change 2025		Main O/D*	Journeys to/from
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2020	2024		
Norwich [NRW]	4,250,834	4,041,818	967,650	3,213,504	3,963,948	4,176,640	4,556,674	13	9	LST	1,202,464
Salhouse [SAH]	11,778	9,856	11,566	12,692	14,006	13,566	14,372	46	6	NRW	4,916
Hoveton & Wroxham [HXM]	136,414	125,260	38,880	112,218	124,804	126,828	134,424	7	6	NRW	62,378
Worstead [WRT]	25,650	25,404	6,730	22,270	26,816	27,188	29,316	15	8	NRW	17,434
North Walsham [NWA]	265,400	226,116	54,894	221,032	243,208	221,002	227,692	1	3	NRW	83,306
Gunton [GNT]	19,188	18,560	3,334	22,228	28,446	30,084	36,122	95	20	NRW	17,688
Roughton Road [RNR]	21,766	21,552	3,304	20,956	24,670	21,736	21,340	-1	-2	NRW	7,540
Cromer [CMR]	219,244	213,936	60,352	212,590	244,294	245,658	249,402	17	2	NRW	86,122
West Runton [WRN]	27,212	26,076	9,144	31,834	32,918	34,194	34,872	34	2	NRW	10,164
Sheringham [SHM]	225,894	182,288	53,214	233,550	232,222	244,950	267,898	47	9	NRW	97,600
Brundall Gardens [BGA]	12,248	9,408	9,318	11,358	14,558	19,246	17,886	90	-7	NRW	12,448
Brundall [BDA]	97,164	89,742	33,282	83,006	92,068	100,552	103,312	15	3	NRW	69,998
Lingwood [LGD]	46,134	43,536	12,622	37,524	44,230	45,572	49,708	14	9	NRW	35,098
Acle [ACL]	45,336	41,618	8,478	33,642	40,672	41,334	47,882	15	16	NRW	25,796
Great Yarmouth [GYM]	381,002	344,276	117,164	347,854	393,322	402,658	439,660	28	9	NRW	165,468
Cantley [CNY]	20,590	17,048	7,004	14,776	15,740	18,298	20,390	20	11	NRW	14,496
Reedham (Norfolk) [REE]	45,618	41,074	10,770	36,230	37,042	39,320	41,566	1	6	NRW	26,810
Berney Arms [BYA]	442	42	348	868	950	800	802	1,810	0	NRW	324
Haddiscoe [HAD]	13,580	12,650	2,870	9,086	10,304	12,064	14,758	17	22	NRW	9,200
Buckenham [BUC]	216	212	98	300	354	360	284	34	-21	NRW	172
Somerleyton [SYT]	12,972	10,898	2,194	8,696	9,010	10,076	11,958	10	19	NRW	5,840
Oulton Broad North [OUN]	112,600	106,438	21,768	98,344	109,170	125,458	137,218	29	9	NRW	93,842
Lowestoft [LWT]	438,476	406,440	103,144	354,928	396,618	426,034	468,156	15	10	NRW	165,404
Oulton Broad South [OUS]	47,696	43,518	7,212	45,430	51,210	56,484	60,488	39	7	BCC	17,478
Beccles [BCC]	114,302	110,152	17,682	97,838	111,814	118,074	129,850	18	10	LWT	32,986
Brampton (Suffolk) [BRP]	9,532	9,858	1,342	7,674	9,390	11,920	14,508	47	22	LWT	4,560
Halesworth [HAS]	102,016	99,838	15,854	84,792	99,576	107,644	124,996	25	16	LWT	33,148
Darsham [DSM]	59,924	61,534	13,092	48,180	55,964	60,836	68,476	11	13	LST	35,936
Saxmundham [SAX]	164,400	165,274	35,022	138,696	157,214	164,480	176,536	7	7	LST	54,304
Wickham Market [WCM]	50,932	55,266	11,570	47,570	57,274	62,200	67,636	22	9	LST	23,544
Melton [MES]	84,358	82,562	14,742	55,112	67,954	77,364	89,082	8	15	LST	27,878
Woodbridge [WDB]	210,440	209,172	50,570	168,694	189,784	208,998	229,388	10	10	IPS	67,866
Westerfield [WFI]	11,642	11,284	10,188	12,988	13,970	16,444	21,666	92	32	IPS	7,602
Derby Road [DBR]	47,938	46,808	18,040	56,746	73,198	81,986	95,046	103	16	FLX	38,936
Trimley [TRM]	32,178	31,122	7,366	35,612	41,164	45,948	57,066	83	24	IPS	27,748
Felixstowe [FLX]	187,454	170,412	58,704	193,072	218,542	238,190	278,504	63	17	IPS	116,236
Ipswich [IPS]	3,416,026	3,292,182	726,756	2,125,686	2,682,574	3,028,054	3,371,206	2	11	LST	943,520
Mistley [MIS]	75,366	71,784	14,418	36,520	47,958	54,074	63,776	-11	18	LST	16,008
Wrabness [WRB]	30,348	29,056	5,458	17,280	20,006	23,178	26,698	-8	15	LST	6,462
Harwich International [HPQ]	110,944	109,876	33,030	74,476	95,228	103,856	117,528	7	13	COL	29,410
Dovercourt [DVC]	177,752	163,728	46,460	118,474	130,342	148,728	168,182	3	13	COL	53,992
Harwich Town [HWC]	151,076	128,454	27,818	79,978	87,472	102,334	112,064	-13	10	COL	29,292
Diss [DIS]	700,586	671,300	124,442	422,272	559,966	615,118	701,420	4	14	LST	284,220
Manningtree [MNG]	1,106,204	1,068,816	200,350	634,684	783,130	907,374	1,043,404	-2	15	LST	552,748
Colchester [COL]	4,453,178	4,249,444	1,029,176	2,913,266	3,392,742	3,719,094	3,648,216	-14	-2	LST	1,494,248
Colchester Town [CET]	771,090	735,814	178,206	504,448	587,470	643,980	1,012,034	38	57	LST	222,406
Hythe [HYH]	265,716	279,464	59,242	178,362	265,670	327,640	433,168	55	32	LST	120,754
Wivenhoe [WIV]	401,240	403,306	70,786	216,778	278,916	323,558	352,166	-13	9	LST	115,884
Alresford [ALR]	62,994	65,602	15,816	47,180	63,450	85,564	97,088	48	13	LST	26,912
Great Bentley [GRB]	81,144	78,634	18,728	50,764	64,860	85,784	105,230	34	23	LST	24,540
Weeley [WEE]	34,908	37,652	11,506	30,360	32,642	35,504	42,386	13	19	COL	13,350
Thorpe-le-Soken [TLS]	131,088	135,486	32,264	95,582	119,048	132,260	143,078	6	8	LST	42,854
Clacton-on-Sea [CLT]	799,344	763,016	276,656	623,870	705,916	792,630	836,512	10	6	COL	192,132
Kirby Cross [KBX]	44,782	47,842	13,726	36,664	48,908	58,260	62,896	31	8	COL	22,370
Frinton-on-Sea [FRI]	200,904	184,550	51,010	134,952	159,442	178,506	208,700	13	17	LST	46,166
Walton-on-the-Naze [WON]	136,708	130,090	40,024	97,784	111,400	125,642	140,642	8	12	COL	32,696

Station name [code]	Year ended 31 March							% change 2025		Main O/D*	Journeys to/from
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2020	2024		
Marks Tey [MKT]	604,902	606,914	112,616	302,470	401,950	452,940	474,352	-22	5	LST	1,202,464
Chappel & Wakes Colne [CWC]	39,360	46,258	4,090	22,490	28,176	28,762	32,962	-29	15	LST	8,922
Bures [BUE]	60,432	58,024	8,626	35,712	45,068	46,312	53,342	-8	15	LST	16,418
Sudbury [SUY]	334,274	334,694	61,846	224,284	278,534	319,430	347,900	4	9	LST	111,158
Kelvedon [KEL]	847,748	797,650	119,948	355,632	482,106	545,692	599,812	-25	10	LST	300,580
Needham Market [NMT]	102,320	100,754	33,484	79,196	94,148	112,342	129,588	29	15	IPS	49,634
Stowmarket [SMK]	967,114	916,094	185,762	615,232	764,552	859,800	975,908	7	14	LST	278,238
Elmswell [ESW]	71,078	71,050	13,570	67,164	91,892	109,934	121,748	71	11	BSE	51,622
Thurston [TRS]	77,592	71,562	15,688	76,036	95,720	114,330	123,640	73	8	BSE	43,808
Bury St.Edmunds [BSE]	665,112	657,942	151,514	564,972	698,282	834,744	929,244	41	11	SMK	139,928
Kennett [KNE]	42,684	42,516	9,408	36,538	43,782	50,226	53,638	26	7	CBG	24,526
Newmarket [NMK]	355,068	335,652	77,602	255,860	303,332	347,148	374,156	11	8	CBG	184,722
Dullingham [DUL]	41,832	35,086	10,842	22,798	25,314	28,974	32,026	-9	11	CBG	24,042
Shelford [SED]	207,478	216,194	57,942	140,840	170,262	207,250	221,546	2	7	CBG	127,804
Whittlesford Parkway [WLF]	558,134	552,024	93,042	291,808	376,432	424,092	454,262	-18	7	LST	182,484
Great Chesterford [GRC]	110,120	110,198	24,252	77,954	86,096	98,778	100,560	-9	2	CBG	41,876
Audley End [AUD]	979,414	1,006,730	172,636	502,644	623,570	751,334	814,130	-19	8	LST	395,734
Newport (Essex) [NWE]	188,094	195,984	64,436	167,346	198,334	205,164	206,012	5	0	LST	60,154
Elsenham [ESM]	252,716	245,240	63,386	155,610	191,746	207,816	222,928	-9	7	LST	70,442
Stansted Airport [SSD]	9,773,870	8,474,784	794,992	3,368,742	7,906,474	9,280,540	10,090,904	19	9	LST	6,465,414
Stansted Mountfitchet [SST]	599,478	578,766	150,136	406,316	455,236	537,304	551,240	-5	3	LST	219,700
Foxton [FXN]	101,990	105,404	30,564	75,252	87,794	94,124	98,982	-6	5	CBG	57,872
Shepreth [STH]	115,600	117,102	23,676	68,718	91,082	98,754	109,514	-6	11	CBG	51,382
Meldreth [MEL]	295,470	305,888	82,016	181,362	217,158	230,482	245,846	-20	7	CBG	140,854
Royston [RYS]	1,467,154	1,435,616	289,662	835,428	1,081,014	1,272,012	1,415,838	-1	11	CBG	328,042
Ashwell & Morden [AWM]	156,490	159,254	34,748	104,212	140,696	146,024	173,122	9	19	CBG	40,360
Baldock [BDK]	637,664	654,320	154,004	387,170	502,586	527,306	568,602	-13	8	STP	82,450
Letchworth [LET]	1,856,558	1,834,720	457,590	1,189,236	1,471,004	1,598,310	1,779,634	-3	11	KGX	330,356
Hitchin [HIT]	3,265,142	3,233,772	750,478	1,981,466	2,512,254	2,682,410	2,940,178	-9	10	STP	538,524
Arlesey [ARL]	662,676	696,708	152,836	407,022	552,150	592,464	688,476	-1	16	STP	148,940
Biggleswade [BIW]	1,038,164	1,033,622	227,702	592,254	753,050	789,284	894,928	-13	13	STP	142,662
Sandy [SDY]	497,992	495,528	143,316	385,704	524,068	571,530	679,484	37	19	STP	118,392
St.Neots [SNO]	1,325,534	1,261,664	246,330	672,958	886,088	959,298	1,081,866	-14	13	KGX	169,298
Huntingdon [HUN]	1,786,548	1,723,088	337,704	949,924	1,302,160	1,421,020	1,572,480	-9	11	STP	317,298
Peterborough [PBO]	5,059,576	4,934,692	1,089,232	3,719,850	4,519,016	4,720,686	5,299,726	7	12	KGX	2,355,752
Whittlesea [WLE]	31,986	35,230	8,026	26,436	33,738	43,364	51,194	45	18	PBO	18,124
March [MCH]	407,914	385,956	87,832	251,638	305,354	340,976	373,732	-3	10	PBO	125,592
Manea [MNE]	18,950	18,834	3,910	16,192	21,038	24,904	29,708	58	19	CBG	7,940
Soham [SOJ]				14,196	55,518	65,912	65,796		0	ELY	19,896
Ely [ELY]	2,386,744	2,363,818	577,460	1,634,548	1,894,014	2,052,282	2,299,024	-3	12	CBG	1,106,130
Shippea Hill [SPP]	432	164	36	102	142	70	76	-54	9	CBG	24
Lakenheath [LAK]	454	416	246	476	562	480	920	121	92	SSD	168
Brandon [BND]	117,798	111,572	26,804	93,682	115,102	119,300	128,812	15	8	CBG	28,782
Thetford [TTF]	299,752	286,700	73,700	226,022	276,522	295,514	305,618	7	3	NRW	95,006
Harling Road [HRD]	2,880	3,794	646	978	2,104	3,364	1,768	-53	-47	NRW	1,042
Eccles Road [ECS]	2,952	2,390	296	1,276	1,830	1,568	1,534	-36	-2	NRW	976
Attleborough [ATL]	163,062	158,464	41,592	131,918	168,896	172,376	175,046	10	2	NRW	89,950
Spooner Row [SPN]	1,344	276	74	320	382	698	686	149	-2	NRW	548
Wymondham [WMD]	200,332	196,036	56,424	150,466	196,452	186,470	197,704	1	6	NRW	89,710
King's Lynn [KLN]	991,252	931,394	240,162	683,706	757,034	789,204	853,200	-8	8	KGX	240,116
Watlington [WTG]	153,782	138,366	39,078	105,886	107,724	118,846	133,888	-3	13	KLN	49,822
Downham Market [DOW]	549,562	512,772	129,058	341,550	386,270	399,600	440,550	-14	10	KLN	126,002
Littleport [LTP]	248,808	238,488	60,976	153,660	186,752	204,358	251,780	6	23	CBG	109,536
Waterbeach [WBC]	407,650	377,660	100,176	265,180	309,130	331,764	371,828	-2	12	CBG	194,452
Cambridge [CBG]	11,983,320	11,599,814	2,300,528	6,952,780	9,341,600	10,033,088	10,597,572	-9	6	KGX	2,900,308
Cambridge North [CMB]	812,972	949,550	220,958	733,612	1,074,602	1,268,788	1,459,946	54	15	KGX	561,570
Total for Railfuture East Anglia	74,631,292	71,514,332	14,989,042	45,676,094	60,719,456	66,844,866	73,224,284	2	10		

STATION USAGE: LIES, DAMNED LIES AND AI ANSWERS

BY JERRY ALDERSON

RAIL EAST first mentioned Artificial Intelligence (AI) in issue 207 (September 2025) having asked Google AI in which issues RAIL EAST covered the LNER Fares Trial. Its answer was spot on. Not a difficult challenge, as 'normal' Google could also do so.

RAIL EAST production is tight, going to the printer just three weeks after the deadline for contributions. By comparison, Railwatch magazine, which also has 24 pages, with a larger editorial team, takes much longer to produce. Google AI was asked to compare the word count of the two (one is A5 and the other A4). Its answer was "ask the publisher"! It was necessary to give it a link to the two most-recent issues so it could then compare them. The answer then was: *"According to a comparison of the December 2025 issues, RAIL EAST (Issue 208) contains approximately 12,000 to 14,000 words, focusing on East Anglian regional updates, timetable changes, and campaign news. Railwatch (Issue 186) is significantly larger with an estimated 20,000 to 22,000 words, covering broader national rail topics and campaigning efforts."* Nothing to quibble with there. It just needed a helping hand.

With 'normal' Google you ask it to search for something and return a list of ordered websites and pages where it finds a match. But with Google AI you ask it a question and it goes away and 'thinks', researches a mass of material, tries to make sense of it and produces an answer often comprising one or two paragraphs.

When the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) station usage figures were published (see [pages 12-13](#)), rather than navigate through the ORR website and download a copy of the full Excel spreadsheet, it seemed much easier to ask: "What are the latest annual footfall figures from the ORR for Cambridge North station?"

Trying this with Google AI, it said "Based on ORR estimates via Railfuture, Cambridge North station recorded 949,550 entries and exits for the 2022-2023 period. This represents a significant rise from the 2018 figure of approximately 488,000. Data indicates substantial growth, with 1,074,602 total estimated movements in some recent estimations." Well, it's great that it takes Railfuture as its first port of call, but how about the 2024-2025 figures from the ORR website?

So, beware of using words such as "latest". Replacing this by 2024-2025 returned "Based on the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) Estimates of Station Usage for April 2024 to March 2025, published on 4 December 2025, the 2024-2025 annual footfall (entries and exits) for Cambridge North station is 1,330,684." But this doesn't match what is on [page 13](#) in this issue — it has **1,459,946** — or any other year!

Google AI is easy to use as it uses a browser. There are other AI tools, such as Gemini, ChatGPT and DeepSeek. Some can be used by a browser and others by an app, which needs to be downloaded, but most support both. If you create an account then you can hold conversations that are recorded, and it remembers everything in the conversation so it can use your responses to refine the answer.

DeepSeek was asked about Cambridge North patronage. First it gave the 2023-2024 figures, claiming that it had 2,158,426 entries and exits. Wow! It was then asked for 2024-2025 and answered "2,595,750 entries and exits." Wildly wrong!

Trying to work out why these figures were far too high, it was asked "How do these figures compare to Cambridge (main) station?" Result: 12,648,602. That was two million too high. Asking it "Have you got the equivalent footfall figures for Waterbeach station?", it answered "292,180" (actually 371,828) with "47.8% year-on-year growth". Asked to give reasons for the astonishing growth, it said "This is almost entirely due to the station's relocation and reopening. The old station closed in June 2023. A brand new station, built approximately 1.5 km to the north as part of the Cambridge North – Ely capacity scheme, opened in December 2023. The near 50% jump reflects the transition from the old, limited facility to the new, purpose-built transport hub." RAIL EAST readers know that the station construction has not even commenced yet. AI is unable to cope with delayed schemes, and much more.

Your district, your views

Breckland's new Local Plan will shape our district to 2046.

It will help ensure that planning decisions are made in the best interests of our communities.

Everyone with an interest in their village, town or local area can have their say. The more people that get involved, the better the aspirations of our communities will be reflected.

Keep up to date with the latest news about the local plan [here](#).



Breckland covers a large mostly rural area in central Norfolk with its principal centres being Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton. The only network railway passing through is the Ely to Norwich line in the south of the district. There is also the Mid-Norfolk Railway running to Dereham.

The draft Breckland Local Plan went out for consultation in 2025 and Railfuture submitted its response to some of the proposed developments put forward. Much of the development set out in the plan is concentrated along the A11 corridor which we support because of good rail access to the parallel Ely to Norwich line.

In addition to extensive developments at Thetford and Attleborough, a substantial new development is proposed centred around the A11 at Larling which could deliver up to 6,000 homes. The railway line would run along the southern edge of this development and Harling Road station is well placed to serve the new community. In our response we stressed the importance of the railway in helping to meet the local transport needs and that any future investment should be considered at an early stage. This would include upgrades to Harling Road station and the introduction of a regular stopping service rather than the handful of trains that presently stop. As demand for rail travel increases along the corridor, a local Thetford-Norwich service, potentially extending to North Walsham, should be considered.

Further along the line towards Norwich, near to Eccles Road station, the Snetterton General Employment Area has the potential for further development and future introduction of a stopping service could include Eccles Road too. In addition, the Employment Area benefits from a rail-connected freight facility which should be promoted as part of the Council's wider industrial and logistics strategy.

Other proposed developments

It is hard for districts to ensure their housing quotas are located near to railway stations when they don't have railway nearby. Developments proposed at Swaffham and East Tuddenham are poorly located for the rail network. Swaffham's nearest station is 14 miles away at Downham Market, and for East Tuddenham it is Wymondham at nine miles away by car, or Norwich 15 miles away by bus.

Dereham line

Norfolk County Council's Rail Prospectus identifies potential for reinstating passenger services between Wymondham and Dereham. This would allow more scope for shaping housing and employment policies within Breckland, especially within the Dereham area itself. Dereham is the largest commercial centre in Breckland after Thetford, and is the largest town in Norfolk and the third largest in East Anglia (after Wisbech and Haverhill) without a network rail link. Dereham could act as a convenient railhead for communities in the northern part of the district. There is also a proposal for the development of 2,000 homes on the Robertson barracks site at Swanton Morley when the barracks close in 2031. The site is located near to the railway line north of Dereham at Hoe. Any proposals for the Dereham line would of course have to be managed collaboratively with the Mid-Norfolk Railway.

EAST WEST RAIL UPDATES BY PETER WAKEFIELD

The graphic on the right, courtesy of the Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster, shows the employee density of businesses located in Oxford-Cambridge arc. It is one of the key drivers for East West Rail (EWR). The EWR Company has announced several changes to its plans, which we examine in this article.

Cambridge Station Eastern Entrance

At Cambridge station, the eastern entrance, which Railfuture and many others have been calling for, is to be progressed. Consultation feedback worked!

It is expected that a footbridge will be constructed from a new entrance on Clifton Road to the southern end of platform 7/8, continuing across to approximately the buffer stop end of platform 2. See image in RAIL EAST issue 205 page 10.

Given the painfully slow progress of the delivery of EWR, local politicians want this very important project to be detached from EWR and delivered now. We agree.

Cambridge East Station

David Hughes, the Managing Director of the EWR Company, has spoken ambiguously about EWR being extended along the Newmarket line. This was taken to mean that it would, as logic should dictate, go to Newmarket itself, with the entire route from Cambridge Coldham Lane Junction to Newmarket's Chippenham Junction being restored to double track.

But no, it is obvious that EWR hasn't been listening to anybody but consultants. Consultants for the Cambridge Airport redevelopment project appear to have persuaded the Company that the station should be just off Barnwell Road on land in the furthest southwest corner of the airfield where few live and few jobs exist.

Most local residents want the station to be further east at Gazelle Road-Yarrow Road level crossing, close to thousands of jobs and a large and growing population — and also close to the Airport redevelopment should it eventually happen. The level crossing here should of course be closed and replaced by a bridge.

Newmarket must be the turnback station for EWR with the line to Cambridge restored to double track to enable a frequent service to operate to Newmarket, with some services going on to Soham and Ely and east to Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich.

Cambourne

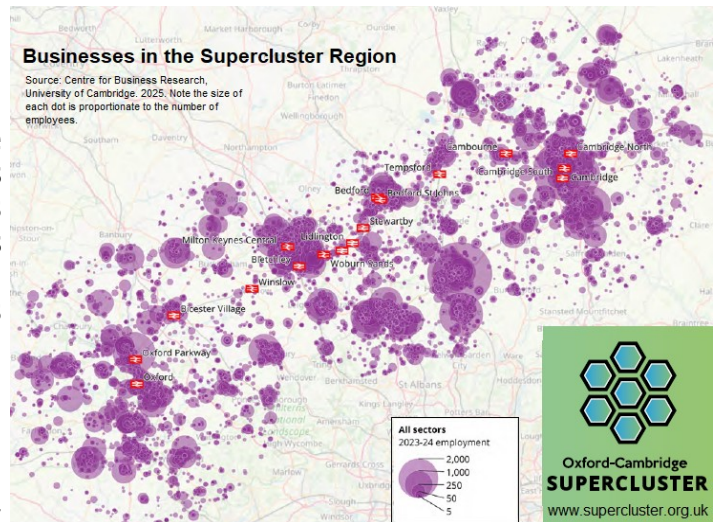
Going west, the original site proposed for Cambourne station has been abandoned. Local councillors have worked closely with EWR to move it 700m west to an ideal site. This settlement is planned to have up to 100,000 residents.

St Neots

The new railway will skirt the eastern edge of this very fast-growing town already with some 40,000 residents. Currently, if any of them want to use the new railway, they will have to drive five miles south to the new station at Tempsford, Bedfordshire, or drive east some nine miles to Cambourne. This is nonsense. A new park and ride travel hub station must be constructed on the eastern edge of St Neots. The EWR Company is supposed to be planning for the next 200 years.

Tempsford

This name is, as we have written about before, going to become famous. A new town is confirmed by HM Government with very large numbers of residents (up to



320,000) being claimed for its eventual size. Most will commute to Cambridge but obviously many will commute to London as well. Its station will first be built alongside the tracks of the East Coast Mainline, followed by platforms above on an east west alignment following EWR's "route option 1c" towards Bedford that crosses the Great North Road just north of the Black Cat Roundabout (currently being very expensively reconstructed).

Bedford

The new line will access Bedford station from the east just north of the station on separate tracks parallel to the very busy four Midland Mainline (MML) tracks. EWR will keep to the east of them using its own platforms within an extensively rebuilt station. Additional platforms will be built alongside the "fast" MML tracks.

Bedford will be a key interchange from all directions and, with the right frequency on all services, will be the fastest way of connecting the East Midlands towns and cities, Luton and St Albans, to Cambridge, Cambourne, Tempsford, Milton Keynes, Oxford.

Bedford St John's

The current station of that name will be closed (just as its predecessor was in the 1980s) as the EWR line will be diverted to a new alignment to pass close to Bedford Hospital, where a much larger station will be built taking the same name.

The Marston Vale Line

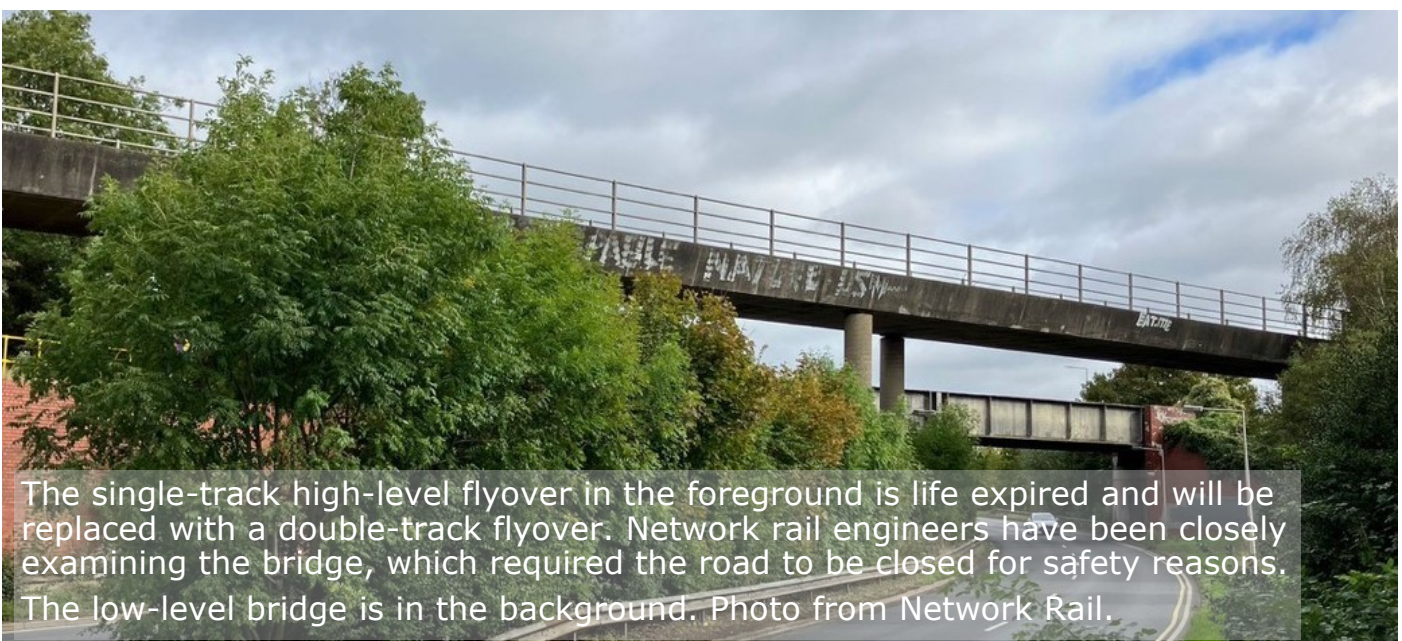
Continuing west, EWR takes over the existing railway (15 miles) with numerous small stations. EWR has decided that the new service pattern of up to five trains each way each hour will only work if they are consolidated into four: Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Lidlington, Stewartby. Railfuture East Anglia agrees with this proposal.

Each of these stations will be rebuilt to modern standards in slightly more appropriate locations to serve existing growing as well as new communities.

The new station to serve Stewartby will also be at one of the main entrances to a theme park being built by US Company, Universal Studios. The footfall through this station is expected to be very considerable.

Bletchley-Milton Keynes

At Bletchley station the Marston Vale Line will continue as now into the low-level platforms. Before reaching them there is a junction with the rebuilt high-level lines that continue to the new Bletchley High Level platform lines that continue west to the completed EWR line to Winslow, Bicester Village and Oxford — in use just for freight for the time being. The last section of the Marston Vale line into Bletchley is single track but work is starting to double track this section.



WHAT NEXT FOR FREIGHT ON EAST WEST RAIL?

BY PHIL SMART



A more detailed version of this article first appeared in Modern Railways as an opinion column from the Rail Freight Group for whom the author works

Locomotive 66090 hauls the 19.08 Northampton Gateway to Southampton Maritime at Newton Longville on the new East West Route on 16 June 2025.
Paul Scott Modern Railways Magazine

As the 'Rail 200' celebrations are still fresh in our minds it is worth reflecting on how differently we do things today. The latest evidence of this comes with the publication in November 2025 by the East West Railway Company (founded in 2017) of their response to their third non-statutory consultation. It has taken us more than a generation to get this far, and we still have a long way to go before we see trains run over the entire route sometime in the 2030s. Forty years on from the opening of the Stockton and Darlington in 1825, most of our network had been constructed and in operation! Today it seems that *progress* has given way to *process*, and the rounds of consultation continue (see Peter Wakefield's article on [pages 16-17](#), which mentions some of the positive news that has come from the last consultation).

What does this latest chapter tell us about further opportunities for freight, which is already using the Western Section between Oxford and Bletchley?

The decision to replace nine of the ten stations on the Marston Vale line with just four and relocate a fifth to a new alignment is good news for freight as maintaining the all-stations stopping pattern alongside through services would have left little room in the timetable for anything else. We are promised sufficient capacity for up to two freight trains per hour, which should be sufficient for future growth. The proposal for discontinuous electrification is justified on grounds of cost, citing mitigation problems with electromagnetic interference, But costs are rarely saved, only deferred and for freight to rely on bi-mode traction will limit speeds over sections without overhead supply. It is also symptomatic of the line's legacy as a stand-alone project rather than one integrated with the rest of the network. Until wires reach Oxford from the South or Cambridge from the East, the route would still be an electrified island, but one which will only cost more to retrofit in the future.

The company's limited scope omits freight friendly features the line might otherwise have. Network Rail in its West Coast Main Line South Strategic Advice placed as its top priority the construction of an east to north connection at Bletchley so that freight from the east could access Daventry and Northampton Gateway besides offering a diversionary route to terminals north of Nuneaton. This is left to Network Rail to take forward at a later date and is now subject to a wider review of capacity.

The proposal for a Cambridge East station (beyond the original geographical scope) to provide a turnback for passenger services will result in a limited redoubling of the Newmarket branch. For freight to exploit this route requires a much greater length of doubling for future growth alongside the expected demand for more passenger services — and gauge clearing the tunnel at Newmarket to allow maritime containers. Neither will happen in the current project but will be left to another time.

The time has surely come when we need to adopt a more strategic approach to what East West Rail can really deliver.

40 YEARS OF CHANGE – PART TWO – NORWICH

BY DEREK MONNERY

The first part of this timetable review in the last issue (RAIL EAST 208, December 2025) looked at services covering tables 10-15 in the 1983 timetable (an image from it is shown on the right) — principally Great Eastern mainline trains plus regional lines from Colchester and Ipswich. The focus here is on regional services from Norwich, the West Anglia mainline route and long distance trains then operating from Harwich. As with the schedules examined in the previous article, the principal story here is of expansion and enhancement.

Table 16 – Norwich to Yarmouth and Lowestoft

As with other non-electrified routes in the area, these services in 1983 were provided by elderly two and three car diesel units. Timetabling of trains was random by today's standards, with gaps of up to 90 minutes. However, there was one through train from Yarmouth to London, the 0709 and the 1620 return, which used standard mainline stock including restaurant facilities. This through train had been provided when the original mainline terminus of Yarmouth South Town was closed. This was expensive to provide as the train had to reverse at Norwich, with a class 47 diesel engine attached to a class 86 hauled Norwich to London set for the journey to and from Great Yarmouth. So, it was one of the first victims of privatisation. Today it would be much easier to revive as some London to Norwich journeys are covered by class 755 bi-modes.

These new trains have provided a step change in quality, reliability and space, such that these services are now among the most reliable in the whole country. Services now have an hourly clockface pattern rather than the random pattern of 1983, but Norfolk County Council is keen to make services half-hourly.

Table 17 – Norwich, Cromer and Sheringham

In 1983, this service was roughly two hourly, with the line run down and at risk of closure. Since then, there has been a steady revival, with services now hourly, and a massive upgrade in trains and stations. This has been mirrored by the private North Norfolk Railway (NNR) that runs from the old Sheringham station site to Holt. A link between the two railways was built in 2010, enabling guest engines and rolling stock to visit the NNR (see photo on right).



NNR at Sheringham viewed from the railway gate at Otterndorf Green in 2020. By Jerry Alderson.

Table 18 – Norwich to Ely, March, Peterborough, Leicester and Birmingham

This service has changed radically over the years. The range of destinations available forty years ago was remarkable. For example, an early morning train left Norwich at 0637 and called at all stations via Ely and Cambridge to Bishops

Mondays to Saturdays

Table 18
Norwich, Ely, March, Peterborough and Leicester to Birmingham

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Stortford, then London Liverpool Street. I imagine most passengers were asleep well before Ely, as it did not arrive at London until 0924! Norwich to Peterborough services were roughly hourly. There were also five through trains to Birmingham New Street, running approximately every two hours.

At privatisation, what had evolved as a long-distance service from Norwich to Liverpool via Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester was franchised to Central Trains and later to what is now badged as East Midlands Railway, which still runs services today. Currently veteran class 158 units or class 170s cover the service. One hopes that nationalisation could bring an upgrade of rolling stock — maybe new class 810 bi-modes could be used?

Table 22 – London to Cambridge, Ely and King's Lynn

The 1983 timetable covers the West Anglia route north of Tottenham Hale, at a time when electrification had only reached as far as Bishops Stortford. North of Cambridge, the rail network was unmodernised, with manual signal boxes and semaphore signals. At Ely, tall semaphore signals were local landmarks, visible for miles. Trains from King's Lynn ran roughly every two hours, calling at all stations to Ely, Cambridge then fast to London Liverpool Street.

At about this time major changes were being planned, as the line to Liverpool Street via Cambridge was becoming congested. All fast services for Cambridge and King's Lynn were to be diverted south of Cambridge to King's Cross via Royston. Most trains from Liverpool Street would terminate at Cambridge (later extended to Cambridge North, although after its 2017 opening). In the mid-1980s electrification was extended to Cambridge. Later, in the mid-1990s the line was upgraded and electrified to King's Lynn. Unfortunately, this modernisation was scaled back to the minimum, with savage cuts to infrastructure around Ely and between Ely and King's Lynn, which left one single lead junction for both King's Lynn and Norwich routes at Ely North with most of the line north of Ely reduced to single-track.

When electrification was completed, class 365 EMUs provided the services from King's Cross to Cambridge and King's Lynn, with venerable class 317 units on the Liverpool Street route. In 2010, class 379 units were introduced to provide better travelling conditions for Cambridge and Stansted Airport services. Stansted Airport station had opened in 1991 (see below). New class 720 EMUs replaced all outer suburban class 317 and 379 units in the last five years.

Table 23 – Harwich (Parkeston Quay) to Sheffield, Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh

This timetable covered the two daytime trains that served the sailings from and to the Netherlands. It is incredible to recall that even in 1983 you could catch a through train from Harwich to Glasgow. The northbound train left at 0717, the southbound at 1120. The journey took just under 12 hours, and only light refreshments were available, so definitely not one for the faint hearted! Faster journeys could be made by changing at Peterborough, or indeed by travelling via London. The only boat trains running in 2026 are semi-fast trains to London, using class 720 stock, and a northbound train each way to Ipswich and beyond using bi-mode units. These latter trains are currently the only passenger services to use the north curve at Manningtree.

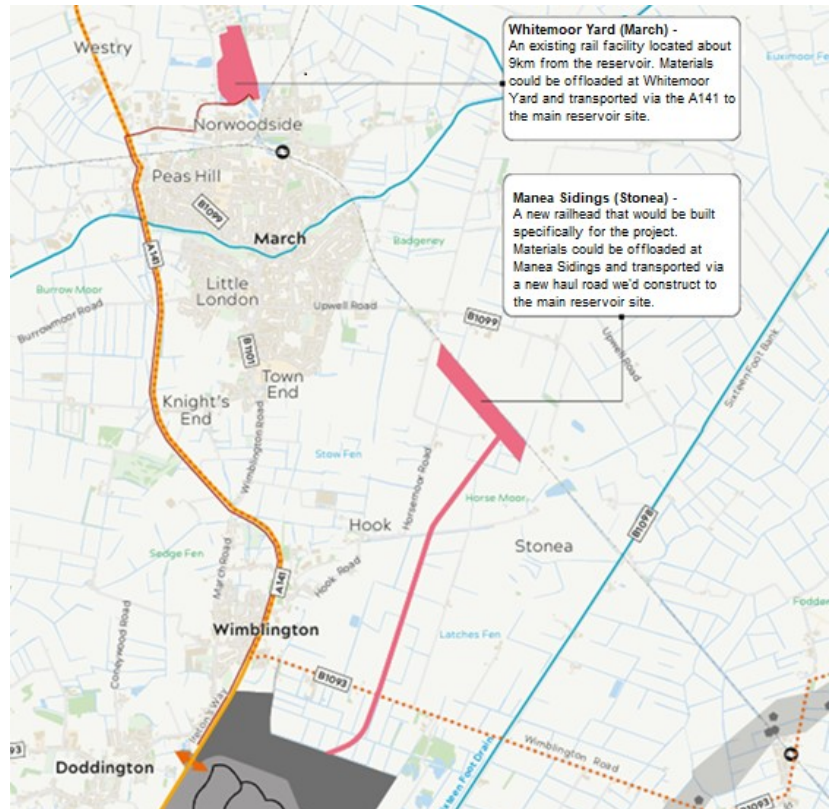
Postscript: Stansted Airport station

Although Stansted Airport had been run as a commercial airport from the 1940s, it did not get its own railway station until 1991. A new branch line was built to the airport off the West Anglia Main Line with north and southbound connections. Initially the station was served by one of five new class 322 four car units. More recently, as part of Greater Anglia's total fleet replacement, dedicated class 745/1 Stansted Express units were introduced in 2020. The service has grown from one four car unit every half an hour in 1991, to one 12 car unit every 15 minutes now. Regular services using bi-modes also serve Cambridge and Norwich.

CAMBRIDGE WATER SUPPLY – PROPOSED RESERVOIR AND A POTENTIAL ROLE FOR RAIL BY PHIL SMART

In late 2025 Anglian Water published further consultation on its plans for the new Reservoir between Chatteris and March in which they put forward two options for delivery of construction materials by rail.

Railfuture strongly supports any proposal for the supply of construction materials by rail. Moving a unit load by rail achieves a 76% reduction in CO2 emissions compared with moving the equivalent unit by road. As the distance from the sources of aggregates, either from UK quarries or imported and sea dredged material, is likely to lend itself to rail transport, this is likely to contribute to the carbon targets of the project overall. There are associated benefits in air quality and reduced road congestion which serve to enhance the project's environmental reputation. Looking at the two options in turn:



Option 1 Whitemoor Yard (March)

This option appears to offer a cost advantage as it is an existing facility. However, it is likely to be the least popular locally, with increased HGV movements affecting the Norwoodside and Knight's End areas of the town of March itself, as well as inhabitants of Doddington and Wimblington. Use of HGVs may also have a detrimental effect on the road surface giving rise to potential cost for the local highway authority.

These movements will also use, and conflict with, the main railway between March and Peterborough which is heavily used by both passenger and freight trains as it lies on the main Felixstowe to Midlands and North rail corridor.

Option 2 Manea Sidings (Stonea)

Potentially more expensive to provide, this option overcomes the problems associated with the Whitemoor option above, and needs to be judged against the overall cost of the project.

Although likely to exceed the immediate needs of the reservoir, we would ask that consideration be given to the potential legacy benefits of providing a loop line with turnouts at either end of sufficient length to store a 775m train. Such trains are used by intermodal (container train) services to and from Felixstowe. To satisfy future aspiration to grow rail freight by 75% by 2050, as well as increasing the number of passenger services to meet likely future demand, the network requires a number of 'refuge' sidings (rather like a motorway layby) in order to regulate those freight trains that need to be overtaken by faster passenger services. Such a loop need not require road access and therefore does not require the retention of the haul road once the reservoir project is complete.

This text is a version of the consultation response from the Rail Freight Group for whom the author works. It was also presented at the meeting of the East Anglia Branch of Railfuture held on 6 December 2025.

LOWESTOFT STATION ROOF VISION

BY IAN COUZENS

We know it's important that stations are as welcoming as possible to rail users, that our stations are properly looked after and that importantly there is protection from the elements.

Lowestoft station is very well located in the centre of the town and visitors can see the station is well cared for thanks to the support of the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership and the Lowestoft Central volunteers. With a large expanse of open concourse and exposed platforms, however, the overall roof that once graced the station is much missed. The roof was demolished in 1992 (see photo below) after falling into disrepair and at a time when the local authority was misguidedly seeking to relocate the station further away from the centre of town.



With its 170th anniversary just celebrated (the station first opened in 1855), now there is a bold vision to build a new roof. The designs which have been commissioned by The Lowestoft Central Project and the Community Rail Partnership feature an attractive Great Eastern Railway heritage style roof covering the station concourse together with platform extensions. The roof would be a self-supporting structure to minimize any impact on the original buildings. *Continued on next page.*

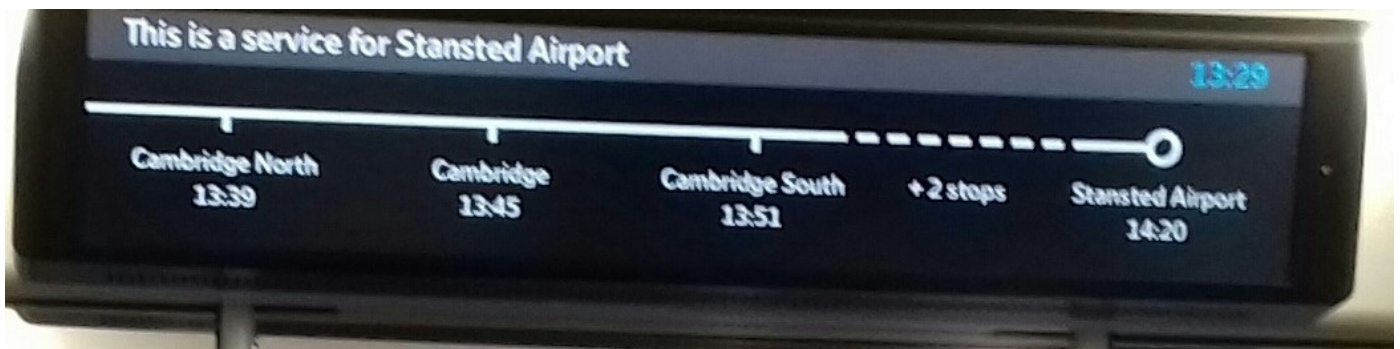


As well as keeping rail passengers dry, the concourse roof would create a valuable enclosed space in the centre of Lowestoft for community events and indeed would make the station an attraction in itself. This work builds on projects already carried out at the station to reopen the old parcels office for community use and current plans to improve toilet facilities.

The next stage will be to produce more detailed plans and costings, after which large scale funding opportunities can be investigated. We hope to bring news of development with this important project in a future issue of RAIL EAST.

GHOST STATIONS... NOW IT'S AN EMBRYO STATION WE CAN'T WAIT FOR CAMBRIDGE SOUTH — NEITHER CAN GA!

Everyone is disappointed that Cambridge South station did not open in January 2026 as intended (already a postponed date), with June 2026 now likely. RAIL EAST will be celebrating, but in the meantime Ben Walsh captured images on 9 January of the passenger information system (PIS) on Greater Anglia's train showing that it was about to call there. It was still showing this in February.



RAIL EAST ARCHIVE IS GROWING FAST – MORE NEEDED

Chris Milnes is the latest person to provide back issues of RAIL EAST, and his are the earliest so far, from 1976. There are a few more to scan, but currently all but 40 issues are on the website. See: www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/archive/.

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.

All submissions by **22 May 2026**, please, preferably earlier, but articles covering late news will be considered just before sending to the printer two weeks later.

RAIL EAST is formatted by Jerry Alderson.

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

JOIN RAILFUTURE — FOR A BIGGER, BETTER RAILWAY

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

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

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railfuture East Anglia

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

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

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

SATURDAY 26 SEPT 2026

Friends Meeting House,
5 Upper Goat Lane

NORWICH

NR2 1EW

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

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