RailEast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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Railfuture campaigns for better services over a bigger railway (passenger & freight)

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Greater Anglia invites Railfuture to look behind the scenes at Crown Point depot



A dawn image of a class 720 emu in GBR livery at Cambridge, 17 October 2026. Credit: Ben Walsh

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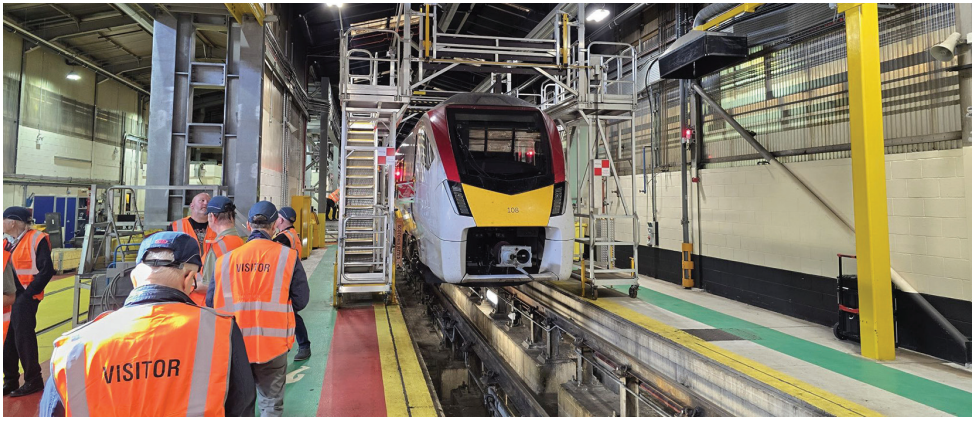
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Note: all photos are by article contributors unless otherwise credited



FROM THE CHAIR

BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

Firstly, I wish to express our sincere thanks to Jerry Alderson, who has formatted RAIL EAST for so many years and has now decided to stand down. Putting this newsletter together is a complex and time consuming task, so we are really grateful to Jerry for all the work he has done. Not just formatting, I might add, but also finding many photos and diagrams to help illustrate articles, which has enabled us to deliver the newsletter to a high standard.

Taking over the design and formatting role from Jerry, we are pleased to welcome Soo Smart of Double S Design. We look forward to working with Soo and hope you will enjoy the new look. Please address any thoughts on the new look to Peter Feeney, who continues to edit RAIL EAST (see p.24 for contact information).

Crown Point visit

Instead of our usual September branch meeting in Norwich, 11 Railfuture members were lucky enough to be taken on a guided tour of the Crown Point Depot, courtesy of Greater Anglia. This was an insight into what goes on behind the scenes in keeping our trains running day in day out and maintaining the high level of performance that we have become used to.

In getting to the site, we realised how secure and well protected the depot is. As most RAIL EAST readers know, it sits alongside the triangle of lines outside Norwich station, with road access via the Laurence Scott factory site, which also has its own security arrangements. Before commencing our tour we assembled in the depot's training centre for a safety briefing and to don hi viz jackets, safety shoes and bump hats.

Opened in 1982, the depot is still relatively modern, and first impressions were of a very clean and tidy working environment. Indeed, a far cry from the dirty and greasy diesel depots that some of us will remember from decades ago! Further investment has been made in the depot over the years and particularly when the new Stadler fleets were introduced. Stadler employees themselves are responsible for train maintenance and some Greater Anglia staff transferred over to Stadler on the arrival of the new trains.

One impressive piece of equipment installed to assist maintenance work is the bogie drop, which allows bogies to be easily and quickly removed from a train and then replaced. The train bogie to be replaced is brought to rest on the bogie drop "bridge"; the bridge carrying the detached bogie is lowered, then moved sideways and finally upwards to meet with an adjacent track where the bogie can easily be worked on.

Train cleaning and presentation remains the responsibility of Greater Anglia and we were able to witness one train going fully through the train wash. The wash is an integral part of the cleaning routine – it is after all so important that trains are seen to be clean both inside and out. The depot has a zero-tolerance policy towards graffiti but the secure nature of the site ensures this is a rare event anyway. The re-laid Victoria sidings at Lakenham where trains are also stabled are subject to regular security patrols.

The staff at Crown Point rightly take great pride in maintaining the Stadler fleets to an excellent level of reliability and appearance. We are very grateful to Greater Anglia for organising this visit on our behalf and would particularly like to thank Richard Jones, Charles Smalley and Jonathan Denby for being our hosts on the day.

Cambridge meeting

Finally, I do hope you will come to our Cambridge meeting on 28 November, where we will welcome Stuart Ratcliffe-Jones as our speaker. Stuart is Head of Communications at the East West Rail Company and as we move towards the final stages of the planning and consultation process, we very much look forward to hearing the latest about how the project is evolving. I'm sure there will be many questions you'll want to ask. Peter Wakefield's article on page 16 gives more information and sets out the timeline for the remaining stages in the planning process.

GREAT NORTHERN MELTDOWN IN SUMMER HEAT

BY MARK COLLINS

Statistics show that nationally rail performance over the summer of 2026 has been the worst on record. On the Fen Line the service has been abysmal, with recurring rolling stock faults and persistent failures across signals, track circuits, level crossing and points, all suggesting chronic underinvestment and inadequate maintenance of ageing infrastructure.

Between June and August, Great Northern (GN) recorded nearly 840 cancellations on services booked to start or finish at King's Lynn or Ely, impacting many thousands of passenger journeys. Commuters have faced severe personal and financial strain, ranging from lost wages due to late arrivals at work, to costly detours driving to Peterborough for alternative services to London.

As the article on p.7 by Paul Hollinghurst about the infamous "dewirement" of 3 July illustrates, a primary cause of the disruption is the route's overhead line equipment. Faulty and missing droppers have cut deep grooves into the carbon pads on train pantographs which at one point resulted in 19 out of 26 units being out of service. Meanwhile, extreme temperatures have caused wires to sag and destabilised the underlying peat trackbed. Compounding these issues, the Class 379 trains – reintroduced in May 2025 from long-term storage – have suffered from brake and coupling issues, failing air conditioning and problems with onboard safety systems. Difficulty in obtaining spare parts has hampered repairs, whilst a shortage of train crew has also led to further cancellations.



Communication systems have consistently failed too. Contradictory platform displays, and incorrect online journey planners and website updates, have often broadcast inaccurate real-time information, misleading both passengers and frontline station staff who bear the brunt of public frustration when things go wrong.

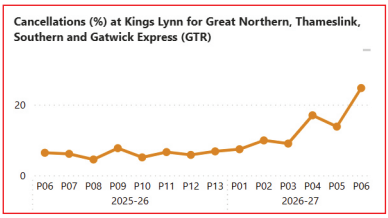
The escalating crisis has drawn intense political scrutiny. Local MPs, led by West Norfolk MP James Wild, have pressed Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander and the Prime Minister for immediate intervention. In response to mounting public outcry, GN and GBR Anglia (responsible for the infrastructure) issued formal apologies and on 3 August introduced a temporary speed-restricted timetable to protect the track from further damage. Then on 8 September they launched a joint "Fen Line Action Plan" aimed at mitigation and promising regular updates on progress.

This recovery strategy focuses on five key priorities:

- Strengthening infrastructure resilience against extreme weather
- Improving train reliability through targeted fleet interventions
- Increasing driver availability to minimise cancellations
- Making the timetable more resilient during disruption
- Improving customer communication

There were 320 cancellations in September, 40 more than in August, but as we go to press we have not received any updates from the industry. However, the Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) has just been invited to a Performance Seminar on 5 November for "the GTR area to the north of the Thames".

3 July incident: Looking north from Mill Road bridge at around 13.30 through the maze of overhead wires, with the overhead line maintenance vehicle alongside the stranded train. Photo by Paul Hollinghurst



The ORR chart shows that approximately 25% of services to or from King's Lynn were cancelled in September 2026

In the meantime, affected passengers are strongly encouraged to submit Delay Repay claims for any disruption exceeding 15 minutes and to write to their local MPs to ensure sustained accountability.

Peter Wakefield adds some further points highlighting systemic issues with GN and Thameslink (TL) services…

The troubles summarised above continued on south from Cambridge to Royston, Baldock, Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin and Stevenage to King's Cross.

Further to the difficulty users have faced on the busy King's Lynn to Cambridge railway, users on the continuing section of line towards Cambridge South, Royston, Hitchin and King's Cross have faced unprecedented disruption too. Obviously, this has caused great uncertainty to individual lives on a daily basis as well as to the operation of the complex, huge and growing industry along the line. GN's problems have been compounded by GTR's other service group, TL, often failing as a back-up to its GN services. There have been severe signalling breakdowns along the vital "Core" between London Bridge and St Pancras stations, as well as constant disruption along the route towards Gatwick Airport and Brighton at Croydon's Windmill Junctions. The unfunded plans to increase capacity at these junctions cannot come fast enough, as delays there affect TL services towards Cambridge and Peterborough.

In the past when these "Southern" problems caused difficulties along the "Great Northern", an emergency timetable could be operated from King's Cross station. Railfuture has recently learned that the TL 12 car units forming the four trains an hour that operate between St Pancras and Hitchin cannot be diverted to terminate at King's Cross station in a "Southern" emergency. This is because there are no 12 car platforms available at King's Cross since the much vaunted East Coast Mainline revised timetable was recently introduced. Additional long distance trains that are enabled by the new timetable fill all 12 car platforms - even if they are "short" open access five car express units.

The result of this is that "Southern" problems mean TL services along the "Great Northern" route collapse.

Is Finsbury Park as an emergency "turnback" a possible solution?

Railfuture's view is that if King's Cross is no longer available for an emergency timetable it is possible to terminate and start TL services at Finsbury Park – use of the freight-only link between Finsbury Park station and Canonbury would enable up TL services from Cambridge to run down the link to turnback and then return under the East Coast Main Line to Finsbury Park's downside.

Finsbury Park is well served by TL services as well as the GN Inner service to Moorgate for onward journeys.

News in brief

Network Rail (NR) has announced that it will replace 50-year-old track in platforms 2 and 3 at Lowestoft station. NR said that the ground beneath the rails was currently saturated in several places along the platforms, affecting the condition of the track and increasing the likelihood of faults that could lead to disruption. Oil from previous generations of trains is also visible. A specialist vacuum machine will remove areas of old ballast, before replacing it with fresh material. Sleepers and rails will also be replaced at various locations within the platforms. The work will take place between Friday 13th and Monday 16th November, with train services affected on both the Lowestoft-Norwich and Lowestoft-Ipswich lines with buses replacing trains.

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH FOOTFALL GROWS IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

We are indebted to Scott Dolling, Greater Anglia's Partnership Manager, for adding this important note to our article about the opening of Cambridge South station in our last issue (RAIL EAST 211, June 2026).

"For info on the Cambridge South / change management feature, Alan Neville and I established a series of pop-up visits and events with the business, medical and resident communities in the months leading up to Cambridge South opening. We spoke to hundreds of people and shared leaflets and information about the plans and preparations for services operating from the station and it became clear to us that the station would be well used from the beginning by campus staff and visitors.

This was in addition to the marketing material mentioned in the article and was developed in partnership with stakeholders in the local area to build awareness of the opening. These face-to-face events helped establish confidence and commitment for the local community and we were able to answer most questions on the day and liaise with the project management team on any technical aspects. We started the events in 2025 and continued regular visits until about a month before opening in June 2026. We also shared maps, and with the wider project team worked on a consistent way of presenting onward travel in the area; most of the partners were given material to put on their internal communication platforms to assist awareness of the services on offer. The regular free shuttle bus that visits the main medical sites calls at the station, making an excellent service for users.

I hope this is of interest and adds to the general points made about marketing of the station made in your article".

The significant efforts of Mr Dolling and Mr Neville from Greater Anglia have been vital in encouraging the now common scenes at Cambridge South station shown here.



The photo shows platform 1 (left) and platform 2. Passengers waiting on platform 2 are anticipating the arrival of the 16:35 Thameslink service that stops at Royston, Ashwell and Morden, Baldock, Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin and Stevenage before its sprint down the East Coast Main Line to Finsbury Park then London stations to Gatwick Airport and Brighton.

This service operates twice hourly early until late. In the photo there are considerable numbers on platform 1, too. They are concentrated towards the far end of it, as passengers for Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth have to use the front four cars owing to short platforms.

Over the next few months, it will become even more important to the region's economy because the major pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline, is shutting its huge research centre at Stevenage, transferring all its approximately 2000 staff to a new facility currently being built adjacent to Cambridge South station. No doubt most of these highly skilled people will remain resident in the Stevenage area, particularly because house prices in the Cambridge area are excessive. As a result, the frequent train service from Stevenage to the Cambridge area will become more vital and must be absolutely reliable in the future.

THE ANATOMY OF A RAIL INCIDENT

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

An article in the September 2026 Issue 211 of RAIL EAST mentioned the 3 July dewirement north of Cambridge, offering a first-hand account of how it affected services to the north of Cambridge, including the stranded train at Waterbeach and the restoration of CrossCountry services. The following article examines the incident in more detail and covers the whole of the impacted area. It attempts to convey a sense of how an apparently straightforward mechanical mishap can entail complex knock on consequences for rail operation.

On 3 July 2026 the 1E08 07:24 King's Cross to King's Lynn service departed from Cambridge station but as it passed the carriage sidings north of Mill Road bridge at 08:24 the contact wire wrapped around the front pantograph.

Much of the information in what follows is taken from the rail industry's detailed incident log which was published here, along with what was witnessed on the day:

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/information_on_the_cambridge_ove/response/3532313/attach/5/Full%20CCIL%20log%20redacted.pdf

Immediate impact

At 08:24 the train came to a halt by the crossover to the carriage sidings with the contact wire tangled around the front pantograph. The rear pantograph automatically dropped. Simultaneously the power tripped on the northbound and southbound lines – although, perhaps surprisingly, it immediately reclosed on the northbound line.

The severity of the incident was immediately clear, so at 08:27 (within three minutes) services were suspended in the area (Cambridge-Ely, Great Chesterford-Ely, Royston-Ely) with multiple calls held with relevant parties.

Four trains were left stranded away from platforms – two of which were able to set back. One southbound train was stranded in the platform at Waterbeach – it had power but couldn't continue, as the track at Cambridge North was without power.

- 1T08 London King's Cross to King's Lynn: The incident train (eight carriages)
- 1T11 King's Lynn to London King's Cross: between Cambridge South and Shepreth Branch Junction (12 carriages)
- 2W04 06:56 Ipswich to Cambridge. Set back to Dullingham
- 9S04 06:09 Brighton to Cambridge. Set back to Royston
- 1T13 King's Lynn to London at Waterbeach

The recovery would look at:

Train Running Options (Holding back & where); Degraded working details; Diversions; Service reductions; Stepping up; Key Points/Risk (time of day; Special events; Freight traffic; Morning Peak passenger flows; Overcrowding; Driver displacement; Unit displacement; Driver Personal Need breaks; Contingency Plans.

Services blocked, passengers informed and Rail Replacement buses ordered

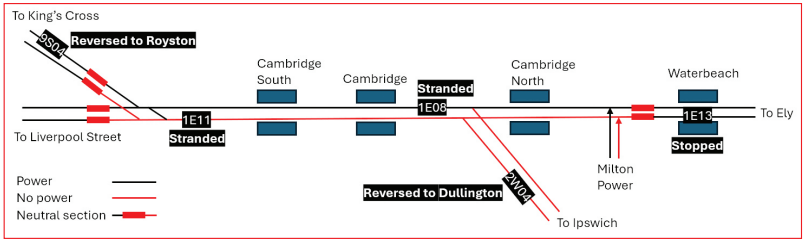
During 08:37 to 08:48 a block was established on services to Cambridge from Liverpool Street, and to Thameslink and Great Northern Services to and from King's Cross. Information to show "Due to damage to the overhead electric wires, services may be delayed, altered or cancelled". Five buses were confirmed covering King's Lynn to Cambridge, Hitchin to Cambridge and Royston to Cambridge.

THE ANATOMY OF A RAIL INCIDENT continued

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

Stranded trains

The simplified map below shows the trains and power immediately after the incident.



1T08

08:45 Driver reported 50 passengers on board, none with disabilities or access restrictions. 379024 pantograph damaged. 379008 pantograph dropped.

09:44 Power restored via rear pantograph so air conditioning to rear carriages. Passengers fine.

09:51 Bus being sent to evacuation point.

11:05 Detraining complete – 2hrs 40mins after the incident.

11:22 Fitters ready to remove damaged pantograph.

19:23 to 22:12 Incident train moved by attaching other Class 379s – rear carriages to Cambridge and front carriages to Hornsey.

1T11

09:22 Driver reported 250 passengers. Train very hot. Opening emergency windows.

09:29 Priority as two vulnerable passengers and passengers anxious and restless.

10:27 Detraining complete – 2 hours after the incident using side by side evacuation.

14:59 Moved after the power had been restored.

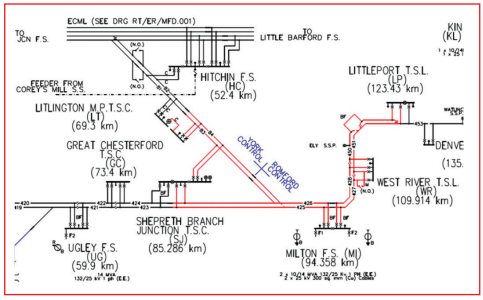
1T13

At Waterbeach. Appears to have been less of a focus as it was in a platform – taxis were only ordered at 11:31, 3 hours after the incident and the train itself moved at 13:13 when the points were manually operated allowing it to set back to King's Lynn.

Electrical

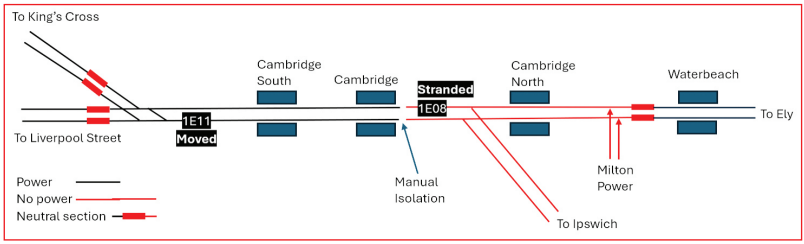
The extent and length of the disruption is mainly due to the power supply configuration in the area. The following map was included in one of the reports about the delivery of Cambridge South station.

Power is fed into the network at Ugley, Hitchin and Milton, separated by the neutral sections at Shepreth Branch Junction. The feed from Hitchin goes via a normally bridged neutral section at Litlington. There are cross feeds at Shepreth Branch junction which can be used to provide an alternative source of power to the area if Ugley, Hitchin or Milton are unavailable.



When the power tripped near the incident train it therefore affected the whole of the route from Milton through Cambridge North, Cambridge, Cambridge South to the neutral sections south of Shepreth Branch Junction, causing issues as far as Litlington due to cross feeding arrangements.

To restore the power to Cambridge station the wires had to be manually isolated at the north end of Cambridge station, as there are isolated sections to allow this (not marked on the electrical supply diagram). The work on the manual isolation commenced at 13:30 and the power was restored to Cambridge station at 14:11. Permission was granted to operate trains from Cambridge to the South from 14:35 but with a reduced service to avoid overloading the supply. This is shown in the diagram below.



The wires were then repaired, the contact wire being up at 16:06 and work complete by 20:23.

Services

Initially it wasn't possible to restore any kind of service as the lines were blocked by stranded trains, and these needed to be moved before any service could be operated – even a diesel one. This was done by 14:59.

The phased restoration of CrossCountry services was covered in the September article. Greater Anglia Ipswich to Cambridge services were diverted to Ely. To the south Greater Anglia services terminated at Great Chesterford, and Great Northern ones at Letchworth.

14:35 After power restored the following service was planned:

Greater Anglia

- 2HXX Liverpool Street-Cambridge: two trains per hour, operated by five-car units.
- 1KXX Stansted Airport-Cambridge: one train per hour, operated by five-car units.
- 2WXX Ipswich-Cambridge: Services continue to divert via Ely and will not call at Newmarket, Dullingham or Cambridge.

GTR / Thameslink

- Kings Cross-Royston: two trains per hour.
- One of the above services per hour will extend to Cambridge, calling at all stations (eight-car formations).
- 1TXX to operate as a special 1GXX shuttle service between Ely and King's Lynn.
- 9SXX Brighton-Cambridge services remain suspended.

CrossCountry

- Services will operate between Stansted Airport and Cambridge, and between Ely and Birmingham.

However, it took around three hours for this service pattern to settle down, with units needing to be shunted, and units blocking platforms due to lack of drivers. Some of these are shown in the timeline below.

Freight

We mustn't forget about freight – several trains were caught up in the disruption. Some were diverted away from Cambridge, but this depended on driver route knowledge so some diversions were declined. There was also a train in Barrington which normally runs to Cambridge to reverse, but the driver propelled out so it could go straight towards Royston.

THE ANATOMY OF A RAIL INCIDENT continued
BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

6M04 11:46 Foxton to Willesden Euro Terminal normally runs round at Cambridge but will instead propel out and head straight to Royston.

4L73 11:18 Tinsley to London Gateway diverted via ECML.

6J56 10:13 Ely to Pitsea diversion declined due to driver route knowledge.

6M55 11:42 Chesterton Jn to Wembley diversion declined due to driver route knowledge.

6L37 09:45 Hoo Jn to Whitemoor diverted via Peterborough.

6O36 20:56 Whitemoor to Hoo Jn first to be routed via Cambridge after being held at Hitchin from 22:28 until 23:16.

Summary

The log shows the complex nature of an incident such as this; it demonstrates why the disruption was so widespread and prolonged – although it does seem some of the steps are slow and the rail industry should look at speeding them up. For example:

2hrs 40min and 3hrs to evacuate two of the stranded trains.



Damaged pantograph on 1E08, the 07:24 King's Cross-King's Lynn service, photographed from Stone Terrace at 13.30, just as work was beginning to secure the pantograph. Photo by Peter Wakefield.

Five hours to manually control the crossover at Waterbeach to allow the train there to be moved.

Six hours after the incident to complete manual isolation of the wires to the north of Cambridge Station to allow power to be restored to the station itself.

Eight hours after the incident for diesel operated CrossCountry services to reach Cambridge North.

MURKY PLANS, OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE: THE CASE AGAINST CLOSING WATERBEACH STATION
BY JAMES DENNISON



Waterbeach's existing railway station is threatened with closure when the proposed new station opens approximately 2.4 kilometres to the north. The scheme is routinely described as a "relocation", but that language obscures an important distinction. Constructing a new station and closing an existing one are separate decisions. Closure must be justified through the statutory process established by the Railways Act 2005.

Under that process, the proposal must be assessed against criteria including its effects on passengers, accessibility, the economy, the environment and public expenditure. The available evidence suggests that closure is highly unlikely to satisfy those criteria.

Waterbeach Parish Council's survey has received more than 1,300 responses from residents and station users. Analysis of those responses indicates that closure would result in approximately 49.6 per cent fewer rail journeys and 20.2 per cent more car journeys. Some 600 written testimonies explain why: the proposed station would be considerably further from much of the existing village; many journeys currently made on foot or by bicycle would become car journeys; and older and disabled passengers, young people and residents without cars would face particular difficulties.



Existing demand – the full car park at Waterbeach. Photo by Peter Wakefield.

These figures are not a formal demand forecast, but they are the best contemporary evidence available about the likely behavioural response of existing users. They point directly towards adverse effects under several statutory criteria: reduced rail use, increased driving and emissions, poorer accessibility and significant disadvantages for particular groups.

The published business case does not resolve the issue. Its headline benefit-cost ratio of 3.65 compares the entire relocation scheme with a "do-minimum" scenario. In practical terms, the do-minimum scenario means not constructing the proposed new station and continuing use broadly with the existing arrangements. It is not a comparison between operating only the new station and operating both stations. The 3.65 figure therefore cannot demonstrate that closing the existing station is preferable to retaining it after the new one opens. I have found no published incremental appraisal of closure, retention benefit-cost ratio or fully costed retention option.



Existing demand at Waterbeach – commuter cycles. Photo by Peter Wakefield.

Some arguments historically advanced for relocation have also been overtaken by events. Eight-car platforms were presented to South Cambridgeshire District Council's Planning Committee in 2018 as an advantage of the proposed station. Yet Network Rail had already decided that the existing platforms could be extended, and that work was subsequently completed. The station now accommodates eight-car trains and recorded approximately 372,000 entries and exits in 2024–25.

There is also an operational alternative requiring proper examination. Railfuture East Anglia has suggested extending services currently terminating at Cambridge North to the proposed station, using an additional turnback platform and serving the village station en route. This could preserve a useful village service without adding another stop to the tightly timed King's Lynn trains. The proposal must, of course, be tested by professional timetable planners. The question is whether Network Rail has modelled it – or any equivalent retention option – at all.

Public bodies have already committed substantial resources to a project whose programme and business case assume closure. That makes a genuinely open statutory consultation especially important.

When the consultation opens, RAIL EAST readers – particularly passengers with experience of Waterbeach and the Fen Line – should submit evidence. The decision must reflect the real consequences for passengers, accessibility, rail use, roads and the environment. On the evidence presently available, the statutory case for closing Waterbeach station has not been made and appears highly unlikely to be met.

James Dennison is a Waterbeach Parish Councillor and Professor in Political and Social Sciences

MID ANGLIA SERVICE TO PETERBOROUGH – SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

BY JOHN REVELL

The Ipswich to Peterborough line is an essential local link and also the gateway for connections to a significant part of the national rail network for many passengers. I have used this service for more than 20 years and I naively hoped that the introduction of new and faster trains by Greater Anglia several years ago might achieve a more reliable service, with shorter journey times and more passengers, leading in time to a more frequent service. In my recent experience, this has not happened and, if anything, it's getting worse.

I live in Bury St Edmunds and six of my last eight journeys on this route have been significantly late, leading to a delay claim. A seventh journey was a mere 11 minutes late (fortunately I did not have to make a connection that day) and one, just one, ran on time. Here are four of the journeys.

1. 19 June 2026 – Bury St Edmunds to Newcastle via Peterborough.

Advance tickets with seats reserved on specified LNER train from Peterborough.

The 08:30 train arrived early and left exactly on time from Bury, but was already late by the time it reached Soham because of a freight train – so we missed the connection at Peterborough for the 09:51 LNER train to Newcastle. Our next train was the 10:51, an hour later. Other passengers missed their connections, including one who was a pall bearer at a funeral.

2. 22 June 2026 – Newcastle to Bury St Edmunds.

Advance tickets with seats reserved on specified LNER train.

The LNER train had left Inverness at 07:55, arrived and departed from Newcastle on time and arrived at Peterborough on time at 13:08. The 13:50 Greater Anglia Peterborough to Ipswich service had been cancelled, having terminated at Ely on its outward journey because of "signalling problems". The East Midland Railway service to Norwich via Ely had also been cancelled.

This has happened to us before, so we took the Birmingham to Stansted train to Ely and waited there until the train to Ipswich miraculously re-emerged from the sidings. This left a lot of other, less railway savvy, passengers stranded on the platform at Peterborough.

3. 16 September 2026 – Bury to Leeds via Peterborough.

Advance tickets with seats reserved on specified train from Peterborough.

The 08:30 arrived and departed on time – a freight train had passed through 15 mins earlier. We were then held at a red signal before Soham for "a freight train to clear Soham". We were subsequently held at Ely where the 09:15 Stansted to Birmingham train was allowed to overtake us and we finally arrived at Peterborough 42 minutes late. The train crew apologised for this major delay caused by "late running services, a freight train ahead of us, congestion and the condition of the track". Most passengers who had connections missed them, including ourselves. One passenger had started at Stowmarket with an advance ticket to Glasgow, so a long and normally relaxing journey had been made even longer and rather less relaxing.

We caught the train to Leeds from Peterborough an hour late, arriving a further 15 minutes late because of "an issue with a level crossing in the Doncaster area".

4. 8 July 2026 – Bury to March

The 08:30 was delayed and, to the amazement of fellow passengers, a freight train came through Bury Station at 08.32 (see photo p13). Our train left Bury late, was held at Soham, then left Ely 30 minutes late, arriving at March 30 minutes late (and presumably Peterborough 30 minutes late).



These far from satisfactory recent experiences indicate there is significant room for improvement in the overall reliability of this service. A practical tip for anyone travelling from Peterborough towards Ipswich after a long journey – catch the first direct train to Ely, where you will have more options and be closer to home.

A major factor in the unreliability of the passenger service is the frequency of late running freight to and from Felixstowe. Without a comprehensive plan for addressing such late running, it is hard to see what Greater Anglia can do with respect to the punctuality of the passenger service.

I am old enough to remember the severe and prolonged winter of 1963. I travelled to school by train then and had to change to a connecting train on each leg. Despite the severity of the weather, the train journey was only cancelled once during all that period. I am also old enough to remember the advertising slogan "Let the train take the strain". This needs to happen more often.

John Revell is a member of MARPA. A version of this article appears in the December 2026 MARPA Newsletter.

THE CAMBRIDGE REGION: AN INTEGRATED PLAN FOR THE RAILWAY, BUSES, BIKES, PEDESTRIAN LINKS

BY KATIE THORNBURROW

A version of this article by Cllr Katie Thornburrow, Leader of Cambridge City Council, was first published in the Cambridge Independent newspaper on 23 September 2026. She writes of her vision for the development of the railway in the west of our region and has given permission for Railfuture East Anglia to reprint it here. We have added headings to each paragraph.

Maybe these thoughts will lead to an overall plan for the Cambridge region being developed by Great British Railways, the Cambridge Development Corporation, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority and the unitary authority when it emerges from the depths of Whitehall. No more development in silos oblivious to the work of others!

Modernising British Rail: from the 1970s to today

If you remember the 1970s British Rail slogan "Let the train take the strain", you may also recall that carriages were old and rattling and signal boxes were magnificent brick buildings by the side of the track. Things have changed a lot since then and, over the last decade in particular, regional railways have been quietly increasing their capacity and comfort while the network has been transformed by technology.

Expanding capacity and frequency in Cambridge

We can see the difference in Cambridge. Platforms have been lengthened across the network so train operators can run longer trains by adding extra carriages. In some cases they have doubled the length of the train, massively increasing passenger capacity. Alongside these physical changes, we have seen significant improvements to train schedules, steadily boosting the frequency of services connecting

THE CAMBRIDGE REGION: AN INTEGRATED PLAN FOR THE RAILWAY, BUSES, BIKES, PEDESTRIAN LINKS Continued BY KATIE THORNBURROW

Cambridge with surrounding areas. And of course we now have two new stations.

Upgrading infrastructure behind the scenes

These visible changes have been made possible by essential work behind the scenes. For a long time, much of our regional signalling infrastructure was dated, some of it decades old. This severely limited the frequency with which trains could run for safety reasons. Now most of the signalling has been upgraded and relies on modern electronics, so trains can run faster and closer together on the track. As a result we now enjoy enhanced rush hour services including additional direct trains from Ipswich.

The future growth of Cambridge's rail network

Looking at the broader picture, the expansion of our rail network over recent years is extraordinary. Passenger numbers at Cambridge North have outstripped expectations, Cambridge South is open and busy, and if we look ahead to the arrival of East West Rail linking Cambridge and Oxford, we can anticipate new connections through Cambourne and even a Cambridge East station near the Marshalls site. We might finally see improvements to the line towards Newmarket, which is currently still single track and means there are too few services.

Building an integrated multi-modal transport strategy

Much as I like trains, I know that they are only part of the transport picture and we can't rely on the train to take all the strain. We need a broad, integrated transport strategy with support from every level of government, bringing together the many different ways people and goods can move. I want Cambridge to have an interconnected transport system inspired by successful models across Europe and the Far East. In those regions, railway and light rail networks act as the backbone of the entire transport system, because they properly connect to other forms of transport. Rail stations work as multi modal transport hubs to connect rail journeys seamlessly with bus services, active travel routes, and road networks.

Prioritising active travel, micro-mobility, and accessibility

Good design ensures that walking, cycling, and public transport access are prioritised from the outset. High quality, secure cycle parking at stations, easy transfer paths, and accommodating bikes on trains and buses encourage people to leave their cars at home. Trains + bikes and buses + bikes allow for hybrid journeys. Accessibility is equally vital; every station must be fully accessible to wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility, as is Cambridge South.

Synchronising timetables, ticketing, and fares

Joining these different ways of travelling together requires political commitment and practical coordination. Timetables must be synchronised so that a bus arrives just in time to catch a departing train, or awaits returning passengers in the evening. Integrated ticketing systems should allow a passenger to move between buses and trains without friction. Fares must be fair.

Moving beyond the traditional peak-hour commute

Historically, many urban transport systems were designed primarily around the idea of a daily commute, carrying workers into city centres in the morning and returning them home in the evening. That traditional model fails many of us, including parents dropping children off, carers, shoppers and people travelling outside peak hours.

Aligning sustainable transport with urban planning

It is also important that we recognise that transport is just one element of planning for a thriving city. Good integrated transport systems work hand in hand with other aspects of how we design our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and streets. For example, we can reduce the need to travel by designing communities where people can live, work, and access everyday services locally, and then ensure that when people do travel an integrated network makes sustainable and active choices the easiest option.



An early EWR Co visualisation of the proposed station setting

The much improved station concept following local consultation



Reducing road congestion for essential vehicle use

One side effect of a good transport system is reducing the pressure on roads, which benefits everyone, including those who need to drive. Offering reliable alternatives for daily trips frees up road space for essential journeys, deliveries, tradespeople, and those who depend on motor vehicles.

Putting community engagement at the heart of planning

As we think about transport and the development of the city, I know that community engagement has to be central to the process. We can't just build a new station without understanding how it fits into existing spaces. The design work that Cambridge City Council's shared planning service with South Cambridgeshire District Council did for the planned station at Cambourne resulted in moving the location of the station to a spot that integrates better with anticipated local growth and a change from a footbridge to an underpass for platform access.

The power of early local consultation

This clearly shows how effective it is to actually listen to local residents, businesses, and community groups early on. Incorporating local concerns helps refine high level planning and ensures new infrastructure respects existing neighbourhoods; it is a model that we want to carry forward.

Collaborative governance for sustainable growth

At Cambridge City Council we are working with the many other bodies that are helping shape the future development of the city, including the Combined Authority, the Development Corporation, the County Council and of course neighbouring South Cambridgeshire District Council, so that we have a modern and integrated transport network that serves everyone. This will allow us to deliver the ambitions of the next Local Plan and make sure that Cambridge develops in a sustainable way that works for everyone.

EAST WEST RAIL UPDATE – AND NEWS OF THE CAMBRIDGE MEETING (28 NOVEMBER 2026)

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Stuart Ratcliffe-Jones is the Head of Communications at the East West Rail Company.

He has very kindly agreed to talk at our forthcoming meeting in Cambridge. More information on p.21.

It is useful to remind ourselves where we are in the development of this exciting project.

East West Rail (EWR) is currently in Stage 1: Pre-application of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process.

Because the railway between Bedford and Cambridge is designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), approval must be granted by the Secretary of State for Transport via a DCO under the Planning Act 2008.

Current Status & Key Milestones

Current Stage: Pre-application: East West Railway Company (EWR Co) is refining proposals, evaluating route options, completing environmental impact assessments, and carrying out community engagement.

Statutory Public Consultation: EWR Co has planned public consultation events (including statutory consultation rounds) to gather feedback on final designs, environmental mitigations, and route alignments before submitting the application.

Target DCO Submission: EWR Co plans to formally submit the DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate in 2027.

Roadmap of the Remaining DCO Stages

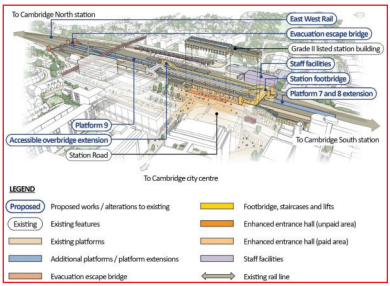
Once the application is submitted, it will progress through the following statutory stages set out by the Planning Inspectorate:

Stage	Expected Duration	Key Activity
1. Pre-application (Current)	Ongoing through 2026	Route design, stakeholder engagement, and statutory consultations.
2. Acceptance	28 days	The Planning Inspectorate checks whether all required documentation and consultation processes meet statutory standards.
3. Pre-examination	Approx. 3 months	Members of the public, local councils, and stakeholders can register as Interested Parties to submit written comments.
4. Examination	Up to 6 months	An independent Examining Authority holds hearings and assesses written representations from all parties.
5. Decision	Up to 6 months	The Examining Authority makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport (3 months), who then issues a final decision (3 months).
6. Post-decision	6 weeks	A statutory period during which the decision can be challenged via Judicial Review in the High Court.

On the assumption that EWR Co will have settled the problems raised by parties along the route, the Development Consent Order will be granted sometime in 2028. Railfuture East Anglia would then expect that with planning completed, construction will start immediately.

… but start in the EAST

Railfuture urges that work should start at the eastern end of the planned line, double tracking to Newmarket as the turnback for EWR trains, and including all the work scheduled at Cambridge station – new platforms, an eastern entrance and associated footbridges; changes to the track layout and signalling from Shepreth Branch Junction through to Cambridge North.



The much expanded station at "Cambridge Central" in an EWR Co visualisation, first published in RAIL EAST issue 205 (February 2025)

It will be very disruptive, which is why we need planning to include the creation of a turnback platform at Waterbeach New Town station now, plus the reorganisation of running lines at Cambridge North to help keep as many services operating through Cambridge station as possible during the busy reconstruction period.

Hauxton Junction to Cambourne

At the same time, Railfuture hopes that construction of the grade separated junction at Hauxton, the tunnels and Cambourne station will be underway so that electric trains can start operating from Newmarket to Cambourne as soon as these works are complete, rather than waiting for completion to Bedford. At the same time, we suggest continuation of the work to get the line built to Tempsford via an additional station at St Neots East Parkway, then the trains extended to Tempsford and on to Bedford.

Why we want a start in the east

Principally because the complexity of the reconstruction of the line and stations along the Bletchley to Bedford line will be a very time consuming piece of work – especially at the sites of the large station needed to cope with the Universal Studios Theme Park traffic and the two very large station reconstructions in Bedford with their huge associated track remodelling. Surely both pieces of work should be concurrent?

The proximity of Network Rail's Whitemoor Yard facilities, as well as the planned yard at Tempsford ECML, will enable logistics to be developed more easily.

Hopefully the completion of the line from Cambridge at Bedford will coincide with the completion of the Bedfordshire works and trains can start running across the entire route sooner rather than later.

A HOT TOPIC FOR FREIGHT

BY PHIL SMART

Regular readers of RAIL EAST are already familiar with the powerful environmental case for moving freight by rail, the 76% less CO2 per tonne kilometre than using road transport and the benefits this gives us in tackling the climate emergency. With the recent hot summer still fresh in our minds, another debate opens up. Should our focus be on avoiding climate change or should we instead adapt to the new norm? Of the ten hottest summers (June-August) in the past hundred years, five have been in the last ten years and four of those in the last five! Climate experts are warning that summer temperatures that we used to think of as exceptionally hot, are set to become the new normal. So, what are the implications for the railway and for freight in particular?

For the railway it means having to protect the track from heat induced movement of the rails, whether through expansion of the metal itself or through ground movement at embankments following long dry spells. Doubtless this will be investigated as possible contributory factors in the two recent derailments at Wickford and Lewes, which can close a line for several days for repairs to track and lineside equipment that may have become damaged.

Long periods of high temperatures are often followed by violent storms that can lead to flash floods, undermining the track bed or making a line impassable if submerged beyond a permissible depth. This leads us into interesting legal territory when it comes to compensating users if the railway is unavailable. Can the infrastructure provider invoke a force majeure clause if the outside event is deemed to be outside its control? On the passenger railway, the world of Schedule 8 payments to operators is about to change as, under GBR, the operator and infrastructure provider are one and the same, even if in the case of unplanned disruption, the passenger is still entitled to Delay Repay. But what of non-GBR users of the network? What will be the threshold for deciding what is extraordinary? If a section of line repeatedly floods or becomes unusable due to distortion of the track, should the onus be on the infrastructure provider to ensure the railway is climate ready, or just put it down to bad luck? Has the line been properly maintained? Are there any drainage culverts that have become blocked?

One effect we have seen this summer is the increased number of wildfires. Several examples have made the news headlines, particularly if it has affected road transport, such as the two-week closure of the A31 following a vehicle fire. Of course, fires can start for a number of reasons and, while lightning strikes may be a more frequent threat, human error through discarded cigarettes and vapes or disposable barbecues is not a direct result of global warming. But its consequences are! In a lush green environment, flames are less likely to spread but in a parched landscape, where rain hasn't fallen for weeks, the consequences can be dire. One railway example occurred in July, when several fires broke out in the Carpenters Park triangle near Stratford due to the rampant spread of buddleia. Media attention focused on the inconvenience to passengers which lasted a few hours, but it took five days

What does the rail freight industry say?



Phil Smart from the Rail Freight Group said the government needed to match private investment in freight

before freight services were restored on this vital junction for port traffic. This must surely lead to a re-evaluation of the railway's approach to lineside vegetation. Previously this has concentrated on tree growth and the consequent effects of leaf fall season, preparation for which is a common sight using Rail Head Treatment Trains to improve adhesion in early autumn. But with hot dry summers becoming a regular feature in the UK, perhaps we should take a more proactive approach and embark on a spring campaign to ensure that fire risk is kept to a minimum in summer?

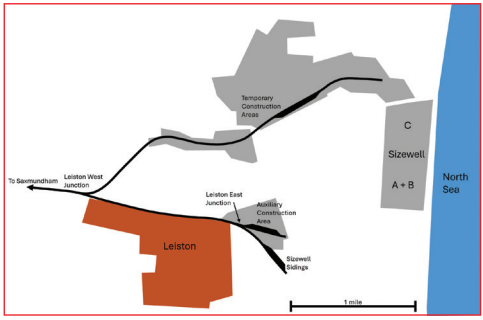
A particular focus on the main freight routes would be welcome. The interim freight growth target announced in September of 40% by 2040 was significant in that it identified how the 2050 target of 75% was to be split between the major market segments. The interim target of 65% for intermodal assumes this sector is expected to double by 2050. Not only will this require the provision of additional network capacity, but that every part of the existing railway must be available throughout the year. We cannot afford any lost time due to lack of maintenance.

An earlier version of this article was first published in Modern Railways. Its author, Phil Smart, works for the Rail Freight Group.

FREIGHT TRAINS BEGIN OPERATING FOR SIZEWELL C POWER STATION CONSTRUCTION

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

We have all known for a very long time of the plans to build a third very large nuclear power station at Sizewell on the Suffolk Coast. But it was as recently as January 2024 that the Treasury gave permission for construction to go ahead through the granting of a Development Consent Order. Those long years of planning were over and construction could really get going. And now it has!



Map showing the Sizewell Nuclear Power Station site immediately north east of Leiston. The map shows the position of the three power stations (Sizewell A, B and the new station, C).

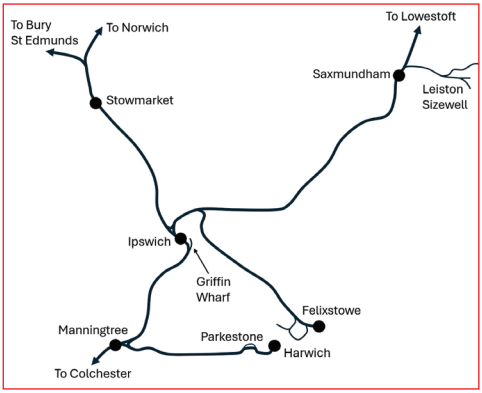
As you will see from the diagrammatic map, the new railway works around Leiston are considerable. The original branch from Saxmundham Junction, on the Ipswich to Lowestoft line, ran past Leiston town to a yard marked as Sizewell Sidings. There, an overhead gantry lifted the very heavy flasks for Sizewell A & B stations' nuclear waste materials on and off flask wagons, for transport across the country to the Cumbrian coast nuclear waste processing plant at Sellafield. Latterly few flask trains have operated. The track's age was more or less the same as that which passenger trains used in the 1960s…presumably last relaid in the 1930s!

Most if not all of the track from Saxmundham Junction to the new "Leiston East Junction" has been renewed. At this new junction a substantial new yard, called the Ancillary Construction Yard, has been constructed. This will take initial train loads of construction materials.

Maps courtesy of Paul Hollinghurst.

FREIGHT TRAINS BEGIN OPERATING FOR SIZEWELL C POWER STATION CONSTRUCTION Continued BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Further west another junction has been created, called "Leiston West Junction". From here again a new railway has been laid over two miles to the "Temporary Construction Area". This is very close to the Power Station C site. It has several very long sidings, able to take 2000 ton stone trains and presumably also materials such as cement and steel girders. Other than aggregates, one traffic we do know will arrive are tunnel segments. These will originate from a new factory Sizewell is setting up at Avonmouth, Bristol, and will provide the tunnels for the temporary desalination plant needed for the huge quantities of water required during construction of the third nuclear power plant.



Map shows how freight traffic to Sizewell reaches the project site from the national network. Maps courtesy of Paul Hollinghurst.

The good news is that on 8 September 2026, a train carrying construction material from Tunstead in North Derbyshire arrived at these new freight terminals. It is thought a further originating point for the stone will be Mountsorrel in Leicestershire. Some trains run via Peterborough and Bury St Edmunds directly to Sizewell, others lay by at Parkeston Yard near Harwich International and are tripped from there to Sizewell via Ipswich and Saxmundham on the East Suffolk Line. Other trainloads will originate at Brett's Aggregate terminal on Griffin Wharf, accessed off the Ipswich-Manningtree mainline. This connection faces south, so the loaded freight trains operate via Parkeston Yard too. There, the locomotive "runs round" its train and takes it back to Sizewell via Ipswich and Saxmundham.

Early days yet, as the train numbers will definitely increase as the construction continues and ramps up over the next few years. Any photographs of trains running into Saxmundham / Leiston will be welcomed by the editor – see contact details at the end of this issue.

We welcome, too, the renewal to modern standards of the several long and ancient lengths of the mainline track between Ipswich and Saxmundham. The junction with the Leiston Branch is at the time of writing about to be renewed and re-controlled by Saxmundham signal box rather than from the previous "ground frame".

Note, too, that the very long branch siding from Leiston West Junction to the construction area is classed as "temporary". It will be removed when Sizewell C is opened. On the assumption that much of the track is made up of new rail, it would be a good legacy for Suffolk from all this work, if it could be reused around Wickham Market station to install a long passing loop.

We are very much in favour of a second legacy of the construction period of the introduction of an Ipswich to Leiston passenger train service. Leiston's current population is about 6,000.

A reminder that the power station project is a huge undertaking – it will provide electricity for 6 million homes; creating 2,600 construction jobs plus about 70,000 more in the complex supply chain across the UK.

RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA MEETING – SATURDAY 28 NOVEMBER



Our new venue is Mill Road Community Centre, 6 Hazell Street Cambridge CB1 2GN

Our speaker is Head of Communications at the East West Co, Mr Stuart Ratcliffe-Jones.

Stuart is an enthusiast for the project and a mine of information. Do come! An excellent opportunity for an informed update, with plenty of time for questions. The meeting starts at 14:00.

The new Mill Road Community Centre is close to the railway, at the foot of the western ramp of Mill Road Bridge, about a 10 minute walk from the station.

From Cambridge station entrance – go right.

Head across Station Square to and past the Ibis Hotel Chill Café entrance.

Continue across the carpark towards the red cycle bridge.

Spot the new mural at the west end of the bridge and enter Devonshire Road ahead. Do not turn left! Nor go upstairs!

Head up Devonshire Road towards the construction cranes looming over the Mill Park Development (on the site of the Midland Railway goods yard).

You're at Mill Road when you see the White Swan pub on the opposite side.

Turn right into Mill Road and immediately cross it via the traffic refuges.

Having crossed the road, turn right towards the red brick building. This is Headley Street. Turn left.

At the end of Headley Street is a shop for sale. Turn right into Hazell Street. The Community Centre is directly ahead.

Alternatively, use this route finder on Google Maps: https://shorturl.at/4oSNu

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

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

This issue of RAIL EAST is designed by Soo Smart of Double S Design in Ipswich. We hope you like the new look of the newsletter. Please send all submissions for the next issue by Friday 15 January 2027, but articles covering late news will be considered just before sending to the printer in early February.

Beaulieu Park footfall exceeds forecasts



Photo by Jerry Alderson

As we finalise this issue for publication in late October, hot on the heels of all the encouraging news about passenger numbers in the opening weeks of Cambridge South, comes another tale illustrating that familiar truth Build it and They Will Come! Greater Anglia has just announced passenger numbers for the first year of operations at Beaulieu Park station exceeding 800,000 - see https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/about-us/news-desk/news-articles/beaulieu-park-station-sees-double-its-expected-passenger-numbers

Three immediate points seem pertinent:

1. It's about time the Treasury thinking (the infamous Green Book) that informs the calculations made in the Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance was rethought. Consistent underestimates of new stations use are fast becoming an embarrassment. And this isn't a purely academic matter, since such projections determine funding allocations - which in turn, crudely, determine the size and facilities of each new station build.
2. The impressive first year patronage at Beaulieu Park indicates significant new traveller flows to and from London - the volume can't just be people who would otherwise use Chelmsford station. So we have, yet again, some compelling proof that embedding good quality rail and bus links in new housing developments really can bring about modal shift.
3. With this evidence of strong patronage, will the station as designed really be fit to cope with a growing population?

RECEIVING RAIL EAST BY POST OR ELECTRONICALLY?

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

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

Your co-operation will be appreciated. The latest RAIL EAST is always at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/.

Cambridge North

When Cambridge North station opened in May 2017 there were no retail facilities (other than the train ticket vending machines),

and construction had not begun on the hotel or office block. After a year, Costa Coffee moved into the vacant kiosk. However, the much larger retail area remained empty until 2025, when a personal fitness training centre opened — a somewhat strange facility at a railway station. On 1 November it was see celebrating its first anniversary (see photo).



Photo by Jerry Alderson

Looking ahead

Topics in the next issue, February 2027, will include

- **All station footfall data for 2025/26**
- **Looking at future service needs in Tendring**
- **Some learning from recent European rail travel**
- **Norwich area growth - calling for an improved service at Salhouse**
- **An answer to improving capacity at Welwyn?**

JOIN RAILFUTURE — FOR A BIGGER, BETTER RAILWAY

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

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

Annual membership fee is £20 (£22 for joint membership); under 26 years can join for just £14.

Join online at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/ using a credit/ debit card or PayPal — the £10 'paperless' option requires a direct debit mandate.

RailEast EAST ANGLIA

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

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 28 NOV 2026
Mill Road Community Centre
6 Hazell Street
CAMBRIDGE CB1 2GN

SATURDAY 27 FEB 2027
Friends Meeting House
St John's Street
BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 1SJ

A SATURDAY IN JUNE 2027
Colchester.
Date and venue TBC

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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