

RAIL EAST

The Newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of RailFuture

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Greater Anglia franchise update

Following a consultation exercise in April, the SRA has now issued revised tender documents to the three bidders; GB Railways, Arriva and National Express. The companies have to submit their bids on the 1st September. The SRA has issued a stakeholder briefing to keep interested parties advised on what is likely to be in the franchise.

The SRA has identified four key stakeholder concerns, although it is not clear how much notice the SRA will take of these when assessing the final bids. The concerns are:

- Proposed reduction of trains on the Colchester line from 7 to 5 each hour to allow for more freight traffic
- Support for Transport for London's proposed additional services but concern how they will be integrated with other services
- Concern that any new bus-rail links should be co-ordinated with existing bus services
- Strong concern about the impact of replacing existing rail services by buses at certain times of the day. The SRA has confirmed in the documents that line and station closures are not acceptable.

Although bidders are allowed to propose improvements to train services there are few improvements outlined in the basic tender documents. These are limited to improvements of station facilities and better integration. Bidders may include improvements to services to rural routes but this has to be done without additional subsidy.

A CASTIRON proposal

A rail alternative to the Cambridge guided bus system has been put forward by CASTIRON, a new organisation set up by Railfuture member Tim Philips. Rather than spend £75m on the busway, or rely on the SRA coming up with the money for a rail re-opening, CASTIRON proposes to re-open the line as a railway using the same principle as the recently reopened Wensleydale line. The route would be re-opened in stages with much of the work being done by volunteers. Stage 1, which would enable services between Swavesey and the Cambridge Regional College, could be running within a year.

Further stages would extend the services to St Ives, and linking into the existing rail network at Cambridge and Huntingdon. Many letters of support have been received and at least £100,000 has been pledged if a detailed proposal can be developed.

At national level, Railfuture has agreed to help fund a leaflet explaining the project and the Branch Committee will discuss a further contribution at its next meeting.

For more details, please contact: CASTIRON, Frances House, 10 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8DT. Or e-mail: Tim.Philips6@ntlworld.com

Next branch meeting

Our next Branch meeting will be in Norwich on the 20th September. We are at a new venue, the Pearl Continental Hotel, Thorpe Road. The hotel is about 5 minutes walk from the station. From the station entrance, turn right and walk up Thorpe Road. The Hotel is at the top of the hill, just before the railway bridge. The public meeting starts at 10.30 a.m. with a presentation from the Green Party on sustainable transport. There will also be a discussion on the CASTIRON scheme and updates on the Greater Anglia Franchise and the latest SRA publications. The meeting should finish around 12.30 p.m.

Guided bus-way plans on show - but still doubts

During July, Cambridgeshire County Council hosted a series of exhibitions on their proposed guided bus system between Huntingdon and Cambridge. The system was one of the recommendations of the CHUMMS study and needs to be operating before work starts on adding lanes to the A14.

The 40km system will comprise 23km of guided busway using former rail routes between St Ives and the Cambridge Science Park and between Cambridge Station and Trumpington Park and Ride site (P+R). The rest of the system will use normal roads with some bus priorities at key junctions. Two new P+R sites are planned at St Ives and Longstanton. Services will link into Huntingdon railway station and the proposed new station at Chesterton. The system will also serve the proposed new town of 20,000 people near Longstanton. Actual construction costs are £45m with the total cost including design and management fees around £75m. Subject to Government approval, the system could be running in

2007 and, according to the County, be carrying 16,500 people per day by 2016.

The system will operate as "open access", meaning that any operator could run services on the guideway subject to paying an access charge. Unlike recent light rail systems, the operators will not have to pay back the capital costs, and it is possible that the access charges may be met by a cost subsidy from car park charges. The County claims there will be no need for subsidies to operators (apart from the £75m initial cost!).

Although the County talk about a step change in public transport, many are still concerned about the ability of buses to get people out of their cars. There are also concerns about the operation of the Open Access system. Following bus deregulation, the County Council have little control over what services are run, so there are fears that operators may concentrate on the core route and not continue the busway to serve adjacent villages as proposed. There are also concerns about the future of existing bus routes along

the A14 when most traffic is diverted to a busway. There may be cuts or a need to subsidise these routes. The final concern about open access comes from the experience from rail privatisation where operators would not commit to investment unless competition was limited. Responding to these comments, the County Council say that their figures have been extensively checked by Government consultants and that the bus industry has matured in recent years so that bus companies are now more willing to invest and less likely to indulge in senseless competition. As the consultation drew to a close, it emerged from a meeting at Huntingdon District Council that user numbers are based on the assumption that there are 8000 existing bus users along the A14. A simple check on the number of existing buses indicates that for this figure to be correct, there has to be an average of 35 people on each bus throughout the day. This is clearly nonsense, and the Branch has written to the County Council asking for a breakdown of this figure.

First Group take over GB Rail

A recent announcement by First Group reveals that they hold a sufficient number of shares in GB Rail for the take over to go ahead. GB Rail is the owner of Anglia Railways and GB Railfreight and a major shareholder in Hull Trains. Anglia Railways operations will continue to be run as at present but the bid for the Greater Anglia Franchise will be strengthened by the input by First Group. The take-over makes First Group the first of the passenger Train Operating Companies to enter the freight market. Hull Trains is unique as it is the only open access passenger operator and is not a franchise under the SRA.

SRA gets to grip with rail capacity

One of the reasons that train punctuality has suffered in recent years is that there are many more trains running on the rail network. These extra services have generally been slotted in to existing timetables on a first come first served basis which has not resulted in the best use of the available track capacity. The SRA is now attempting to resolve this issue by reviewing services on crowded routes and also ensuring that there is enough time allowed for proper track maintenance.

The SRA intends to operate routes with a maximum of 75-80% capacity, although it accepts that for some routes, especially London commuter lines, may have to operate higher than this. Having identified which route has a capacity problem, there will be a series of studies to look at ways of providing the best use of the available train paths. This may mean changing

stopping patterns of trains, faster rolling stock or cutting some lightly used trains. The study on the West Coast Main Line has already been issued; the Midland Main Line (from St Pancras) is currently out to consultation. A study for the East Coast Main line is due to start later this year with the Greater Anglia routes in 2005.

As part of the process, the SRA has indicated the expected level of services for both long distance passenger and freight in 2011. Generally there are few changes to passenger services but there are significant increases forecast for freight - for example the number of freight trains between Stratford and Ipswich is expected to increase from 23 to 36 each day.

This is the reason for the proposed cut in passenger services on the Great Eastern Mainline. The capacity of the network beyond Stratford is limited.-Ed

From here & there

The last Royal Mail train left Norwich at the end of July as part of the Post Office's plans to end rail use. GB Railfreight and Virgin Trains have hinted that they are in discussion with Royal Mail to retain some mail traffic by rail.

A new leaflet describing the route and places to visit for the line between Ipswich and Lowestoft has been produced by the East Suffolk Travellers Association. The leaflet also includes bus connections to and from the train.

WAGN and Network Rail management told the Rail Passengers Council for Eastern England meeting in Peterborough that they hope to have punctuality on the Great Northern route up to 90% by the end of the year.

The Branch has met with the **CBI for the Eastern Region**. They share our concerns about slow progress on improving the railways especially the East-West Rail Link.

The new **Class 360 trains** are being brought into service by First Great Eastern. Passenger carrying service have begun on the Clacton branch, with the Harwich branch following. As the trains bed in they will be introduced to the main line.

The Branch welcomes contributions to Rail East. Short articles are particularly welcome. Material for the next edition should reach Nick Dibben by 10th October 2003.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 20th September - Branch meeting at 1030 at the Pearl Continental Hotel, Thorpe Road, Norwich. Please see front page.

Friday October 1st - East Suffolk Travellers Association Film Evening at 7.30 p.m. at Campsea Ashe Village Hall. Films selected from the UEA archive. Tickets £3 or, £6 with a buffet from 6 p.m., from Rod Lock on 01502 511715 or Campsea Village Store.

Saturday 22nd November - Branch meeting in Cambridge at Little St Mary's Hall.

Saturday 1st November 2003 - Railfuture Rail Users Conference at Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD (off Euston Road).

Airport strategy

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has issued a formal response to the Government's airport strategy. Although the SRA states that it has no views about where any airport expansion will take place, it does believe that it is in everyone's interest to ensure that there is a high public transport modal share in journeys to/from the airports. The SRA has agreed a basic framework for transport provision to airports with the Department of Transport based on passenger demand which suggests that airports with over 7.5 million passengers per year should have a dedicated station and train services to many parts of the country. For lower use airports but with over 3 million passengers a station nearby with a dedicated bus link is considered adequate.

Following discussions with the airport operators, the SRA has produced joint policy statements for developing rail services to the airport. For Stansted the following improvements are proposed.

- Confirmation of extra rolling stock on Stansted Express paid for by BAA as the Section 106 planning agreement for extra capacity at the airport. (The SRA Greater Anglia Franchise document includes 12 additional Class 317s being available in September 2004 to achieve this)
- There is a possible new line parallel to the existing rail route to the airport starting at Harlow and running direct to Stansted. This link could be extended to rejoin the existing railway line to Cambridge depending on the amount of air traffic.
- There is intent to speed up Peterborough-Stansted trains and possibly extend Norwich-Cambridge trains to Stansted.
- Direct rail services to Stratford are considered with extensions to serve the new Thames Gateway development. In the short term a Tottenham Hale-Stratford shuttle is suggested.

The Section 106 agreement mentions safeguarding land for a new line from the east and space for freight, although this is not included in this SRA report.

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Ipswich blockade

Although the detailed arrangements for passengers have not been finalised, the intention is to use Manningtree as the northern terminus for trains from London between 11th July and 5th September 2004 when Stoke Tunnel at Ipswich will be closed. The work is necessary to enable the passage of 9ft 6in containers from Felixstowe docks. The opportunity will be taken by Network Rail to carry out other maintenance work at the same time

During this period there will be a direct train service between Norwich and London Liverpool Street via Cambridge in the morning and evening peaks only.

The Cambridge-Norwich class 170 trains will be strengthened to 3-cars for the off-peak, allowing passengers to change at Ely or Cambridge for journeys to London.

Concerns have been expressed at the congestion on the roads around Manningtree leading to difficulty in assuring the reliability of the replacement bus services. As it is likely that the Anglia trains will continue to Harwich, the level crossing will be used several times an hour for these and the Harwich branch services. The adjacent road bridge under the railway has low headroom and can not be used by buses.

The incoming franchisee of the Greater Anglian franchise will have taken over barely 3 months earlier.