

# raileast

THE NEWSLETTER OF RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Yes, another year is upon us and with it an opportunity to offer a heartfelt "thank you" for the support you've shown the Branch during 2008. Attendance at Branch Meetings is beginning to reflect the high quality speakers our Chairman has managed to garner. But don't let up: Saturday 28 February is our Annual General Meeting at Bury St Edmunds so do try to be there too.

Quite apart from the business bit, we also have a Guest Speaker who is probably *the* British expert on integrated/interval timetabling, used so effectively in Switzerland. It promises to be a stimulating talk, so your support and questions are vital. Further details below and on the enclosed flyer.

And by happy coincidence our Secretary, Nick Dibben, has recently sampled Switzerland's railways, and in plenty of snow! So I'll get him to start the proceedings.

## The Swiss Rail Travel Experience

A holiday in Switzerland over Christmas and the New Year involved extensive use of the rail network, and a good opportunity to see just how the regular interval timetable, the theme of our AGM presentation, actually works in practice. The simple answer is that it works very well. The down side is slow journey times, with trains often hanging about at stations for 10 minutes. Yet there were a number of other features of the Swiss railway system from which we might learn some useful lessons.

Rolling stock – Spare rolling stock appeared to be available and during the festive season was put to good use. Many inter-city services use 8 coach sets of double-deck coaches. More than a few had additional single deck coaches with always a shunting engine at key stations to add or subtract coaches, as required. All the rolling stock appeared to be compatible allowing a mix and match approach where new low floor coaches, offering easier access by disabled people, were coupled to older power cars.

Rural services – Most rural routes are operated as driver only services with a penalty fare system in operation: you'd be clobbered a Sf 80 (£50) fine for not having a valid ticket. Mine, a Swiss rail pass, was checked on nearly every journey. Many stations were staffed or there was a ticket machine available. There were buttons on the train or on the platform to stop trains at request

stops. Each station had cycle racks and in most cases a bus was waiting by the station for connections.

Freight sidings – The desire to sell off rail land seen in the UK has not happened in Switzerland, so most stations still have freight sidings, as do many factories. A freight wagon or two attached to a narrow gauge passenger train was a common feature. This of course may partly explain SBB's freight division running at a loss, but a loss which, nevertheless, was reduced in 2007-8 from Sf 70million to around 16 million. That's quite a cut. And it is largely the competitive stimulus from open access private hauliers which has necessitated this. But SBB is still by far the largest carrier.

Information - Mixed results here. Station and on-train announcements were generally pre-recorded and often in German/French *and* English. The platform announcements always included the location of the first class coaches with information repeated on the departure screens and posters around the station. For some reason, however, the announcements, displays or timetable sheets did not include all the station stops. If you didn't know - and not all the trains on each route had the same stopping patterns – confusion might well result.

Although there was a full service operating on Christmas Day and over the new year, I did encounter a bus-substitution on the local railway journey near St Gallen. There the train normally runs down the main street in the village of Teufen. But not on 1 January: it was closed for a New Year's Day parade! A much better reason than general engineering works, I thought! ND

*Ed. Amen, Nick. So it's quite a system **and**, apart from Inter-City services based on quite a subsidy. But the electorate vote to pay this tax, hence the Swiss, though boasting one of the highest levels of car ownership in Europe, are not at the top of the car usage league. Indeed, over 1million Swiss do not own a car. And that applies, amazingly, to virtually 50% of the population in Basel, largely ascribed to the very good local public transport network! See: <http://www.worldradio.ch/wrs/news/switzerland/one-million-swiss-eschew-cars.shtml?12328> for the details. But now on to home territory. CB*

**From our Chairman, Peter Wakefield**

### **The 2009 Annual General Meeting: Bury St Edmunds Public Library**

As Chris said earlier, the speaker for this year's AGM will be Jonathan Tyler, a timetable expert who has eloquently argued for the "taktfahrplan". This is the German word for a timetable that plans for *real* connections at every junction rather than the hit and miss system that has evolved in this country.

We all know of exasperating examples in East Anglia where we see the branch connection slink away from an adjacent platform just as our train arrives. The Train Operating Companies seem completely oblivious to the problem, concentrating only on the radial routes from London. Surely, if the railway is to be of use to the tax payers who largely pay for it, and want to use it for, say, a journey from Woodbridge to Newmarket; this should be nearly as easy as one from Ipswich to Newmarket or London.... and so on.

Mr Tyler will explain all on **February 28<sup>th</sup>**, and parry your questions, so please, do come along and participate in what promises to be a thought provoking presentation. **It starts at 14.15 hours. Fuller details on enclosed Flyer.** PW

## **AGM PART 2....**

If you want to add a topic/s to the Agenda, do please notify our Secretary, whose contact details are on the back page, as soon as possible. Likewise, if you wish to be nominated as a new member of the Branch Committee, also send your name and contact details to our Secretary, at least a fortnight ahead of the meeting. We are always looking for new members with enthusiasm and contributions to *actively* bring to our work. CB

## **The East West Rail link Leaflet... and website.**

The leaflet that the branch has commissioned and largely paid for, is now printed. Suffice to say that we have had 10,000 printed and that you should have received a copy with the latest edition of 'Railwatch'. The leaflet is 'interactive' in the sense that there is a 'postcard' provided with it for you to send to your Member of Parliament. **Please do so.** You can download additional copies of both the postcard and the leaflet from the website address given on the leaflet. Please encourage your family and friends to send off additional copies to their MP. This extra effort will make all the hard work over many months by the Railfuture team that has produced the leaflet and website, worthwhile.

***Without your effort, our effort will be much less effective.*** PW

## **Trains at Christmas.**

Another Christmas Day, another Boxing Day without trains. Surely 2009 will be different? How can it be justified that Train Operating Companies(TOCs) and Network Rail can close the network down at such a busy time? The arguments are well rehearsed for train services to be restored for sporting events, travel to work, shopping expeditions, theatre trips, family and friends visits.... all the normal things that people do on 363 other days in the year.

**Christmas Day must have at least a modified Sunday service and Boxing Day a full Saturday service.** *Maybe this should be a major campaign for 2009?* PW

Ed: Good point, Peter, and this will be emphasised at national level with a press release from Chairman, Mike Crowhurst.

## **Ticket Hike**

Amidst the greatest global banking crisis for decades, with the real threat of *negative* inflation and unemployment, severe inflation+plus rises seemed especially objectionable. 9% at First Capital Connect and 7.4% at East Midland Trains were just two impinging on our area. Further afield, Arriva Cross Country *averaged* an 11% increase!

Although the Association of Train Operating Companies(ATOC) largely took the

flack, they meekly failed to point out that it was active government policy to transfer as much of the cost of running the railway to the user, rather than the taxpayer. Despite the astonishing sums 'invested' by government to try and stem the finance crisis, railway support, paltry by comparison, looks challenged as never before. Service cuts, staff reductions and general investment cutbacks seem inevitable on a railway which government expects to be run on strictly business lines. The growth cycle on which most franchises were let is disappearing, fast.

But environmental threats still advance, hence the future role for the railway will still be, ultimately, greater than now. Railfuture will continue to vigorously support a railway fit for the future and one that does not strangle itself with poor value fares. In short, a railway which shows a real will to control its costs and partnering a government prepared to fund the long term view. Do please, write to your MP making these points, as soon as you can. CB

## **General News from Our Region**

### **Cambridgeshire Rail Plans**

Our Secretary, Nick Dibben reports that the Branch had a very successful and informative meeting with Cambridgeshire County Council discussing a range of strategic issues. Nick, plus Branch Chairman, Peter Wakefield, met Councillor Bradney and Transport Officers Graham Hughes and Paul Cook, and took the opportunity to present details of the station count we had carried out at Meldreth. Ways in which the County Council could assist with issues such as improved cycle parking and signage were also conveyed.

For their part the County Council updated us on progress with the new Chesterton Transport Interchange scheme, which is fully supported by the rail industry. Funding bids had been submitted and were awaiting response from the Government: 2011/12 was cited as the projected opening date.

The possibility of re-opening the Wisbech line was discussed with the economic regeneration benefits recognised by all. The Branch suggested that since passenger and freight train operators had recently called for electrification of the Ely to Peterborough route, Wisbech could be added to that scheme to allow a through electric service to London. The County Council are still members of the East-West Rail Consortium but admitted that limited funds did not allow them to play an active part.

On a very different tack, Cambridgeshire is being asked to take some of the future domestic waste from London at the former brick pits near Whittlesea. We strongly advocated sending this waste by rail. The County agreed, but stressed that they could not force the traffic to travel by rail. After the success of this hour-long meeting, further talks are being set up for 2009. ND

### **Railfuture EA Branch meeting Nov 2008 in Cambridge**

Gilly White, External Relations Manager for Arriva Cross-Country(AXC), gave a

very informative and upbeat presentation on the activities of the new train operator since it had taken over the Birmingham to Stansted service from Central Trains. Ms White explained that the Cross-country franchise serves 7 out of 10 of the UK's largest cities and that, unlike other operators, there were no dominant passenger flows between any two stations. Their service interfaces with most other passenger operators with over 40% of trips involving a second train journey.

The staple Class 170 trains are being refurbished, plus extra seats, with a First Class section also installed. A 2 car unit will have 120 seats with 200 seats in a 3 car train. Catering has been taken in house to improve availability. The December 2008 timetable has seen the introduction of additional early morning and late evening trains to/from Stansted Airport and faster journeys on some services. Overall, AXC believe this route has great potential and are working with Network Rail to reduce end-to-end journey time.

Branch members welcomed the fact that there appeared to be far fewer cancellations and services turning around, short, at Ely or Cambridge. Some wanted an even earlier train to Stansted Airport and additional stock to relieve overcrowding on some services. Ms White responded by saying that there were no spare units available but surprised many by stating that an all-night service to Stansted Airport was a possibility. She also promised to investigate the distribution of AXC timetables to stations such as Norwich.

All-in-all, another first class exposition from a local Train Operating Company generating a welter of members questions and frank answers. ND

### **Norwich to London – with higher reliability. eventually.**

There cannot be a single Railfuture member who, like your Editor, doesn't wish to see the Norwich to Liverpool Street route enter an era of vastly improved reliability. Its frustrating fragility has been evident since well before privatisation, especially over the Shenfield to London section, the oldest bit of electrification and the most intensively used. The good news is that 2009 is to see truly serious work by Network Rail to rectify this, to the tune of £140 million.

The bad news though, inevitably, Sunday closure of the southern end of the route through much of the year. On several weekends, Saturday too. So please, do check before travelling, either on the internet at [http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/service\\_disruptions/currentAndFuture.html](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/service_disruptions/currentAndFuture.html) where the preview is about twelve weeks in advance, or from wherever you buy your ticket. The summer holidays are likely to be especially affected. CB

### **Ely to Norwich**

In earlier editions of RailEast we've mentioned proposals to resignal this route with the new European Train Regulation Management System – ERTMS for short. This is still the plan, but is awaiting Network Rail funding clearance for the detailed plan. If this happens, say in Spring 2009, the project is virtually certain to be implemented by December 2012. They are also considering an automatic full barrier design which can be remotely controlled from a central

point. These are already in use in Germany and Japan but would require safety clearance here. CB

### **Branch meets National Express East Anglia**

Peter Wakefield and Peter Lawrence met with Stakeholder Manager, David Charlesworth, plying him with many questions to all of which he responded. Indeed, too many to include here but there will be feedback at the AGM. So you should be able to discover, for example, why Norwich to Cambridge has a completely different Sunday arrival and departure pattern to that on weekdays.

### **Ticket Barriers**

Norwich will be the next station in our area to have automatic ticket barriers installed: late February-early March is the planned 'switch-on' period. Under active consideration for this treatment are Bishops Stortford, Harlow and Ipswich stations. But no dates! CB

### **Ely Congestion**

When writing about rail congestion at Ely in previous editions, several readers have pointed out that the Haughley to Peterborough gauge enhancement project should surely address the slow freight speeds over the two bridges north of the station. Here the speeds have to stay at 35mph for diesel/electric units and 20mph for everything else. If the average speed for the first mile north out of Ely could be raised from 20mph to 45mph, freight would clear the section more than a minute sooner. A significant operating benefit.

Sadly, the project is not funded for such expensive and highly disruptive work. Indeed, I am advised that a business case would be rather tricky despite the seemingly obvious benefits. But maybe the cost-benefit ratio might improve with the passage of time ....or the condition of the bridges! CB

### **East Suffolk Line 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

To mark the 150th birthday of the Ipswich - Lowestoft Line (actually on June 1st), East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA) will be holding a celebratory lunch at the Bell Hotel, Saxmundham, on Saturday May 30th followed by a public meeting and AGM in the adjacent Market Hall. There will also be an exhibition on the line past and present in Saxmundham Museum, in the High Street, May 16th - June 13th. All these venues are within a short walking distance of the railway station.

Further exhibitions will be at Woodbridge and Beccles Libraries May 25th - June 6th and Halesworth Library June 9th - 20th.

Full details of these and other events will be on the association's website [www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk](http://www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk)

ESTA would also be pleased to receive on loan any pictures, handbills, posters or other memorabilia for the exhibitions. If you can help, please contact Trevor Garrod at 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ or [trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk). TG

## **Lowestoft Station**

Jerry Alderson writes to say that the Railfuture Board has approved the Fighting Fund application by ESTA to conduct a survey of passengers about relocating Lowestoft Station, following a recommendation by the Passenger committee. The £200 award is conditional upon ESTA supplying evidence that it has obtained permission to conduct the survey on board National Express East Anglia trains or at stations. JA

## **Integrated Transport at Woodbridge?**

"Our bus and rail operations work extensively with each other and other industry partners to deliver integrated transport."

So said First Group in their evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee in April 2008, writes Trevor Garrod.

Apparently this does not apply to Woodbridge, however, where FirstBus is not using the new bus shelter provided just outside the railway station.

Investigations have so far shown what appears to have been a sad lack of communication between the County Council, District Council and bus operators when the station forecourt was redesigned. We hope that all sides will now work constructively with each other to resolve the issue. TG

## **Beccles Loop:**

Trevor Garrod writes that NXEA say that it is hoped to provide this long-awaited improvement at the same time as the line is resignalled, in 2010/11, but provision of the loop is dependent on third party funding, from such bodies as Suffolk County Council and the East of England Development Agency.

And it doesn't end there as funding will also be needed for the higher frequency service, which is the reason for installing the loop. Network Rail have confirmed they have completed the final development phase and are now concluding internal funding arrangements for the design work as well as pursuing third party funding for further stages of the project. TG

## **Sheringham Crossing**

As we go to press we learn that the plan to re-connect Network Rail and the North Norfolk Railway at Sheringham has been deferred for about a year. One reason is the need to give EDF three months notice to reposition a power cable. As this needs to be paid for and nobody wants the road dug up at the start of the tourist season, the decision was taken to breathe deeply and sort out the problems at relative leisure. At the moment there is every reason to believe the project will start in early 2010. CB

## **Railway History:**

Present our knowledgeable readership with a railway history conundrum, and an informed answer is virtually a certainty. Peter Lawrence did just that in our last edition and the answer duly appeared. Several in fact, so thank you for

the much valued feedback. As for the information, here is the gist.

Apparently, Feltwell had one airfield opened in 1915 and the other, for the RAF, in 1937. The earlier one was served by a roadside tramway which was removed in 1919, so essentially a World War 1 creation. Adjacent to this site a second airfield was built in 1937.

Shrub Hill however, was built in 1865 to serve a clay pit between Shippea Hill and Lakenheath. It didn't last long as the Railway Clearing House Handbook of 1876 shows it as closed. Fuller details are in 'Industrial Lines of East Anglia', if you can find a copy, and through the researches of the late Bryan Wilson who worked for the railway at Bishops Stortford for many years. CB

## Letters

A big 'thank you' to those who took the trouble to write in response to items in previous editions. It is a genuine delight to hear from you and be assured that your comments are noted and, where possible, published here in RailEast.

**And here's where to write with all that news and comment, adverse or otherwise: Editor, Chris Burton, / [cfb79ten@googlemail.com](mailto:cfb79ten@googlemail.com) or Nick Dibben, see details below. Either of us would love to hear from you, especially you Eastern East Anglians! Deadline for next issue is Monday 1 June 2009 (the correct date this time!)**

### Dates for your Diary

#### BRANCH MEETINGS 2009

**BURY ST EDMUNDS:**  
28 February at 14.00:  
Central Library,  
Sergeants Walk, St  
Andrews St, IP33 1TZ  
(The AGM)

**IPSWICH:** 21 June.  
Details to be announced

**NORWICH:** 27  
September Details TBA

**CAMBRIDGE:** 6  
December Details TBA

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