raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

Issue 191 • Sept 2021

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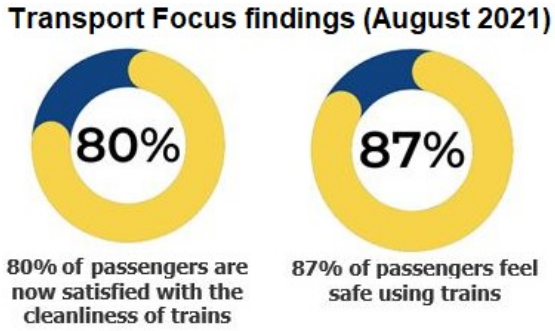
Leisure travellers have returned to rail...

...but many commuters still work from home. The 'flexi-season' attempts to woo them back — but is it good enough? We assess the pros and cons.

Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS ISSUE OF RAIL EAST



There was no photo competition in RAIL EAST 190, but Ben Walsh was first to respond that the graphic on the cover was clearly inspired by Dad's Army. The photos below show the confused state of our railway. The Greater Anglia station customer information screen is of limited help to passengers (photo Jerry Alderson) whilst the GTR train can't make up its mind who it 'belongs' to (Mike Lamport).

WELCOME BACK TO THE RAILWAY

BY NICK DIBBEN, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

With most COVID-19 restrictions being lifted in July 2021, it is good to see passengers returning to the railway and national TV adverts encouraging them to do so. Like many people, I haven't made as many rail journeys this year as I would normally do, but during August I took a trip to Newark to visit the National Civil War Museum (no connection with anything going on in Railfuture!) as an impulse day trip. At Huntingdon station (northbound platform photo below) there were around 100 people waiting for the London train, including some women who looked like they were attending a 1940s event (as shown on the front cover). The train to Peterborough was busy as well. The LNER train to Newark was practically full so the ability of the staff at Huntingdon to sort out some seat reservations was much appreciated. Other people have reported well-used trains across the region, so it looks like leisure travel is returning to pre-COVID levels. Many businesses are, however, taking a more cautious approach to getting people back into the office and a move to more flexible working is happening, so the long-term trend for commuters is less clear. A small reduction in commuters would see less overcrowding and avoid the need to run some additional services in the peak period. This could have positive aspects, enabling a more reliable service and avoiding the need to have rolling stock that is effectively used for two trips a day.

The Department for Transport seems already to have concluded that home working is here to stay. Our in-depth article this issue explores the pros and cons of the new Flexi Season ticketing scheme. Looking at the hard detail provided in the article, it is impossible to avoid thinking that the men (and women) from the ministry are just adding another layer of complexity to an already bewildering fares structure – when what's most urgently needed, as Railfuture has consistently argued, is a simpler rationalised fare pricing model. As always, time will tell whether this initiative has legs.

East Anglia Branch 50th Anniversary

The 50th anniversary of the Branch will be in 2022 and to mark the occasion, the Branch has agreed with Railfuture nationally to produce an updated rail vision for the region. National funds will be used to employ transport consultants to provide some supporting evidence and other data to help make the case to government, local authorities and the new regional transport bodies. The report is due to be issued in the autumn of 2022. This is part of our approach to looking forward rather than back to the past. Having said that, during next year we will no doubt feature some of our past activities, so if you have any memories or photos of past Railfuture or Railway Development Society events, please let us know.

Railfuture Public Meeting — Saturday 25 September, at 14.00 in Norwich

Finally, it was good to see members at the Ipswich meeting in July and I hope to see more of you at our Norwich meeting on 25 September at our usual venue (see back page), and also at our December meeting in Cambridge, when we will have an appropriately named new venue.

FLEXI SEASON TICKETS – JUST HOW ATTRACTIVE ARE THEY?

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST AND ALAN MAYES

As Nick Dibben wrote on page 3, leisure travel has returned to the railway with no effort (and arguably some hindrance) by the government and rail industry, but commuters are a challenge for the railway: the price must be right.

Rationale behind flexi-ticketing - why is there a need?

Flexi season tickets, introduced on 21 June 2021, offer a new lower cost option for people who commute to the workplace two days a week and in some cases also three days a week. The initiative is to a great extent a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, in that government and the industry are responding to quite dramatic changes in work patterns brought about by large numbers of once daily commuters now working at least part of the week from home. This is how the scheme has been introduced to the public and the media:

> New national flexible rail tickets, matching modern working habits and saving passengers hundreds of pounds, will be available to commuters across England.
>
> The paperless tickets will allow travel on any eight days in a 28-day period, with passengers able to tap smartcards or scan mobiles at the station with no need to select the days of travel in advance.
>
> The change has the potential to save commuters hundreds of pounds, providing greater choice and flexibility.

Text taken from: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/flexible-season-tickets-on-sale-saving-hundreds-of-pounds-for-rail-passengers

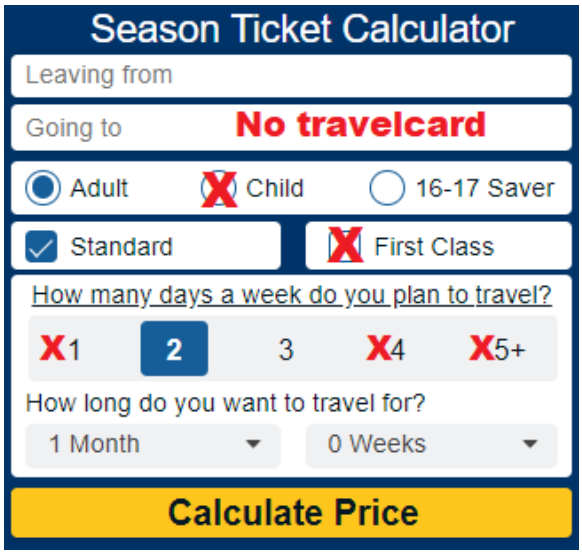
Basic features of the scheme

A flexi season ticket is a season ticket held on a smartcard or smartphone (see TOC website graphics, right) which provides eight separate days of unlimited travel between two specified stations — it is not a carnet of return tickets. The ticket must be validated at the start of each day when it is used. Flexi season tickets are available for most journeys between mainline stations for which fixed period (weekly, monthly, bespoke duration and annual) season tickets are available.

They are not available for journeys that include London Travelcards or journeys wholly within the London Zonal Fare Area. This rules out many journeys through London between places north and south of London such as Cambridge to Brighton, as even though there are direct Thameslink services the season ticket is also valid on routes using London Transport so it is not available as a flexi season ticket. The Cambridge to Brighton season ticket would cover the direct Thameslink train between the two stations but is also valid on routes through London Liverpool Street and London Victoria using London underground services. Rail season tickets which include PlusBus are available, but only as fixed period paper season tickets and not as flexi season tickets on a smartcard. There are also some rail journeys for which smart fixed period season tickets are available but for which flexi season tickets have not been made available.

Flexi season tickets can be purchased online (website or app) or at some ticket offices and have to be on smartcard issued by a train operating company (e.g. Greater Anglia smartcard or GTR's Great Northern Key card) or as a bar code on a smartphone.

The season ticket calculator on National Rail Enquiries has been updated to include flexi-season tickets where available for the journey specified and to compare the cost per day for an anytime day return, a flexi season ticket and the fixed period (weekly, monthly period and annual) season ticket for a specified period of commuting for a specified number of days per week. See: https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/times_fares/Season-Calculator.aspx



This enables commuters to see which is the lowest cost option, an *anytime day return* for each journey (usually for one day a week), a *flexi season* (usually for two days a week and in some cases also for three days a week) or a *fixed period season* ticket (usually for three or more days a week). Potential users also need to bear in mind that the fixed period season tickets are valid seven days a week, so if they are likely to also want to make the journey at weekends a fixed period season ticket may be the best choice. A flexi season can be used at weekends but only by using one of the eight days, which cannot then be used for a day commuting to work.

Flexi season tickets provide eight days of unlimited travel whereas an anytime day return covers just one return journey. Flexi season tickets are generally priced at the lower of seven anytime day returns (a 12.5% discount on the anytime day return each day) and 80% of the monthly season fare. They are never priced higher than 80% of the monthly season fare.

For many longer journeys to London the flexi season ticket cost is set at the cap of 80% of the monthly season fare due to the high cost of anytime day returns compared to season tickets. The flexi season fares for such journeys offer a much bigger discount on the anytime day return than shorter journeys to London and many journeys outside London where the 12.5% discount on the anytime day return prices the flexi season ticket at less than 80% of the monthly season fare. The discount on the anytime day return can be less than 12.5% when the weekly and monthly season ticket offer only a small discount on the anytime day return.

So are they good value for money?

Monthly seasons are priced at 3.84 weeklies. An annual season is 40 weeklies.

The following sections look at a few case studies to see whether the new flexi ticket offers a saving, and whether it could be improved to make it more attractive to potential users. The analysis focuses on comparing the flexi ticket to a monthly season. Annual seasons give an additional discount over the monthly, so some of the more marginal cases could end up with the season being better value if the commuter is willing to commit to a complete year of travel.

Commuting two days a week

Remember that the flexi ticket is priced such that someone **commuting for precisely two days a week** at a time **when anytime tickets are necessary** (and making no off-peak travel on other days on that route) **will always find the flexi ticket cheaper than the monthly ticket and will always be cheaper that buying eight anytime day returns**.

Four weeks is only 92% of an average month but the flexi ticket is a maximum of 80% of the monthly so always less than that. In many cases the saving over the monthly is greater, in some cases costing only 40% of the monthly, often for shorter journeys where the monthly gives a smaller discount over the anytime day return fare. However, where the saving is modest it will not necessarily be seen as good value for money if someone travelling for two days a week is travelling for a not dissimilar price to someone able to travel every day including weekends.

Commuting precisely two days every week		Monthly season ticket	Flexi season ticket	Flexi cost percentage of monthly
From	*To*			
Norwich [NRW]	Liverpool Street [LST]	£852.90	£682.30	80.0%
Ipswich [IPS]	Liverpool Street [LST]	£684.00	£547.20	80.0%
Peterborough [PBO]	Blackfriars [BFR]	£713.90	£466.90	65.4%
Colchester [COL]	Liverpool Street [LST]	£533.00	£408.10	76.6%
Cambridge [CBG]	King's Cross [KGX]	£517.30	£319.20	61.7%
Cambridge [CBG]	Liverpool Street [LST]	£473.90	£291.20	61.4%
Norwich [NRW]	Cambridge [CBG]	£471.20	£272.30	57.8%
Bury St Edmunds [BSE]	Cambridge [CBG]	£220.10	£116.90	53.1%
King's Lynn [KLN]	Cambridge [CBG]	£243.10	£108.60	44.7%
Hitchin [HIT]	Cambridge [CBG]	£235.40	£104.60	44.4%
Felixstowe [FLX]	Ipswich [IPS]	£101.00	£47.80	47.3%
Meldreth [MEL]	Cambridge [CBG]	£103.70	£41.00	39.5%

There are a number of cases where the flexi ticket may or may not offer any saving:

- Commuting three days a week
- Normally commuting two days a week, but with occasional missed days
- Sometimes able to travel off-peak
- Not working the same days each week

Looking at these one by one:

Commuting 3 days a week

For someone working 3 days a week, the average number of working days in a month is 13 (365 ¼ / 12 * 3/7), so on average will require 13/8 = 1.625 flexi tickets per month assuming no holiday is taken, or 1.5 allowing for some leave equating to working 48 weeks in 52.

The table below (prices without pence) shows that in a number of cases at the top of the table the flexi used for three days is more expensive than the monthly, but for shorter journeys is cheaper.

				Flexi season for commuting three days a week			
From	*To*	*Monthly season ticket*	*Flexi season ticket*	*x 1.625*	*Com-pared to monthly*	*With holidays x 1.5*	*With holidays compared to monthly*
NRW	LST	£852	£682	£1,108	130.0%	£1,023	120.0%
IPS	LST	£684	£547	£889	130.0%	£820	120.0%
PBO	FFR	£713	£466	£758	106.3%	£700	98.1%
COL	LST	£533	£408	£663	124.4%	£612	114.8%
CBG	KGX	£517	£319	£518	100.3%	£478	92.6%
CBG	LST	£473	£291	£473	99.9%	£436	92.2%
NRW	CBG	£471	£272	£442	93.9%	£408	86.7%
BSE	CBG	£220	£116	£189	86.3%	£175	79.7%
KLN	CBG	£243	£108	£176	72.6%	£162	67.0%
HIT	CBG	£235	£104	£169	72.2%	£156	66.7%
FLX	IPS	£101	£47	£77	76.9%	£71	71.0%
MEL	CBG	£103	£41	£66	64.2%	£61	59.3%

The table above shows how the flexi ticket can be seen as poor value for money, as it is probably not unreasonable to expect someone travelling only three days a week to pay less than someone with a ticket valid every day, but this is not the case.

Suggested improvement - There is probably a case for a flexi ticket specifically for people commuting three days a week, so 12 days instead of eight, but giving a larger discount to ensure it gives a discount over the monthly season.

Normally commuting two days a week, but with occasional missed days

As mentioned above the flexi ticket is always cheaper than a monthly for someone commuting two days a week, and is always cheaper than buying eight anytime day return (and in many cases the flexi season is priced as seven anytime date returns). The table below shows that if you only use seven out of the eight days on the flexi ticket at best you make a small saving, and in many cases none at all, and if you only use six then you are better off in almost all cases simply buying anytime day returns (ADRs).

From	*To*	*Flexi season*	*ADR*	*ADR x 7*	*Compared to flex*	*ADR x 6*	*Compared to flex*
NRW	LST	£682.30	£119.20	£834.40	122.3%	£715.20	104.8%
IPS	LST	£547.20	£86.40	£604.80	110.5%	£518.40	94.7%
PBO	BFR	£466.90	£66.70	£466.90	100.0%	£400.20	85.7%
COL	LST	£408.10	£58.30	£408.10	100.0%	£349.80	85.7%
CBG	KGX	£319.20	£45.60	£319.20	100.0%	£273.60	85.7%
CBG	LST	£291.20	£41.60	£291.20	100.0%	£249.60	85.7%
NRW	CBG	£272.30	£38.90	£272.30	100.0%	£233.40	85.7%
BSE	CBG	£116.90	£16.70	£116.90	100.0%	£100.20	85.7%
KLN	CBG	£108.60	£14.50	£101.50	93.5%	£87.00	80.1%
HIT	CBG	£104.60	£13.90	£97.30	93.0%	£83.40	79.7%
FLX	IPS	£47.80	£6.70	£46.90	98.1%	£40.20	84.1%
MEL	CBG	£41.00	£5.40	£37.80	92.2%	£32.40	79.0%

Suggested improvement - The above shows how easy it is to tip some of the more marginal savings into losses. These could be mitigated by extending the validity period for an additional week (so from 28 to 35 days) so people commuting two days a week, but missing a week for a holiday, would still be able use all eight days of their flexi ticket so the earlier two day a week savings would still hold.

Sometimes able to travel off-peak

Off-peak fares are often significantly cheaper than anytime fares, so if a commuter is able to make some of the eight journeys on off-peak services then it can be cheaper to buy individual tickets for each day of travel rather than using the flexi, as the table below shows (which assumes rail card discounts are not obtained). How many of the eight days need to be off-peak to make buying individual tickets more worthwhile varies, but there is still a case where the flexi season remains cheaper than buying eight off peak returns (OP = Off-Peak, SOP = Super Off-Peak).

From	*To*	*Flexi season ticket*	*Anytime day return*	*Day return*	*Type*	*Days off-peak*	*Price for 8 days*	*Compared to flexi*
NRW	LST	£682	£119.20	£59.80	OP	5	£656	96.2%
IPS	LST	£547	£86.40	£45.90	OP	4	£529	96.7%
PBO	BFR	£466	£66.70	£32.80	SOP	2	£465	99.8%
COL	LST	£408	£58.30	£30.30	SOP	3	£382	93.7%
CBG	KGX	£319	£45.60	£26.80	SOP	3	£308	96.6%
CBG	LST	£291	£41.60	£19.50	OP	2	£288	99.1%
NRW	CBG	£272	£38.90	£21.10	OP	3	£257	94.7%
BSE	CBG	£116	£16.70	£12.20	OP	4	£115	98.9%
KLN	CBG	£108	£14.50	£11.70	OP	3	£107	99.1%
HIT	CBG	£104	£13.90	£12.30	OP	5	£103	98.7%
FLX	IPS	£47	£6.70	£6.10	OP	8	£48	102.1%
MEL	CBG	£41	£5.40	£4.90	OP	5	£40	99.3%

In the tables percentages are shown in red where the flexi season is a worse option.

Suggested improvement – this method of buying tickets flexibly each day of travel would be enhanced by overall fares reform based on single-leg ticket pricing where rail users would be able to mix and match peak and off-peak singles to match their day to day travel – with capping to make sure the price of a flexi season, weekly or monthly season was not exceeded. (Of course, it is possible that the government and rail industry may decide that the early morning travel in a post-COVID world is not sufficiently busy to justify peak fares.)

Not working the same days each week

If a commuter is allowed to travel into work on different days each week, then there is a potential to make savings by using weekly tickets. For example, if someone works to a pattern of Thursday and Friday one week, then a Monday and Wednesday the next week, then the commuting over a four-week period could be covered by a pair of weekly seasons.

Examples where varying office days enable weekly seasons to be used

Travel any two in five days per week

	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr
1				1	1
2	1		1		
3			2	2	
4	2	2			

Travel three days each week with maximum of two consecutve WFH

	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr
1		1	1	1	
2	1		2	2	
3	2	2		3	
4	3	3	3		

The future?

The Railfuture analysis above shows that although the flexi tickets provide a way of making savings, there are a number of cases where the flexi ticket makes no saving so, as with much of the rail fares system, the only way of knowing for sure is to look in detail at the commuter's specific circumstances.

What is really needed is a scheme that tracks journeys and rewards the commuter with increasing levels of discount as they travel more, capped at the price of a weekly, monthly or annual season ticket. The commuter then travels knowing they are always going to get the best fare, through an increasing discount (e.g. starting at the flexi season's 12.5% off compared to an anytime return) and increasing for additional journeys, factoring in journeys made on off-peak services.

The scheme could require a minimum charge per month (in a similar way to top up schemes run by mobile phone companies) to stay in, but as long as the commuter makes this payment then journeys over a long period would be eligible for rolling discounts assessed up to a year.

Even without such a discount scheme and in the shorter term, smart ticketing should be available to make sure passengers get the best price out of the existing fares system. This can already be done. For example, in Stuttgart the smart ticketing system adds up all journeys made within a month and automatically charges the lowest price. This means passengers no longer need to decide whether a single, daily, weekly or monthly ticket is the best choice.

Right, an example of Greater Anglia's playful marketing of the flexi-season.

Further reading on the Railfuture website: Flexi-Season: not quite flexi enough
https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Press+release+13th+July+2021
https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1872-Creating-a-flexible-season-ticket-for-2021

SETTING CAR PARK CHARGES TO INCREASE RAIL PATRONAGE

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Value-for-money rail travel isn't just about the train fare. The door-to-door cost is what matters, and it can be inflated by the cost of getting to/from the station and either *exploitative* or *unsuitable* car parking charges. It is in the interests of both the car park and train operator to get this right, and technology can help them.

Long gone are days when a man (yes, it would have been a man) stood at the car park entrance collecting money from drivers, usually a flat fee to park all day. He was replaced by a machine where the driver purchased a ticket for a period of time and stuck it on their windscreen. Occasionally someone would visit the car park to check the tickets, and leave a penalty notice where no ticket had been purchased or it had expired. At most railway stations it would rarely have been economically viable to check tickets more than once a day—sufficient to be a deterrent against parking all day without paying but not for a short stay.

Many station car parks now use automatic number plate recognition (ANPR), which has the money-saving advantage that no staff need to travel there (rarely do station staff check tickets as parking is usually outsourced) and then inspect every single parked vehicle. Equally importantly, everyone who parks for the minimum amount of time (often 20 minutes) will be charged. It's hard to escape.

Unfortunately, neither train nor car park operator has realised the enormous potential to provide almost bespoke parking charges to suit every customer.

Let's take Cambridge North. With 428 spaces in its main parking area, it had never filled more than 300 pre-COVID. It's the equivalent of a lot of empty train seats. ANPR became operational in March 2021. On weekdays it costs £8.50 to park before 10.00; £5.50 from 10.00 to 15.59; and £4.00 from 16.00 (there are also weekend rates and seasons) — the same as before ANPR was introduced. These blunt-edge rates that cater only for medium or long stays deter a lot of short-term travel, such as popping into Cambridge to visit the bank or meeting friends for lunch, because the car parking charge is more than three times the train fare (£1.55, with a rail card, for the four-minute journey each way). The parking charge is also too high for someone who wants to visit the Novotel hotel (which has no parking of its own) for lunch or to use the swimming pool/fitness centre.

At Cambridge North, which has frequent trains to Cambridge, there might be a £1.50 charge for 90 minutes and £2 for two hours, but no longer, to avoid revenue abstraction; moreover, they allow the same parking space to be sold many times a day, so maximising revenue. For such a low cost, people might be tempted to park there for convenience, rather than nearby roads. In future if all-day parking is more prevalent these options can be withdrawn.

It is simple to set new rates and calculate the charge but it can be more difficult for the customer to understand how to use or be comfortable with, so information is crucial, as is the interface on the website or smartphone app. However, this seems not to challenge NCP in King's Lynn where you can pay by the hour (see photo, right).

Many drivers are used to being automatically charged (via their credit or debit card) at the end of the day for their parking, at the appropriate rate for their stay. It's the equivalent of an Oyster or Contactless card on the London Underground. There are many opportunities to set a charge that works for both customer and operator.

CAMBRIDGE AREA DEVELOPMENT – FURTHER PROGRESS IS AN URGENT PRIORITY

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Cambridge. Always the historic gateway to East Anglia.

Railfuture has written over the three previous issues of RAIL EAST about the need for real change in the immediate future if the railway is to play a full part in the development of our major towns…Peterborough, Colchester and Norwich. We made various suggestions for possible improvements. In this issue we look at Cambridge, where the rail network is much further advanced in serving its economy rather than being totally London-centric. And in a subsequent issue, completing this series, we will consider the case for service enhancements at our fifth key regional hub, Ipswich.

Cambridge is, of course, internationally famous for its ancient university. History says that its founding dissident scholars making their way to Ely in the Fens from Oxford decided that Cambridge was geographically a better place to settle because of the uncertainty posed by the causeway onto Ely, then literally an island surrounded by Fen. The road network led to the Cam Bridge at the southern head of the practically impassable Fens, which though not a deep-water estuary like the Humber, was just as big an obstacle if you didn't know the way. King John's baggage master should have headed for Cambridge where major dry routes met, making it the gateway for East Anglia from the Midlands and the North. In time the railways mimicked the road network and eventually no fewer than eight lines radiated out of the town's station - 11 if those to Kettering via St Ives, King's Lynn and March via Ely are included.

The photograph shows a Norwich train loading at Cambridge, its three cars proving inadequate for the task.

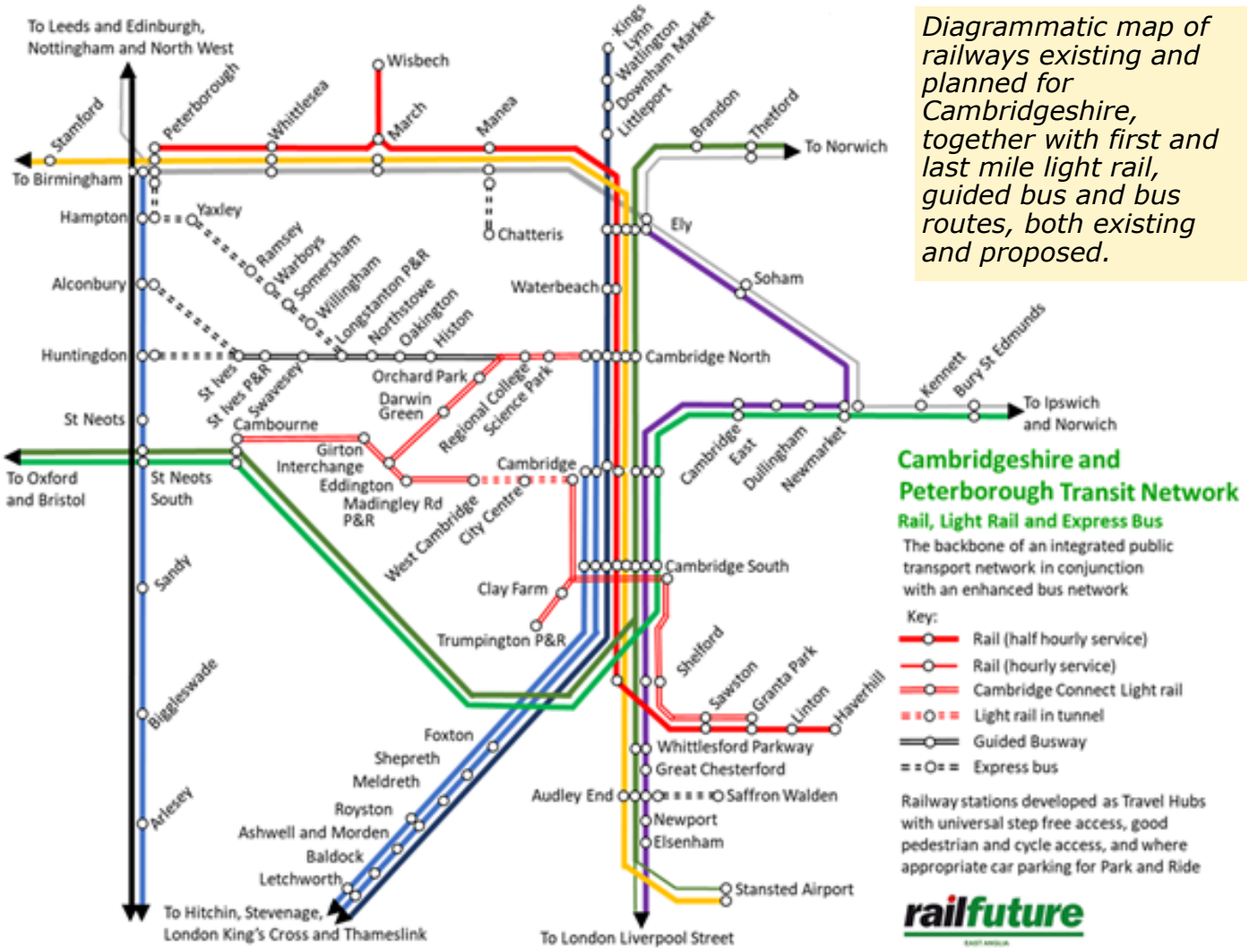
Knowledge based industry

Being a major transport hub was always going to make Cambridge an important regional town. But it is the university that in the last fifty years has directly and indirectly made the (now) city into an economic powerhouse. Research in physics, chemistry, mathematics, computing science and bio medical sciences has spun off — making it one of the most important centres of "new industry" in Europe.

The benefits of industrial agglomeration, scarce skills being paramount, mean it just keeps on growing. This has serious implications for transport as it is not just the resident population that needs better transport but above all the huge numbers of workers who travel to the quickly growing concentrations of jobs around the hospitals in the south city (30k + jobs), around the railway station in the centre (12k + jobs within 10 minutes' walk of the station), and in north Cambridge (over 12k jobs now) all of whom need to be catered for. All three are near the railway, and in such numbers that North Station opened four years ago and South Station should open in 2025. There are two areas of the city that are not near the railway and are employment hotspots. West Cambridge, where the dynamic modern university is busy creating over 12k more jobs and East Cambridge, where international technology giants are growing fast and employ 10k people already. Both are remote from the railway and need special attention.

Light Rail…first and last mile travel from the mainline stations

Railfuture has collaborated closely with Dr Colin Harris, an eminent climate specialist based in the city, who has drawn up a detailed plan for a light rail network, a "first and last mile" network based on Cambridge (Central) and Cambridge North stations. Two routes would run to West Cambridge then out as one to Cambourne to serve the huge developments on the way there. These should be seen as adjuncts to the regional railway network. A researcher who lives in the cheaper housing available say, in Littleport, and works in West Cambridge, could be persuaded to use mainline rail to Cambridge North and then trust the light rail network to offer a reliable, permanent, quick service to West Cambridge. Travelling today by train to Cambridge Central will be fine, but the bus route onwards has no guaranteed permanency. Steel wheels on steel rails is the most efficient form of land transport yet devised but if the rails are not there for the last mile, making the leap of faith necessary for modal switch will not happen. The map below shows the light rail network envisaged by Dr Harris, and how it links with other modes. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority must make this leap of faith in the industrial development of Cambridge.



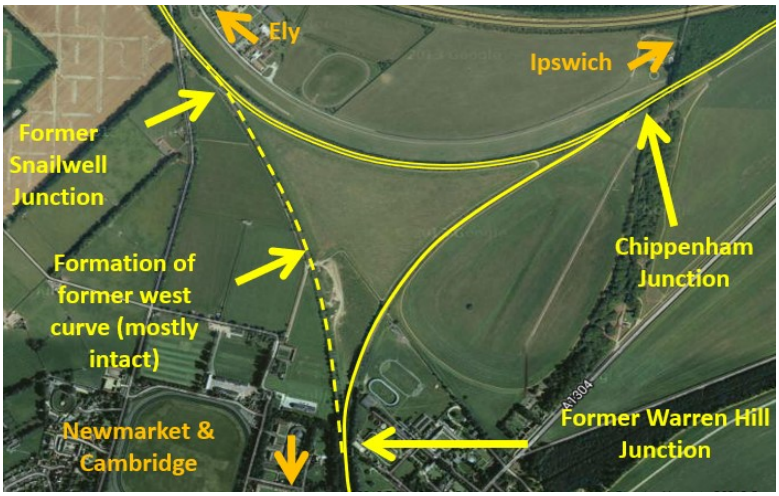
Diagrammatic map of railways existing and planned for Cambridgeshire, together with first and last mile light rail, guided bus and bus routes, both existing and proposed.

New Lines are being planned. More are needed

As can be seen from the above map, there are more railway links promised for the city, unlike in Norwich or Colchester, where for example, the industry mindset considers it an impossibility just connecting Sudbury with Colchester and Clacton.

So, what a difference here, where the East West Railway could arrive in 2028, revolutionising connectivity directly to the west to and beyond Bedford. More than that, train frequency will enable many people to use the connectivity that will be available at St Neots EWR station to make easy journeys from Biggleswade, Sandy,

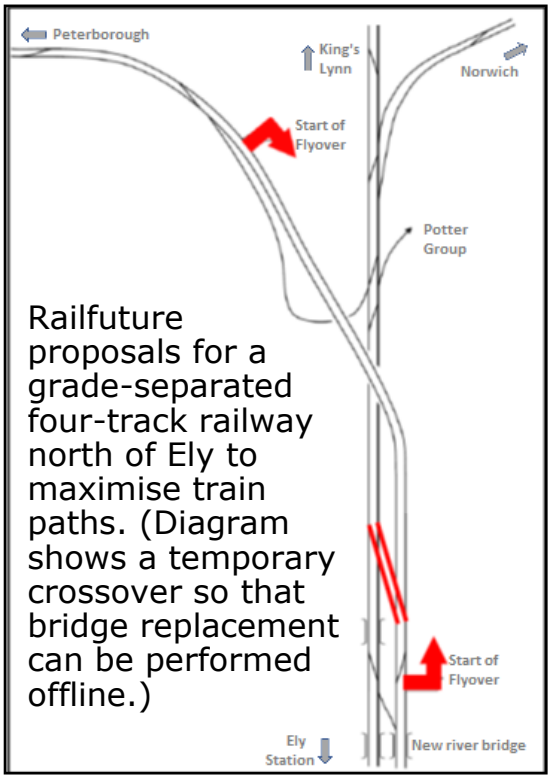
Huntingdon (Alconbury and Hampton too if the long-promised stations emerge) and Peterborough. The plan is for EWR to go onto Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, finally enabling a huge modal shift along that corridor. Sadly, the Newmarket rail route east of Cambridge had all possible redundancy stripped away in the 1980s. It needs very significant investment to restore it and we hope that the business and feasibility case study being undertaken by Suffolk County Council and Greater Cambridge Partnership to do that and restore full capacity along the line, will show what is to be done. The Newmarket line can be adapted to serve East Cambridge, with frequent services all day long to Newmarket, Bury, Ipswich and, via the reinstated curve at Newmarket (dotted line on satellite view, annotated by Railfuture, above), to Soham and the very busy corridor it sits in too.



There are two more railway restorations urgently needed. That from Wisbech to March and that from Haverhill to Shelford. Both routes would be operated with through services to Cambridge and would serve all three stations in the city if they were to be operated as one. They would help provide the very large new town under construction at Waterbeach with the four trains an hour necessary to ensure modal shift, growth at Ely and March as well the very large housing growth planned for Haverhill. This railway service is essential to maintain growth and movement all around Cambridgeshire in a sustainable way.

Ely Area Capacity Enhancements: Too little, too slow? But national priority!

This project (known as EACE) to enhance the capacity through Ely is well known as efforts to increase capacity have stuttered along for five or more years since Network Rail (NR) aborted the project it actually started to double the Soham to Ely line in 2015. Railfuture has reported on NR's current consultation to improve capacity but we, like many industry experts, feel its proposals are far too timid. We believe our proposal (see RAIL EAST issue 189, pages 14-15) will future proof the junction to enable all the conflicting flows…well, flow. Among the conflicts are the urgent need to cater for the heavy freight flows coming out of Felixstowe and the quarries of the East Midlands and Peak District as they cross and converge with the vital passenger trains which sustain the needs of Cambridge and district. There is more than a need just to keep all the trains rolling, because as Julian Worth of CILT emphasised, there are over 1000 HGVs on the A14 each day that roar across the embanked northern suburbs of Cambridge, discharging huge amounts of pollution, carrying goods that could be on trains today if Ely is sorted.



Railfuture proposals for a grade-separated four-track railway north of Ely to maximise train paths. (Diagram shows a temporary crossover so that bridge replacement can be performed offline.)

The quality of life of thousands depends on a solution that enables all trains to run.

Further reading: Railfuture response (July 2021) to Network Rail on EACE consultation for Ely south part of project at www.railfuture.org.uk/display2728.

THE RISE OF THE SUB-NATIONAL TRANSPORT BODIES – LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO BE RECKONED WITH

BY PHIL SMART

Like it or not, local government plays an important role in shaping where we live, the way we travel, the services we use and the quality of our environment. Yet for many in the rail industry it can be quite a complex entity with which to engage. Some areas have planning (districts) separated from transport (county councils), in others there are unitary authorities. More recently we have seen Local Enterprise Partnerships in some areas, such as Norfolk and Suffolk, directly elected mayors and combined authorities in others, including Cambridgeshire. Getting to know who is in charge is not always straightforward but is nonetheless important when, for example, a freight terminal needs planning permission, or a particular enhancement needs local political support.

Too often we think of local government as being parochial and interested only in issues that can be resolved within an electoral cycle, with little regard for long term investment. Yet there are good examples of partnership working between councils that challenge this view. When the East West Rail Consortium came together in the 1990's few gave it any chance of success, yet this scheme will now form a strategic part of the network.

The most recent evolution in local government builds on this collaborative spirit with the creation of Sub National Transport Bodies (STBs). These geographic groupings of local councils have the advantage that there is one for every area in England (transport being a devolved responsibility in Scotland and Wales), they have the same function and pretty much the same influence. There are seven — the first to be established was Transport for the North — and are based on the boundaries of the councils that comprise them. While these do not align perfectly with rail region boundaries, it gives routes and regions fewer relationships to maintain, and STBs invite Network Rail representatives to their meetings.

Since their inception, it has become clear that they will operate at a strategic level. While each authority has a legacy wish-list of local road schemes, there is a shared understanding that if investment is to be made in a particular region, it can only be done by demonstrating how local schemes contribute to the national agenda. Decarbonisation, union connectivity, levelling up and enhancing the UK's global impact are all focusing local priorities. So too is the recognition that schemes benefitting more than one STB are likely to attract more interest from the Treasury, prompting several examples of joint lobbying. England's Economic Heartland (EEH), Midlands Connect and Transport East all signed a joint statement about F2N (electrification for the crucial Felixstowe to Nuneaton freight link) and the importance of sorting out Ely, also supported by Transport for the North. Peninsula and Western Gateway are working together on making better use of rail for freight on the Western Route. Transport for the South East (TfSE) is working together with EEH and Midlands Connect on the benefits of co-solutioning between road and rail on Southampton to the Midlands freight flows. Rail schemes are working their way up the local agenda and are assuming greater investment priority.

But it is not just the major trans-regional routes that offers opportunity for freight. Engagement with local government is a chance to showcase the need for freight friendly planning policies. Local government is under pressure to deliver more housing, and this can get in the way of considering other land uses such as terminals for both freight and aggregates. New homes are units of production during their construction, demanding movement of building materials not just for the homes

themselves but the schools, places of entertainment and employment, shops, medical facilities, and the roads that link them – all are what make communities work. Aggregate terminals need to avoid local receptors who may be hostile to noise and dust and therefore a housing permission on their doorstep needs to be avoided by careful planning. Homes then become units of consumption during their occupation. New consumers of goods create demand for more warehousing, estimated at just under 70 sq. ft. per household. The local planning system needs to identify suitable sites for these, and rail-served sites are likely to command a premium over those that are not. The emerging market for home parcel delivery, accelerated by the recent pandemic, presents new opportunities for rail. While much of this traffic could be accommodated overnight for delivery to conventional station platforms, the time sensitive nature of some of this traffic will demand dedicated depots for onward delivery by electric van or e-bike in and around our larger population centres.

A healthy relationship between local government and rail freight brings mutual benefit to both parties and to the communities they serve.

A version of this article appears in the September 2021 issue of Modern Railways.

"SWITCH IT OFF" — SMALL PIECE OF BIG GREEN JIGSAW

BY PETER FEENEY

With dire warnings of Code Red for the planet ringing in our ears from the recent publication of the IPCC's sixth Assessment Report, it is a good point to note the launch of an environmental initiative by Greater Anglia (GA) and Network Rail (NR). They recently publicised a campaign in partnership with the Community Rail Partnerships in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk aimed at encouraging drivers of road vehicles to switch off their engines whilst waiting at level crossings. The launch was timed to coincide with the annual Clean Air Day on Thursday 17 June 2021. There is further information on the initiative on the Network Rail website at www.networkrail.co.uk/switchitoffatlevelcrossings

The industry's approach in the campaign is to use social media to help "nudge" drivers towards doing the socially responsible – and of course, *legal* (section 42 of the Road Traffic Act 1988) – thing when stopped at a crossing. Between 17 June and the end of July 2021 GA had given out 2,000 car stickers, reached over 78,000 people on social media and held action events at Westerfield, Alresford and Stowmarket to raise awareness and ask people to switch off their engines. The campaign will run for the rest of the summer along with a call for people to visit the region sustainably by coming by train, instead of taking the car – another timely bit of messaging in a year where staycations for many holidaymakers are the norm.

With road traffic levels back to, and frequently now exceeding, pre-COVID levels, it is good to see the railway industry acknowledging that road traffic at level crossings has an appreciable impact on local air quality in terms of harmful emissions and doing something about it.

The problem of course goes back to geography. The topography of East Anglia dictates that the majority of encounters between road and rail occur on the level, so it's not surprising that the east has a disproportionately high number of level crossings – assets we can assume NR

would much prefer to dispense with, if only alternatives were not so prohibitively expensive to construct. But with traffic volumes continuing to increase, in part as a direct consequence of the accelerating rate of house building right across the region, queues at crossings will only get longer – and we have a frightening number of years to wait until all those queueing vehicles are zero emitters.

The relevant section of the 1988 Act enforces rule 123 of the Highway Code, which states: "You must not leave a vehicle's engine running unnecessarily while that vehicle is stationary on a public road." Doing this can incur a £20 fixed-penalty fine under the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) Regulations 2002. This goes up to £40 if unpaid within a given time frame. But this is only imposed if the driver fails to turn off their engine when asked to do so by a marshal. So whilst running the engine of a stationary vehicle at a level crossing on a public highway is clearly illegal, the statutory penalty is negligible and, presumably, rarely enforced.

If we take it as read that drivers allowing engines to idle are doing something to be discouraged, it looks as if the law is probably not the most effective route for changing driver behaviour. And it is reasonable to say that the vast majority of offending drivers who sit in their own bubble in a line of queueing vehicles keep their engines running (and squandering fuel) out of thoughtlessness rather than malice. The big challenge is to effect a permanent change in driver behaviour, such that for the great majority idling the engine when stationary becomes as unacceptable as drink/drug driving or driving without using a seatbelt.

Whilst there is much to commend in the rail industry's decision to do something about the contribution idling vehicle engines make to poor – and potentially dangerous – air quality at the many level crossings throughout the East Anglian network, this initiative feels like a modest first step in addressing a very big challenge. A more ambitious project worth exploring would involve the industry working in collaboration with relevant departments of state – Environment, Health & Transport – to devise a driver education campaign exploiting online media and television advertising. Such a campaign would at least acknowledge the need to challenge vehicle users about the dangers of emissions from idling engines across the board – including, but not limited to, the specific issue of driver behaviour at our many level crossings. Something worth getting into the public domain nationally in the year of COP26? On the principle that "every little helps" this industry initiative deserves support – and ought to be scaled up.

DECARBONISATION – RAIL'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

BY PHIL SMART

For a long time now, Railfuture has argued the case for rail in tackling climate change. The transport sector is the biggest contributor of CO_2 emissions, accounting for over a quarter of the UK total, a figure that has stubbornly refused to come down as engine technology improvements have been outpaced by increased activity. Of the UK total, rail accounts for just 1.4% of CO_2 yet the carbon credentials of rail are often overlooked when it comes to investment due to the small proportion of journeys, both passenger and freight, that are made by rail.

The climate emergency, however, demands a fresh approach. The adage that 'If you carry on doing what you've always done, you'll carry on getting what you've always got' should prompt us to invest in the transport system, not for what it does today, but for its future potential in meeting the needs of both the economy and the environment. In 2021 the UK government published two documents that gave at least a hint that they may have been listening to us, *'Great British Railways, The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail'* and *'Decarbonising Transport – A Better Greener Britain'*. Both were long overdue (an irony not lost on those tasked with running a punctual railway!) but both were worth waiting for, even if rather short on detail.

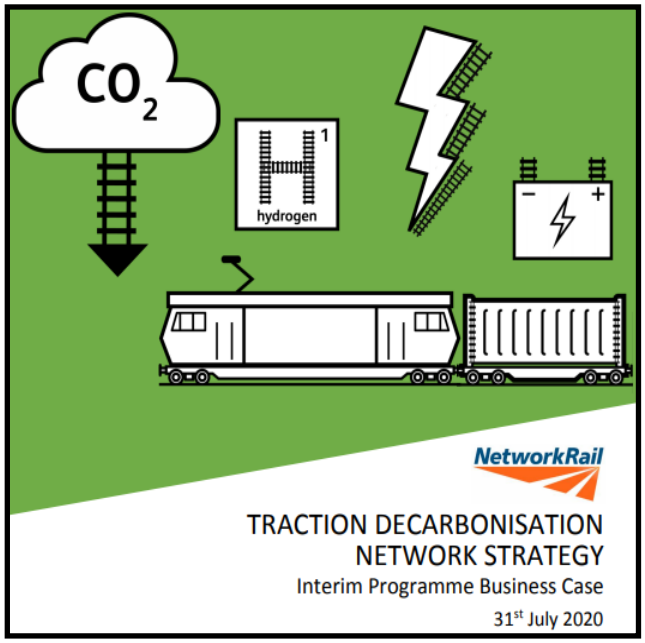
The **Rail Reform** White Paper (the Williams-Shapps Plan) includes three promises for freight. A system wide oversight of timetabling and system planning, a duty to promote freight on the network, underpinned with growth targets, and a requirement to make 'best overall economic use of the network', a hint that future investment may see a better balance between passenger and freight objectives when it comes to enhancements and network planning. There were few specific schemes mentioned in the paper but those that were, which include infill electrification to ports and the Ely area upgrade, are both freight-led.

The **Decarbonisation** paper covers all transport modes and, perhaps predictably, offers much by way of consultations and aspirations. Several sectors get their own policy papers, and the *'Rail Environment Policy Statement'* is also of interest to us.

It re-states the commitment in the Reform agenda to maximizing the role of rail in the movement of freight and the duty placed upon GBR to bring this about.

Secondly it pays tribute to the work of the *Rail Decarbonisation Task Force* in providing the route map for the delivery of a low carbon railway and its role in achieving a net zero economy by 2050.

Perhaps the most reassuring statements are those around traction decarbonisation. It commits Great British Railways to lead an 'ongoing' programme of electrification to be guided by Network Rail's *Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy*. This called for some 85% of the currently unelectrified network to be prioritised for electrification, with battery and hydrogen solutions preferred for the remaining 15%. While this commitment is packaged in some Treasury friendly language such as 'efficient', 'cost effective', 'sustainable' and 'value for money', it does look as if the government has got the message that if you want trains to be fast, frequent or move freight then 25Kv overhead is the way forward. Yes, electrification is expensive, but it only becomes more so when you stop doing it.



For us as rail campaigners, all this seems obvious. By taking a unit of cargo off a lorry and onto a train, it removes up to 76% of the CO_2 attributed to its movement, even with the existing traction mix, but this also places it on a secure pathway towards zero carbon. We can achieve a 90% reduction when we electrify the route, and 100% when we clean the grid's generation mix, both of which must happen anyway. For HGVs, the payload penalty of batteries or hydrogen storage will tilt the economics further in rail's direction. In future, road and rail must complement one another, rail for trunk distances and road for local distribution, served by a growing estate of strategic freight interchanges.

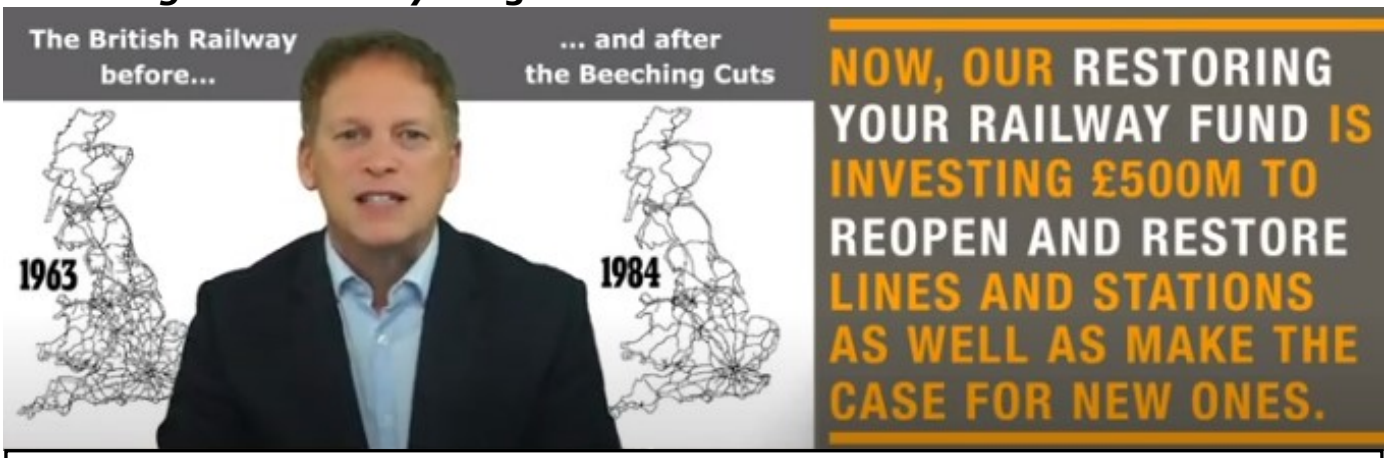
Now that the environmental benefits of rail are firmly on the government agenda there are key investment decisions to be made throughout the supply chain. End users are taking more interest in the carbon footprint of their purchases. Retail and construction companies face demands from shareholders about the environmental impact of their activities and more are turning to rail. Freight operators need improvements to network capacity and confidence in an electrification programme to underpin traction investment decisions and this, in turn, will need certainty over energy supply.

A version of this article will appear in the 2021/2 handbook of the Rail Freight Group, for which the author is Assistant Strategy Manager.

RAIL UPDATES FROM AROUND EAST ANGLIA

BY PETER WAKEFIELD AND NICK DIBBEN

***Restoring Your Railway* Programme**



The Department for Transport launched the Restoring Your Railway programme with a video by the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps.

At time of writing there has been no news of "The Haverhill Bid" to the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* fund. Railfuture understands that decisions have been made but nothing has been announced. In the meantime, the good news is that support for the bid has continued to be sent to the DfT, including from Anthony Browne, MP for South Cambridgeshire, adding his voice to that of Matt Hancock, MP for West Suffolk. West Suffolk District Council has added its voice to that of Cambridge Past Present and Future and the Cambridgeshire Campaign for the Protection of Rural England in supporting the proposal.

The other important bid is, of course, that for restoring the railway from King's Lynn and Hunstanton.

Retail benefits for rail users in Sheringham

Greater Anglia, The Bittern Line Community Partnership and Sheringham Chamber of Trade and Commerce have been working together to offer discounts at various shops, cafés and attractions to visitors who arrive in the town by train. Businesses involved in the scheme will display a yellow poster in their windows and visitors who can produce a valid train ticket will then be able to claim their discount. The scheme hopes to encourage sustainable travel and promote trade in the town. The scheme will be extended to other towns in the near future.

What to do about User Worked Crossings

A collision between a tractor and a freight train at Kisbey Crossing just to the west of March on 19 August 2021 (photo from Network Rail) closed this important railway line for several days, whilst repairs to the track and crossing were carried out. Fortunately, no one was injured in this incident. Freight traffic to and from Felixstowe was significantly affected, whilst all passenger services between Peterborough and East Anglia were disrupted due to the need for a temporary shuttle bus service between the city and March. The crossing is one of nearly 2,500 User Worked Crossings in the country, where farm tracks or similar cross the railway. The rail industry considers them a high

accident risk. There are various types, with some having red/green lamps to indicate when it is safe to cross, whilst others depend on the user contacting the signalling centre and then opening and closing the gates correctly after them. We await the investigation to see what happened in this case and what lessons may be learnt.

The rail industry has been working on new signage to be used at such crossings to make it clear what is expected of users, and trials of these signs have been carried out on a specially created section of track and tested on a variety of people that may use such crossings. Some of the proposed signs are shown here. Hopefully these will be installed around the country before a major accident occurs.

Trains busy again

It is pleasing that train services on all lines across East Anglia are filling up again. Great Northern / Thameslink services are running at just about a normal timetable with all services a minimum eight cars long. These are coping well. GA's West Anglia services also run minimum eight cars and these are loading well and coping.

GA Regional services are four or three cars long and the latter do struggle from time to time. Photo right, taken on August Bank Holiday Saturday from the 'power pack', which was the only standing space left on a three-car bi-mode.

We hope that careful diagramming is undertaken to ensure three car trains are kept off the longer journeys such as Norwich – Cambridge – Stansted Airport; Ipswich – Cambridge; Ipswich – Peterborough.

Cross Country a law unto itself … as usual

Cross Country trains have generally reverted to three coaches per train. Again, these are showing signs of overcrowding from time to time, though attempts to curb overcrowding during the peak Covid crises bizarrely cut out all Audley End (for Saffron Walden) stops. This on the least busy section of its route, as nobody was travelling to Stansted Airport at the time. Complaints have led to some stops being reinstated but most trains still pass through almost empty or if they do stop for pathing reasons, do not open their doors!

Cross Country Serving the Fens?

Railfuture recently asked again that Cross Country run a later service from Cambridge than the current 21.00 ex Cambridge to March, Peterborough. Yes, that is the very last train every night between centres with over 500k people!

We suggested that one of the last services returning to Cambridge depot for overnight stabling from Stansted should take up a path at 22.00 (or better 23.00) from Cambridge to Manea, March, Whittlesey and Peterborough (stable overnight) and return next morning to arrive in Cambridge just after 07.00 – an hour earlier than the current first arrival. (Many people are forced to drive into Cambridge from the Fens to work because of the poor service frequency.) This suggestion was turned down, of course.

A better suggestion from us might have been that now a train crew depot is established at Leicester, a Leicester crew work to Stansted in the evening and work a 22.00 (or better still a 23.00!) from Cambridge all stations to Leicester, so giving Peterborough's night economy a boost too. But no can do. But really Cross Country – there is a climate crisis! Get out of your comfort zone and start serving your communities imaginatively.

The Sunday timetable operated between Cambridge and Peterborough is a 1980s legacy with a timetable that commences from Cambridge (population 170k) to March (pop 25k) to Peterborough (pop 202k) at 11.00. The first train from Peterborough to Cambridge is not until 13.19 – and the last train from Cambridge to Peterborough is at 20.00!

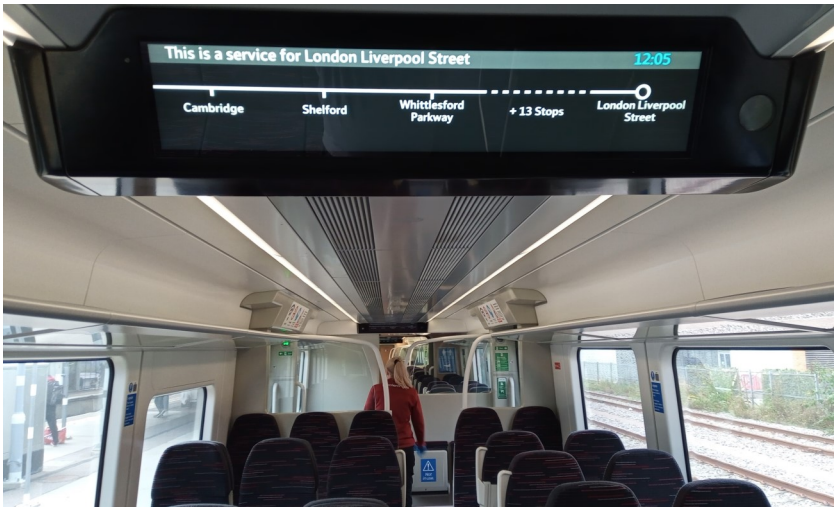
What we will need from Great British Railways in the future is timetable that responds to our region's needs – because it seems there will be no change from the current DfT dominated TOC.

Soham station set to reopen in December 2021

The platform for Soham station can be seen in this cab view of a Greater Anglia bi-mode train posted on Twitter.

The signalling changes were undertaken over August Bank holiday.

Railfuture understands that there will be an opening ceremony on Monday 13 December.



GA's Class 720 Aventra trains on West Anglia Line

Since 25 August, GA's new commuter trains have been in service between Cambridge North and Liverpool Street.

Preparation work to extend platform 4 at Cambridge for a pair of these five-car trains has begun (originally work was to have begun in December 2020 for opening in April 2021).

LOOKING BACK – COMMEMORATING 175 YEARS OF TRAINS BETWEEN IPSWICH AND BURY ST EDMUNDS

RAIL EAST issue 190 covered the arrival of trains in Ipswich from Colchester in 1846, courtesy of the Eastern Union Railway. As an early commemoration of the onward link to Bury St Edmunds at the end of the same year, special steam hauled services ran in August 2021 between Colchester, Ipswich and Bury.

This photo (by Peter Feeney) captures preserved B1 class locomotive *Mayflower* in Ipswich on Sunday 15 August after one such journey.

For those interested in travelling on steam trains, the **Flying Scotsman** will be at the Mid-Norfolk Railway between Saturday 2 October and Saturday 16 October 2021.

www.midnorfolkrailway.co.uk/flyingscotsman

CAMBRIDGESHIRE GUIDED BUSWAY 10TH ANNIVERSARY

BY JERRY ALDERSON

It's hardly a secret that Railfuture didn't want a guided busway built on the then mothballed Cambridge to St Ives railway line. Reopening the railway to passengers had been a continuous major campaign since the East Anglian branch of what is now Railfuture was formed in 1972. However, the busway plays a useful part in providing public transport and serves both railway stations (and will serve Cambridge South), so providing the best integration with other modes is what Railfuture wants to see.

Saturday 7th August 2021 was the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway (CGB), which is known by some as the mis-guided busway (MGB). The first bus ran in public service on Sunday 7th August 2011. With a decade of operation, and plenty of time to prove itself, has the guided busway been worthwhile or misguided? Below is a list of some key aspects of it post-opening (ignoring its very delayed opening and construction going dramatically over budget).

Recognition / Impressions

- If you asked people in Cambridge to name 10 good things about the city would the guided busway be one of them?
- If you asked people across Britain to say where the world's longest guided busway was, would many name Cambridgeshire?

Patronage

- The 3.6 million target after three years was only just met, despite the historical target not taking account of sustained growth in the corridor, but gives a false impression of success as many of these passengers may have undertaken a journey entirely off the busway (e.g. on Cambridge streets, or between St Ives and Huntingdon) since the operator counts ticket sold or used on busway buses, not where the journey took place. In August 2018, the Cambridge News reported "The Guided Busway was expected to take 20,000 people a day, but it has now emerged only 11,000 a day are using it", citing Cambridgeshire County Council figures of 4.1 million journeys in the year to May 2018.

Integrated fares / Value for money

- Busway services accept DayRider and MegaRider tickets, providing fare integration with Stagecoach's services but the lack of discounts makes an off-peak Cambridge to St Ives journey much more expensive than the similar distance Cambridge-Ely rail services, which is cheaper still if a rail card is used (just £1.55 return).

Commercial success

- Stagecoach has operated services profitably (helped by local authority funding of free bus travel for seniors, plus free to use park and ride) and acquired many new buses but...
- Its only rival operator, Whippet, withdrew all services on the northern section of the busway in 2018, leaving just the short southern section
- In the five years since the Stagecoach and Whippet monopoly ended, no new operator has sought to run services on the busway
- Multi-operator smartcards have been withdrawn.

Lack of improvements / Decline

- An advantage of the busway over the railway was the ability for buses to leave the busway to travel through Northstowe. No part of this busway loop has been constructed
- No new facilities (such as retail outlets) have been added to the busway park and rides, although a privately-owned café opened in the former Histon Station building in July 2021 (photo shown at bottom of page 21)
- No new stops on the busway have been introduced
- The busway was extended to Cambridge North station (albeit unguided) but nowhere else, so far, although proposals have been developed
- Bus speed limits have been introduced at various crossing points, because of safety concerns, lengthening journey times

- Some end-to-end services have been curtailed at Cambridge station to enable more double deck buses rather than single deck to operate on the northern section, giving the benefit of increased capacity but necessitating an interchange for some passengers
- All ticket vending machines (TVMs) were taken out of use in 2019, having been converted to card-only in 2014 following vandalism; by comparison, TVMs have not been removed from railway stations
- Much of the busway infrastructure looks in a sorry state e.g. busway beams are quite dirty, vegetation not managed, and sound bunds north of Histon are falling apart (see photo below).

Maintenance-free infrastructure / disruption-free services / safety

- The busway was supposed to be maintenance-free for 30 years but issues around its construction led to numerous closures for remedial works
- The section between Histon and the A14 bridge was closed for many months to allow road widening works
- There have been a large number of incidents where vehicles have ended up on the busway, something not envisaged in evidence to the public inquiry, which caused the busway to be closed and buses taking a route detour to avoid the blockage
- Buses have been involved in several accidents of varying seriousness, including two fatal collisions [*3rd in Oct 2021*]with pedestrians or cyclists (see photo below).

Active Travel

- The undeniable success of the busway is the parallel route for pedestrians/ joggers, cyclists and horse riders, something that would have been perfectly possible if the railway had been reopened.

Replication

- The South East Hampshire, Luton-Dunstable and Leigh guided busways opened one, two and six years respectively after the Cambridgeshire guided busway, but all had been proposed for many years; no other guided busway has been developed in Britain, and the short Edinburgh guided busway was converted into a tramway as intended. Alternative bus-based systems have been proposed but none has reached construction stage.

One of the more serious bus crashes, horse-riders using the bridleway, sound bunds at Histon (just one example of deterioration) and Histon station reopened as a café

DEAR OPERATOR – DON'T LET SUPPLIERS LOCK YOU IN

BY JERRY ALDERSON

Train operators, like every business, rely upon suppliers. But are they educated or naïve buyers?

Big supermarket chains are the most educated and powerful buyers in Britain. Rail companies have core skills – operating the network and running trains – but are not known for retail acumen. Ticket vending machines (TVMs) are a good case in point.

Companies such as Germany's Scheidt & Bachmann manufacture TVMs, which are a combination of the cabinet, moving parts (ticket dispensing), non-moving parts (e.g. interfaces with customers such as the screen and payment touchpad) and, most importantly, the software (along with a communications system).

In the 1990s the machines were largely mechanical, and fares were changed by opening the cabinet and adjusting some settings. Functionality was limited and required someone to visit every machine to amend prices and perhaps change the piece of paper displaying the fixed destinations. As a result, TVMs were rarely located at rural unstaffed stations, which instead might have a permit to travel machine with no prices or destinations configured. However, today everything in the TVM is driven by software, with the huge advantage that changes can be implemented at the same time (overnight) at every TVM by downloading and enabling the changes. Because of the ease of change management operators, such as Greater Anglia, can install TVMs at almost every station. This is potentially great news for passengers, especially where TVMs support a wide range of destinations, ticket types and even future-dated travel – or at least, it should be great news.

The problem with software-driven TVMs is that they are essentially a 'black box' with the supplier holding the keys. The appearance on the screen is driven by a template. The operator choses the template closest to its requirements and the supplier will then customise it both for branding and some additional functionality. No operator will identify every business requirement up front and specify it perfectly. It will require a few iterations to get it right but after that point the operator will have to pay for every change that the supplier needs to make.

How much this contractual arrangement impacts passengers will depend on what changes the operator can make (business as usual [BAU] changes such as the annual fares increases each January) and what it needs to pay the supplier to do. Design changes must be done by the supplier but changes to the product range should not. However, if the supplier's business model is to sell the machine at a low margin and then make their profit later – on support and maintenance or time and materials consultancy – by restricting the changes that operators can make, then there is a risk that TVMs will not sell new fare types or niche (low-volume) ones.

TVM software should hold the set of fares in a 'drill down' hierarchical tree structure, so that the operator can add more fares – and new types of fares - as required, for example, seasons, rovers and rangers and time-limited special offers. Railfuture knows from experience of Greater Anglia's new TVMs that they offer a quite restricted range – for example the popular Anglia Plus ticket is not sold. A properly-designed system should also allow the operator to add an 'are you sure?' dialogue on fares with restrictions without the supplier having to re-program anything.

A perennial problem is new stations. There is no justifiable reason why software-driven TVMs railway cannot sell tickets to new stations on the day that they open and, if the software is capable of doing so, up to a month in advance. Suppliers should not need to be involved. But it can take years for some stations to be added.

When writing an invitation to tender an operator should specify the range of changes they want to be able to make themselves. Great Northern stations occasionally show 'visit wagn.co.uk for info' and a long-obsolete phone number. Lesson learned?

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

Articles from all RAIL EAST readers are welcome — you don't have to be a member of Railfuture or an 'expert' on the railway. Please send articles for possible inclusion to Peter Feeney, who collates all submissions and prepares them for the newsletter. Good quality photos (or graphics) are appreciated, and really are essential in order to make the newsletter visually attractive.

All submissions by **29 October 2021**, please, but articles covering late news will be considered just before sending to the printer two weeks later.

RAIL EAST is formatted by Jerry Alderson.

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, or login to www.railfuture.org.uk/selfcare and change your preferences. Your co-operation will be appreciated.

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

You can view recent issues at www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/covers/.

JOIN RAILFUTURE — WE'RE FUNDED BY RAIL USERS

Railfuture is lean, but hopefully not mean. All of our work is performed by volunteers who believe in the railway to move people and goods. Even if you don't want to play an active role, your annual subscription is much appreciated to cover our costs, not just to print and post both RAIL EAST and Railwatch magazine, but also to support our campaigning across Britain.

Railfuture works *constructively* with the rail industry, government (national and local), businesses and stakeholders to improve and expand the railway. Our "bigger and better railway" strapline sums up what we aim to achieve.

A large membership base — across the generations — is needed, so please make an effort to join or persuade someone else to become a Railfuture member.

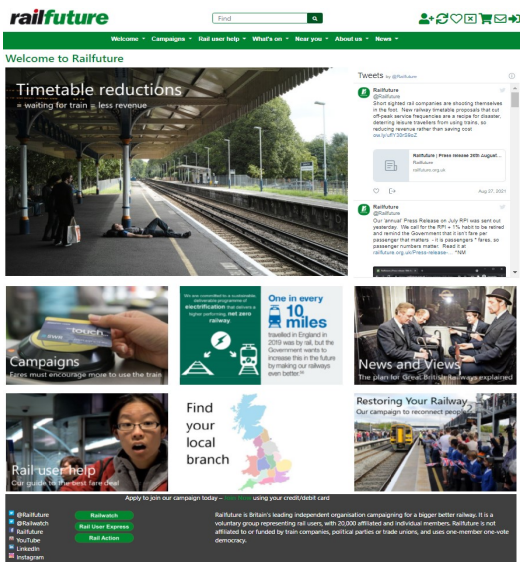
There is a single annual membership fee of **£20** (£22 for joint membership), with a special £14 rate for people under 26. Rail user groups and similar organisations are £25. Join online at https://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/ using a credit/debit card.

REVAMPED RAILFUTURE WEBSITE

The Railfuture website (www.raifuture.org.uk) has been upgraded so that it now formats nicely on all devices, whether a PC/laptop, smartphone or tablet.

It features all of Railfuture's current campaigning and news (articles, submissions, press releases etc.) and contains 20 years of material, including East Anglia branch news 'snippets', which offers a great research tool, and links to copies of publications and radio interviews during this time.

Everything about Railfuture East Anglia can be found at www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Anglia.



railfuture East Anglia

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

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.

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 25 SEP 2021	SATURDAY 4 DEC 2021	SATURDAY 26 FEB 2022
Friends Meeting House,	The Signal Box Centre	Friends Meeting House
5 Upper Goat Lane	Glenalmond Avenue	St John's Street
NORWICH	**CAMBRIDGE**	**BURY ST EDMUNDS**
NR2 1EW	CB2 8DB	IP33 1SJ

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